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Exhausting Improvisation: Stutterances

Reaching the halfway point of our discussion, this chapter will examine what might be one of the most contentious topics in the history of Western philosophy and dance criticism and at once an important question raised by the concept of "choreographing problems": can dancing be equated with thinking, and if so, under which conditions and terms? The topic of the relationship between dance and thought is further complicated by claims related to improvisation, the mode of generating dance movement in the moment of its execution, with which the so-called thinking body is often identified. Before we try to answer this question on the basis of exposing the problem-method of *Weak Dance Strong Questions* (*WDSQ*), a few preliminary remarks about the context of dance improvisation and its theory are needed to better situate the scope of the topic "improvisation" and the problem that *WDSQ* poses to it.

Since modern dance's rupture with ballet in the early twentieth century, improvisation has held a special promise of the invention of new movement. The expectation that new movement is born of improvisation is founded on assumptions and ideas that were first formulated by modern dance pioneers such as Isadora Duncan, then renewed and cultivated from the 1960s and '70s onward: freedom in spontaneous self-expression, the body-mind holism, and the primacy of the physical, sensorial, and emotional nature of movement. An abundant vocabulary widely shared by practitioners across the field of contemporary dance since the 1960s rephrases these ideas in the following terms, as Sally Banes lists it: "Spontaneity, self-expression, spiritual expression, freedom, accessibility, choice, community, authenticity, the natural, presence, resourcefulness, risk, political subversion, a sense of connectedness, of playfulness, child's play, leisure, and sports" (Banes in

Albright and Gere 2003: 77). The ideas of spontaneous self-expression, the holistic concept of a thinking body, and the primacy of physical sensations and emotions as the meaning and value of dancing movement conform to the principles which were discussed in the previous chapters as the subjectivation of the dancer through bodily expression or the objectivation of movement by the dancer's body. They constitute an exaggerated expression of the organic vitalism which has reinforced the ontological foundation of modern dance in the presence, in the movement of the body as the evidence of the living substance. Therefore, in this chapter I will discuss the problems and concepts that arise from a critique of the organic regimes of self-expression and movement-objectivation *within* improvisation itself. My aim is to show how *WDSQ,* a performance by Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema based on improvisation, examines the paradox of the "unknown" in improvisation, or the discovery and surprising experience of new movement and presence, in relation to the "known," given or trained capabilities of moving. The "unknown," "unexpected," "surprise," or "discovery" are the terms of a doxa, a common-sense jargon of practitioners with which improvisation is negotiated. *WDSQ* explores improvised movement with the constraints that undermine the subjectivist or objectivist grounds of the organic, holistic body-movement bind. The problem that gives rise to *WDSQ* is how to question movement by movement itself. Since this involves an immanent critique of the aforementioned ideas as promoted by practitioners and theorists of improvisation, I will first unpack the discourses of improvisation in the field of contemporary dance on their own terms, which thoroughly disagree with the logic of creation as expression that the theoretical approach explored here, based on Deleuze and Spinoza, advances. Hence my first task will be to expose and examine the theoretical underpinnings of practitioners' discourses on dance improvisation—which are implicitly phenomenological, favoring the self-consciousness of the dancer—in order to demonstrate, in the next step, how *WDSQ* departs from them toward an expressive and constructive practice of movement genesis.

Improvisation in lack of philosophy

Since its rise to prominence in the 1960s and '70s, the field of dance improvisation has been invested in primarily by practitioners—dancers, choreographers, and "bodywork" researchers—who have also framed its topics, problems, and terms in writings published in non-academic journals, the predominant references being the American

Contact Quarterly and the British *New Dance*. The pioneers and veterans of improvisational practices, such as Steve Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith, or Lisa Nelson, in the case of Contact Improvisation, or Simone Forti as one of the earliest maverick improvisers, have established a discourse based on the reflection of firsthand experience. The tone of inquisitive, albeit often uncritical affirmation in these empirical "reports" has led prominent dance scholars like Susan Leigh Foster or Ann Cooper Albright to prioritize an experiential approach over theoretical conceptualization without the experience of improvisation, thus settling a tacit rule of entitlement for discursive engagement in this field. Cynthia Novack has contributed greatly to the discourse on improvisation with her book *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (1990), and like Foster and Albright, she was a practitioner of the improvisational dance whose study is, in part, an analysis on the basis of personal experience. Foster participated in the improvisational dance led by Richard Bull, and Novack, his spouse, recounted her experience of this in her book *Dances that Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull* (2002). With a few exceptions, the most significant being Banes, who published extensively on Judson Dance Theater and what she introduced as "Post-Modern Dance" in America (her publications included discussion of improvisation in the works of Simone Forti, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, and Grand Union (Banes 1987; 1993; 1994)) there is hardly any writing on the subject of dance improvisation which does not ground itself in the evidence of personal experience. The reasons for this aren't entirely surprising: if improvisation is rooted in bodily experience, then the knowledge of it must be empirical, born out of experiment and practice; secondly, the mistrust of verbal language among improvisers further hinders debate by regarding improvisers' statements and definitions as documents with truth-value, while these formulations may involve a considerable degree of mystification. Thus in one of the few recent studies on improvisation, edited by Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere, *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader* (2003), Gere remarks that

> the rhetoric of magic runs throughout the discussion of improvisation: to theorize about improvisation is to theorize about consciousness, and to theorize about consciousness is to push the boundaries of physical discourse toward consideration of the spirit, the divine, the unfathomable, and the unimaginable. (Gere in Albright and Gere 2003: xiv)

The consequence of the "monopoly" of practitioners' knowledge in the field is a lack of proper theoretical study, of a comprehensive systematization and historicization of diverse improvisational dance practices of the twentieth century, and of, quite simply, consistent academic work dealing with the subject. Improvisational dance since the 1960s has been "manifesting itself on the basis of how various artists understood it" (Lycouris 1996: 7), which has resulted in the circulation of many terms for notions that have not been precisely distinguished or theorized. In the 1960s improvisation was called "indeterminate choreography," "open choreography," "situation-response composition," "in situ composition," "spontaneous determination" (Banes 2003: 78). The same practices are now referred to as "open" or "total improvisation" (Lycouris 1996: 6). When an improvisation practice gains prominence, its author profiles it by giving it another name, as for instance in the "Open-Form Composition" of the American choreographer Mary (O'Donnell) Fulkerson, a prominent figure in British nonmainstream dance in the 1980s,[1] or more recently in "Real-Time Composition" by the Portuguese choreographer João Fiadeiro (2007: 101–10). The "Cognitive Dance Improvisation" and "emergent choreography" of the Dutch choreographer Ivar Hagendoorn provide us with another lesser known yet thoroughly self-reflected example that contributes to the variety of self-termed practices (Hagendoorn n.d.: n.p.). However, the most elaborated and widespread improvisation practice and technique has kept its name, Contact Improvisation, since its foundation in 1972 thanks to various efforts to institutionalize it through regular international meetings attended by a community of practitioners, through dance studies curricula and through the journal *Contact Quarterly*. The constant definitional rubric defined in the journal accounts for the possibility of reflecting transformations throughout the practice of Contact Improvisation, yet an analysis of definitions pronounced during a period of upwards of thirty years attests to a stability of characteristics. They can be paraphrased as follows:

> Contact Improvisation is a "duet movement form," where two people maintain a "spontaneous physical dialogue" through shared weight, support, common or counterpoised momentum; it deals with organic body movement in response to the physical forces that surround it, gravity being the major one; it guides the body to an awareness of "its own natural movement possibilities," and engages its senses "in the effort of survival."[2]

In a myriad of self-fashioned improvisation practices that have arisen and vanished with their founders, Contact Improvisation has sustained itself for more than three decades due to its reliance on physical laws of gravity and momentum, which brings it close to an athletic discipline. The strong emphasis on technical ability, on training, and on improving and expanding existing possibilities of the body in relation to given physical forces have contributed to its development as a dance technique in addition to its existence as a mode of performance. Thus Contact Improvisation engages two of the three registers of improvisation in dance. First, it is a mode of performance in which movement is spontaneously generated as it is performed before an audience and where making and performing coincide in the event of performance, and secondly it is a specific dance technique included in the training of contemporary dance. The third register in which improvisation in a general sense is used in contemporary dance is as a tool for the spontaneous generation of movement that is then set and reproduced as a kind of composition that privileges the indeterminate, spontaneous, self-expressive, or unconscious in performing as a source of movement. This might be the most widespread and common method since the German choreographer Pina Bausch championed it as a primary source of movement material in her dance theater (*Tanztheater*) in the 1970s and '80s. This method of improvisation won't be considered in this discussion, as its function is to generate performance material which is subsequently set and performed as choreography.

I would like to make clear that my concern here lies in the first register only: the discourse of improvisational dance performance, which I will expose from two perspectives. The first perspective is rooted in Contact Improvisation, in the voice of its founder, Steve Paxton, who, as the living apogee of the American liberal tradition or "culture of spontaneity" (Belgrad 1998), will serve as its main representative, along with a few other related voices. The liberal strand of improvisation in spontaneity will be countered by a newer, analytic, research-oriented perspective proper to the choreographer William Forsythe known as "improvisation technologies," which in its compositional rigor seems closer to *WDSQ* but, as I will argue, conversely aims to affirm, rather than problematize, a certain kind of movement in abundance and excess.

The holistic ground of improvisation

Contact Improvisation is one of many improvisational practices which have developed from the legacy of American modern dance as

epitomized in its early beginnings (Duncan) and in the period of the 1960s and '70s (Halprin). The latter can be situated as part of what Daniel Belgrad defined as the culture, aesthetic, and style of spontaneity in the arts in postwar America, along with action painting, bebop jazz, the second generation of American modernist poetry from the Black Mountain School (Charles Olson, Robert Creely, Mary C. Richards), and beat poetry (Belgrad 1998). As a third alternative opposed to mass culture and corporate liberalism as well as the established high art of the postwar period, improvisation embraces, Belgrad argues, two sets of ideas: body-mind holism and intersubjectivity as a model of democratic interaction. The two lines of reasoning form the basis of self-expression, movement objectivation, and communication in the act of theater, which are contested by Burrows' and Ritsema's improvisation in *WDSQ*. I will examine them here respectively.

The holistic approach to the body, betokening not only the dance but also the poetry of this paradigm, celebrates the unconscious. Modeled after psychic automatism, it presupposes a free flow of subjectivity, which in dance manifests as a form of visceral thinking opposed to the rational control of mind and thought expressed in language. "Improvisation is a word for something that can't keep a name," writes Paxton (Paxton 1987: 126). Firstly, this "something" of improvisation conflates improvised dance movement with a necessarily, if not also exclusively, bodily experience of a self alone or a sensation shared by individuals in contact. Secondly, it is claimed that this experience is irreducible to verbal language, and Paxton, like many other improvisers, reinstates the inadequacy of language in apprehending movement:

> I would bet that no dancer ever reviewed, however positively, has ever felt their dance captured in print. . . . The further it goes from the source of the experience to a verbal or printed version, the less recourse we have to elaborations or answers to our questions. (Paxton 1987: 127)

Thirdly, the pronounced fear of the impoverished language "versions" of bodily experience places bodily movement close to the Romantic transcendent notion of the ineffable, that which eludes the mind's rational grasp. The notion of the ineffable is echoed even by younger improvisers who, like João Fiadeiro, assert that the final goal of improvisation is to "let go of wanting to produce meaning" (Fiadeiro 2007: 104). The idea of sensation resisting meaning points to the dichotomy in which the terms "mind" and "body" stand in for the gap between the "known" and the "unknown." Foster remarks that the common definition of

improvisation as the "process of letting go of the mind's thinking so that the body can do its moving in its own unpredictable way" is an inaccurate and unhelpful obfuscation (Foster in Albright and Gere 2003: 7). Instead of denying the mind–body dichotomy, she tries to resolve it by attributing to the improvising body a specific "bodily mindfulness," a kind of hyperawareness in the body and of the body. In escaping language, the body is regarded as a reservoir of the unconscious, whose unleashing is uncovering the unknown, the unselfconscious as a truer reality than the performance of intended and determined movement. This improvisation is close to the definition of "spontaneous composition" in beat poetry: "an unselfconscious process of fitting the body-mind's subjective apprehensions to a communicative medium" (Belgrad 1998: 201). The ideal of spontaneity in dance, similar to the logic of bebop and beat prosody, revels in a unitary view on the relationship between the unconscious and the consciousness, in search of a whole self, as Forti's reflection on her method of "logomotion" exemplifies here: "I started speaking while moving, with word and movement springing spontaneously from a common source. This practice has been a way for me to know what's on my mind. What's on my mind before I think it through, while it is still a wild feeling in my bones" (Forti 2003: 57). The "common source" of thought and movement lies in the body-movement bind, where the process of making conscious the unconscious by way of bodily movement affirms the self-consciousness in the logocentric, Kantian sense we discussed in Chapter 1: as a given faculty of the mind that spontaneously accompanies and unifies all sensible perceptions.

Fourthly, no matter how diverse their practices may seem, improvisers highlight that their motivation lies in "discovery." For Forti,

> The performance should be full of discovery. Yet even as it requires an unobstructed carrying through on impulse, it also requires keeping an outside eye. A complex of judgments regarding what it is that is evolving, an awareness that there is something that you are making. Is it fresh? Is it going somewhere? Is it accessible to the audience? (Forti 2003: 56)

Hence the "discovery" recounted above implies a constant fluctuation between the conscious and the unconscious in a search for the "unexpected" and "unknown":

> Although the "unexpected" is extremely rare to an experienced player, it is precisely for that moment that I work—to see a good player in

> suspense before an "unexpected," "intriguing" and "enigmatic" move from his opponent. I truly believe that it is exactly in that void, the time parentheses where life stays on hold for a brief moment, that art (like the game) becomes sublime. (Fiadeiro 2007: 108)

The "sublime moment" described above seems like an interposition of the "unexpected" and "unknown" in which the improviser as a player is experiencing a loss of control, and the time aspect implied above relates to the etymological meaning of *improvviso ex tempore*, which in dance, as well as in music, implies composition outside the predetermined and fixed time of a written score. Movement without a pregiven rhythm and time frame becomes open-ended and thus "unforeseen." This, according to Paxton, calls for an interpretation of "out of time" (*ex tempore*) in two contradictory ways. On the one hand, the time of improvisation should be equated with human experience of duration, which he defines as the experiences accumulated in life. "'Out of time' means that, out of experience (conscious or not) there is material for making something" (Paxton 1987: 129). Improvisation supposes that the body generates movement out of itself—out of the experience of its own time, that is, out of duration. On the other hand, Paxton cautions against the habits that may result from such self-absorption. So, he suggests that "out of" should also simultaneously be "construed as 'aside from.' We have to use what we have become in such a way as to not be so controlled by it that it is automatically reproduced" (ibid).

Regarding the question of the origin and place of the tropes of the unconscious, unexpected or unknown, two strands of improvisation can be distinguished. The genealogy of the first can be traced back to the origins of modern dance, where the idea of freedom meant the emancipation of the self of the dancer, as the following remark reveals: "Movement improvisation had shifted from being looked upon as a throwback to Isadora Duncan to being regarded as a very contemporary way to get in touch with oneself" (Ross 2003: 50). Ross confers responsibility for the legacy of improvisation on modern dance, but her statement also unravels the core ideological assumption that improvisation is a way of expressing the self of the dancer. The self is expressed through a sensorial experience, which is at the same time considered an emotional experience. The body-mind holism in the aesthetic of spontaneity presupposes a tapping into the emotional life of the artist, as the painter of abstract expressionism, Robert Motherwell testifies: "The content of art is feeling . . . feelings are neither 'objective' nor 'subjective,' but both, since all 'objects' or 'things' are the result of an interaction

between the body-mind and the external world" (Motherwell in Belgrad 1998: 122). Forti expounds this as a method of personal response that she learned from Anna Halprin, whose workshop in California led other choreographers of the Judson Dance Theater to explore improvisation in the 1960s and '70s:

> One of the instructions Anna sometimes gave was to spend an hour in the environment, in the woods or in the city, observing whatever caught our attention. Then we would return to the workspace and move with these impressions fresh in our senses, mixing aspects of what we had observed, with our responses and feeling states. (Forti 2003: 54)

Halprin's teaching of improvisation resonates with similar ideas of the emancipation of the self to those that guided poets in their quest for an open form, as the following statement from a poet from the Black Mountain School, Mary Cline Richards, confirms:

> I believe that the squelching of the "person" and his spontaneous intuitive response to experience is . . . at the root of our timidity, our falseness . . . . The handicrafts stand to perpetuate the living experience of contact with natural elements—something primal, immediate, personal, material, a dialogue between our dreams and the forces of nature (Richards in Belgrad 1998: 157)

Self-expression in improvisational dance is considered not as a solipsistic act but as a "conversation" between the self and the natural or physical environment, or with another body, as in Contact Improvisation. Thus the idea of intersubjectivity, conveyed in jazz as a dialogue, the antiphony of call-and-response between musicians playing together, or in the visual arts as a "plastic dialogue" with materials, is coupled with the centering of the self, as Albright explains: "If the world is already inside one's body, then the separation between self and other is much less distinct. The skin is no longer the boundary between world and myself, but rather the sensing organ that brings the world into my awareness" (Albright and Gere 2003: 262). Since it was introduced as an approach that deals with dancers as people, "well-trained holistic dancer-performers" who integrate physical exploration and emotional life, or anyone, also non-trained dancers, interested in exploring their feelings, sensations and images (Worth and Poynor 2004: 54), improvisation accomodates another idea developed in body-mind

holism—healing—and therefore suggests itself as a model for the physical treatment of social illnesses.[3] Contact Improvisation is thus compared with the activity of "encounter group" therapy with which it shares many characteristics: self-expression in a group situation, a continuum of mind and body, and a process of risk-taking, reality-testing and trust (Belgrad 1998: 162–3). As one practitioner of Contact Improvisation as a "group process" remarked, "Often, what unfolds is deeply connected to one's own intricate patterns of relating and being in the world (in fact it will be if it is authentic)" (Needler in Belgrad 1998: 163). The therapeutic dimension of improvisation has developed into a widespread variety of somatic practices—also popularly known as "bodywork"—that emphasize the aim of self-realization and operate both inside and outside of dance. It can be concluded that this strand of improvisation that examines emotional life and the relationship between the unconscious and consciousness posits a phenomenological and psychologically determined subject whose whole sense of self is rooted in self-conscioussness. As we will see, this will be one of the crucial points of dissent in Burrows and Ritsema's approach.

The opposite strand uses improvisation as a way out of the self, yielding the possibilities of movement and sensation in and through the body as detached from the subject. The objectivation of movement through improvisation can be illustrated by Paxton's *Small Dance*—an exercise widely used in teaching improvisation today (Albright in Albright and Gere 2003: 261) and whose partial influence on the notion of the impersonal Burrows has acknowledged (Cvejić 2008c: n.p.). Paxton explains it as a method of "detraining": "getting rid of the masks that we have, the social and formal masks, until the physical events occur as they will" (Paxton 2004: n.p.). Detraining consists in standing still, eliminating any conscious muscular action until the dancer begins to feel her skeletal muscles holding the body upright. Its goal is to achieve a balance in which the forces of the body are equalized. Paxton describes its occurrence as "such a delicate moment that if you even think 'Ah, it's happened,' it pushes you out of it, so you have to suspend your thinking" (ibid.). The process of detraining involves relaxation, which is, according to Paxton, a voluntary act of a certain kind:

> An act of "Won't." That is, I won't hold this tension any longer. It's not a negative. It's the opposite of insisting that you have to be what you are in terms of the tensions that have arrived within your body. That insistence is very much some part of the body that says "This is me, this is myself." (Ibid.)

For Paxton, detraining means to peel off the social, historical, stylistic, formalist skin-layers of the body so as to reach "masses and bodies and sensations":

> I stress that the dancers are people not in the social sense but in the animal sense in this kind of dancing, that they should not smile, should not make eye contact, should not talk, that they should just be there as animals, as bundles of nerves, as masses and bones . . . touching the other bundle and letting that be the work. (Ibid.)

An exercise of the emancipation of the physical self, detraining has the purpose to reach what improvisers deem the deepest hidden ground of the body—its automatic unconscious movements and sensations as its primal nature and essence. Or, in other words, detraining should enable a kind of existence which appears truer and more essential than the truth of the subjective experience of a particular self. Paxton suggests that this ground is the physical essence beyond consciousness. And, *Small Dance* is an improvisation that realizes it as a capacity which resides within every human body.

In sum, both strands of improvisation—self-expression as an embodiment of a particular self where the subject coincides with her body, and objectivation of the movement in and for itself to which the body subordinates itself as an instrument—are internalistic; in other words, they refuse externally posited constraints and instead operate within the internally given limits of the body, its experience of time, space, and contact with the other. This conclusion follows from the neo-avant-garde perspective of "dance as/into life," inherited from the 1960s, and still pervades improvisational dance as an ideological precept of the embodiment of freedom. Improvisation becomes the method of uncovering that which inheres in the body per se or is triggered by the situation that the body finds itself in. When considered under the recurrent themes of the unconscious, "unexpected," and "unknown," the method involves a manipulation and a negotiation of false opposites: the known and the unknown which only the known can make possible. The unknown is supposed to be an already existing possibility but hidden from consciousness and knowledge. This explains the experience of a "discovery" whereby the new surprises the improviser as something that she didn't know until then, but which might be new to her alone. Hence improvisers are often warned of the dangers of self-indulgence (Banes 1987: 67), where improvisational dance affords a self-contained event of participants with no interest in observation.

Still grounded in knowledge: improvisation as composition

Improvisation technologies developed in the field of ballet by the choreographer and dancer William Forsythe deserve our attention here, specifically because Forsythe's practice of improvisation thoroughly distinguishes itself from the self-expressionist/objectivist organic and holistic regime. Although Forsythe seems to cultivate ideals similar to those of other improvisational practices, such as "surprise" and "visceral thinking," or as Gerald Siegmund refers to it, "thinking in movement" (Siegmund 2004), his method and its aims set him apart from the main tradition. Forsythe's method in the first place emphasizes its foundation in a specific knowledge—in this case, ballet training:

> My basic method, developed over a period of fifteen years, is to find ways to use what my dancers already know. Since I work primarily with ballet dancers, I analyze what they know about space and their bodies from their intensive ballet training. I've realized that in essence ballet dancers are taught to match lines and forms in space. (Forsythe and Kaiser 1998, n.p.)

Observing the model of the kinesphere, developed by Rudolf Laban, which centralizes a point in the body from which all movement emanates and through which all axes pass, and which accounts for classical ballet as well as for modern dance, Forsythe came to the idea of extending it beyond one center situated in the body. Thus he multiplied the centers within the body, but also transposed them into the space surrounding the body, using not only points, but also lines or entire planes on or in which to issue or lodge movement, which particularly builds on Laban's geometrical foundation of modern dance (Laban 1984 and 2011; Preston-Dunlop and Sayers 2010; Servos 1998; Baudoin and Gilpin 1991). The result of exploding the Euclidian geometry of classical ballet was a breaking up of the coherent and coordinated physical identity of the dancing body, which Peter Boenisch characterized as a dissolution of "the traditional coupling of body and subjectivity" (Boenisch 2007: 23). Forsythe conceives of it as a creation of a "many-timed body, as opposed to a shaped body," folding and unfurling towards and against itself. Until now, the method reads as an account of composition, so the question arises as to how and why Forsythe deploys it as a spontaneous genesis of movement in performance. Instead of writing out movement based on an expanded and decentered model of multiple kinespheres, Forsythe chooses to assign "algorithms" to the dancers in order for

them to create a choreography in real time. He explains his method thus: "Some choreographers create dance from emotional impulses, while others, like Balanchine, work from a strictly musical standpoint. My own dances reflect the body's experiences in space, which I try to connect through algorithms. So there's this fascinating overlap with computer programming" (Forsythe and Kaiser 1998, n.p.). In the case of the performance ALIE/N *A(C)TION* (1992), the algorithm is called the "iterative process" in which the dancers examine their spatial location and movement, and redescribe it, folding the results back into the original movement material, lengthening the movement phrases with the new inserts and repeating the process several times (see Caspersen 2004, and Fabius 2009).

The recursive process has two aims that explain Forsythe's preference for improvisation instead of the reproductive execution of set movement. Firstly, this method involves ballet dancers in composition beyond the customary competences of dancer qua interpreter required by ballet and even contemporary dance performance. This involvement has the peculiar effect of dismantling the laws of mimesis that have guided the execution of movement since ballet. Forsythe explains it as follows:

> My dancers have no idea what they look like. On the other hand, they have to want to know, but I'm trying to put the testimony of their senses into question . . . . What it actually does is to make you forget how to move. You stop thinking about the end result, and start thinking instead about performing the movement internally . . . . When the force of gravity throws them into another configuration, for example, they have to analyze themselves and their current state in relation to the entire piece. In this sense, they are always in a "possessed" state. (Forsythe and Kaiser 1998: n.p.)

Hence, the first aim is to hinder the representational logic by which dancers are directed by an image as the end result of movement. Once this is achieved through the focus on the beginning of a new movement on the basis of a preceding movement, more complex choreographic structures can arise. The second aim of this method of improvisation is to complexify composition beyond a closed, predetermined structure conceived by one authority. Forsythe shares the task of composing movement with the dancers, because, as he argues: "I don't want to know what's going to happen. I want to be ambushed by the results" (ibid.). If we analyze Forsythe's method from the perspective of the

division of labor, then his use of improvisation can also be explained by a post-Fordist exploitation of creativity in collaboration and teamwork as opposed to the traditional hierarchical division of roles between the choreographer and performer in the discipline of ballet (see Cvejić and Vujanović 2010: 4–6). Improvisation serves to accelerate and improve, or as Boenisch suggested, thoroughly "update," "rewire," and "redesign the ballet code into a dance form for the twenty-first century" (Boenisch 2007: 23).

To conclude, Forsythe's practice of improvisation isn't grounded in self-expression or the objectivation of universal movement that inheres in the body as such, unlike the prevalent practices of improvisation. Yet, as a technology for an improvement of composition based on manipulating traditional ballet technique, it strongly relies on knowledge and strives to advance the cognitive and sensorial abilities of performers by building on that knowledge. It doesn't emotionally reassert the individual self of the performer as the subject of dance, but in effect reinforces the performer's identity through a body-movement synthesis founded on the cognitive and sensorial unity of faculties—an approach that integrates the mind and the body. Forsythe's stance is opposed to the liberal idea of spontaneity cultivated by improvisers such as Forti or Paxton because it claims that "visceral thinking" is acquired through training a bodily technique which involves a high degree of cognitive control. The resulting aesthetic of complexity, richness, and sophistication affirms Forsythe's method as a technology of composition rather than improvisation. However, in Forsythe's own understanding of his method, the purpose of improvisation is "to defeat choreography, to get back to what is primarily dancing" (Forsythe and Bürkle 1999: 24), because "the whole point of improvisation is to stage disappearance" (Forsythe in Baudoin and Gilpin 1991: n.p.). Hence the function of improvisation is to restore the elusive essence of dance movement, ephemerality arising paradoxically from an excess of kinesthetic and visual information. As Fabius remarks, "The spectator is dealing with a continuous sense of loss, the incapacity to absorb the excess of impressions. From this follows the qualification of Forsythe's work as embodying the poetry or architecture of disappearance" (Fabius 2009: 341).

Forsythe's algorithmic logic of improvisation doesn't operate by creating a problem that would thoroughly question or transform it. Algorithms organize a complex set of tasks within given "building blocks" (Forsythe 1999: 16) of composition: balletic elements of circles, points, lines and planes in multiplied kinespheres. Operating these programs, dancers are managing many tasks at once, the outcome of which is an unforeseen

combination, always a new variation of movements that gives a dancer a gratifying sense of expanding her own capabilities to move. Another argument against qualifying it as problem-posing is that these "building blocks" are derived from Forsythe's own art of dancing, as he contends: "My body has determined a lot of our dancing because I sense the body a certain way and it informs me a certain way. So it's a very personal view of the world, and that's the nature of choreography" (Forsythe 1999: 22). Thus Forsythe's improvisation technologies yield the aesthetic which owes its unity to the point of origin in the author's body. As he links his concern with a many-timed body with multiple centers of movement in and out of the body to his own movement style, Forsythe suggests that his improvisation technologies result from extending and amplifying knowledge from an individual authoring body. Improvisation in *WDSQ* begins exactly by dismantling the function of the body as the source or point of origin of movement, and this is part of the problem that gives rise to this performance.

What follows is a discussion of the method of problem-posing in the making and performing of *WDSQ,* as rooted in the Deleuzo-Spinozan theory of "choreographing problems" we have developed here. But before we continue with a detailed account of Burrows and Ritsema's thinking process and improvisational procedures, two important remarks need to be made. In an interview by Christel Staelpart conspicuously titled "Becoming Ritsema," Ritsema as a theatermaker "becoming-dancer" mentions that he feels "akin to" and "inspired by the post-war generation of French philosophers such as Baudrillard, Guattari, Deleuze" (Staelpart and Ritsema 2002: 58). Thanks to this interview's having featured at a conference as a key case of a theater practice involved with Deleuzian thinking (Deleuze Revisited: Contemporary Performing Arts and the Ruin of Representation, Ghent, 2001), Ritsema acquired the reputation of a theatermaker whose ideas and methods are in close dialogue with the theories of Deleuze (Bleeker 2004). Firstly, I would like to point out that after gauging the theoretical relevance of his statements about his own work, Ritsema seems to show an erratic and notional connection to an eclectic range of theories, from Ludwig Wittgenstein to Niklas Luhmann, or from Baudrillard to Deleuze. This attests more to a general affinity of artists today with the reflection of abstract thought as such, and particularly to philosophy's and critical theory's position as revered sources of knowledge in recent performance practices and other art practices, than to a consistent engagement with certain theoretical concepts and texts. Thus it comes as no surprise that, as Bleeker argues, Ritsema's understanding of the thinking body in dance

echoes a confused and contradictory notion of presence, understood both as a "ground zero" of "pure" expression and as an intense experience of multiplicity and uncertainty (Bleeker 2004: 136, 147). My second point here is that regardless of inconsistency and confusion in referencing philosophical sources of his poetics, Ritsema's affinity with Deleuze doesn't prefigure and determine my reading of *WDSQ* with the Deleuzian concept of creation through problems. As I explicated in the introduction, although authors' intentions, wishes and notions are of crucial importance for our inquiry into a practice-oriented kind of thinking, the way these authors attempt to associate them with philosophical theories is not only insignificant, but can also be dangerously misleading. Therefore, the ensuing discussion of problem-posing with respect to Deleuze is unrelated to Ritsema's or Burrows' alleged "inspiration" from Deleuze.

Ungrounding possibilities

WDSQ is an improvised duet made and performed by a dancer and choreographer, Jonathan Burrows, and a theater director without professional dance training, Jan Ritsema. Improvisation was given as a necessary condition of the choice of their collaboration, since the "non-dancer" wasn't capable of repeating the same movement; hence, improvisation here stands for no more than working with non-set movement. Moreover, the initial constraint of improvisation couldn't be a sufficient departure point for the two to begin to move together. What they clearly didn't want to fall back on were their individual habitual ways of dancing, one formed over a long period of dancing professionally in classical ballet and contemporary dance, and the other informed by an amateur vision about what he considers dance to be. An idea about movement that would determine how, where, when, and why they were to dance still had to be invented. The idea slowly began to emerge in discussions, during which a poem, "Burnt Norton" from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, lent the notion of a movement "neither from nor towards." Burrows and Ritsema quote this excerpt from the poem as a common reference for their wish to move neither from nor towards, but in the middle of movement (Burrows and Ritsema 2003: n.p.):

> At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
> Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
> But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
> Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from
> nor towards,

> Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
> There would be no dance, and there is only the dance
> I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.
> (Eliot in Ritsema and Burrows 2003: n.p.)

The poem "Burnt Norton" brought the thought of a dance for which they couldn't envisage a possible movement. Burrows introduces it as the inconcrete nature of time that they couldn't grasp through movement. Movement outside of time was impossible to think, and this impossibility forced them to eliminate all possibilities they could rely on in improvisation. In other words, the fantasy of movement that has neither spatial nor temporal structure, a movement that internalizes "the still point," created—what I will consider here—a problem. The problem led *WDSQ* to diverge from improvisation conceived as an exploration of the conditions of possible movement based on the capabilities of dancers.

In Deleuze's ontology, the concept of possibility entails that everything is already given and has been conceived:

> To the extent that the possible is open to "realization," it is understood as an image of the real, while the real is supposed to resemble the possible. That is why it is difficult to understand what existence [possibility] adds to the concept when all it does is double like with like. Such is the defect of the possible; a defect which serves to condemn it as produced after the fact, as retroactively fabricated in the image of what resembles it. (*DR*: 212)

In terms of dance, physiology and physics provide the general conditions or the ground for possible movement of the human body in a concrete time and space. The conditions and limitations that each body in given circumstances disposes are particular and depend on its training in movement, or lack thereof. Realization of the given conditions is the process of adding existence or reality to the given possibility—a process that isn't driven by difference or change, for it reinstates that which was already present. This is why the real is supposed to resemble the possible, on the one hand; while on the other, not every possibility is realized, but only certain possibilities pass into the real while others are excluded. Realization involves resemblance and limitation, which hinders creation and novelty.

When improvisers explore the possibilities for their bodies to move in a certain way, their realizations begin to resemble each other out of

a search for a balance, a ground between the possible and the impossible, or that which is beyond the physical or physiological limits. The ground of the body that coincides with the self, or of movement that is considered to essentially reside in the human body as such, determines their work as self-realization, as we have seen in the cases of other improvisation practices. By contrast, the movement that Burrows and Ritsema were eager to find was fundamentally problematic, as it appeared impossible at the outset and produced a disequilibrium out of its own paradox. Their problem was formulated when Burrows asked Ritsema, "Can you dance a question?" as Ritsema reports:

> It began very soon, when Jonathan asked me, "can you dance a question." It was a way to make me dance. I didn't ask much, I tried to dance a question. We then talked about what it means to dance a question, because you cannot dance a question. This "dancing a question" boiled down to we don't dance a specific question, we dance the state of questioning. (Cvejić 2008c: n.p.)

How to dance a question gave them a problem, which begins first with the relation between movement and natural language, as the following questions from the notes of Ritsema highlight:

> He [Burrows] says that I [Ritsema] should not want to prove anything with the movement, that I just ask questions, but how can one ask a question by moving? This is impossible. Every movement is a statement, this is what I learned when I started dancing. And unlike speech, movements are never something else than they are, they do not pretend. So how can I doubt about a movement which can only be clear to me? (Ibid.)

Second, in order to dance a question, neither Burrows nor Ritsema could find an adequate form or equivalent style. This is precisely why their creation began with a thought without an image, which could determine itself only as a problem. After frequent inquiries from the spectators into the semantic content of the questions they were supposed to be dancing, Ritsema rephrased "dancing a question" as "dancing in a state of questioning," as cited above. The latter formulation had the purpose of preventing a simple equation between movements and questions, which the dancers ruled out from the outset. "Dancing in the state of questioning" couldn't be subject to a process of realization, as there would be no preexisting forms that could resemble it. The

movement abilities that the two dancers call on seemed only to be an obstacle to a quest for a dance in a state of questioning, or for movement that would be outside of time. Dancing and questioning outside of time implied divergence from the habits of improvisation, as well as from their habitual styles of dancing. In other words, for dancing in the state of questioning to become a problem that will create the performance, it had to be determined; that is, Burrows and Ritsema had to invent its terms and conditions, which would act as selective and differentiating operators in the creation of movement.

The problem in *WDSQ* is posed in three terms. The first is how to prevent movement from slipping into gestures, where it takes on the shape of communicating meaning. The second is how to turn away from another habit whereby the avoidance of gestures and formalization frames movement as a task and performance as an execution of a task. The third is how to remove the movement "defaults" of the two dancers—the tendencies, preferences, and mannerisms—especially those they weren't fully aware of. The first term already presupposed setting up a constraint:

> Don't make gestures, let the skeleton make the movement, and don't lead your moving with your eyes from one point to another; then you try to rescue your body and there is no rescue. (Ibid.)

The second term was expressed in questions:

> Is it the fascination for shameless emptiness then? What some people call "courage" of being on stage without being covered by a context of meaning? Without what we call being under the roof of a task? (Ibid.)

Ritsema and Burrows knew they had to renounce the task method if they were going to pursue dance in the state of questioning. Tasks turn every movement into a statement of self-reference, meaningful to itself and its maker. "Doing" a movement that follows the function of a task, rather than being expressive of the self or of a form, creates a certain automatism where the cause for movement isn't questioned.

The third term is most significant and difficult to sustain. For Burrows, it meant undoing his dancerly disposition to shape movement and for Ritsema, striving not to dance unconsciously—in Ritsema's words, "with my mind in the clouds" (Cvejić 2008c: n.p.). Or as Burrows noted, "he wants to dance but gets stuck in an image of what he thinks dance is" (Burrows and Ritsema 2003: n.p.).

The three terms imply divergence from the available devices of improvisation, and thus require a rigor in making difference. The rigor of subtraction could be compared with Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche's double negation—"*everything which can be denied* is and must be denied" (*DR*: 55)—which enables a repetition of difference rather than a return of the same, the habitual or reproduction. In addition, they invented three conditions that enabled the "active forgetting" of their initial predisposition to improvisation. These conditions were supposed to unground the possibilities and limitations of their own moving bodies in the situation of improvisation. For Burrows it meant "unlearning" the habits of a spectrum of techniques his body had been trained in over decades. Ritsema had to undo his untrained, spontaneous, and "natural" inclinations to move. These conditions appear as solutions to two distinct but related problems: how to dance in the state of questioning—the problem from which *WDSQ* stems—and how to avoid improvisation as a process of self-realization—the critique of improvisation that the problem of questioning movement entails.

All three conditions have the purpose of diverging from the common maneuvers of improvisation. The first one concerns the space: "When we walk in, and also during the performance, we should not negotiate the space, nor the time. To walk in and wanting to possess the space is a negotiation" (Cvejić 2008c: n.p.). This principle is supposed to prevent negotiation with space, which entails, on the one hand, disrupting the direction of movement as its telos; and on the other hand, it is supposed to abolish any *mise en scène*. Operating this rule diminishes displacement. Once they enter the stage, Burrows and Ritsema don't "travel" across the stage by movement. Their few displacements involve erratic steps around a spot, as far as a short movement utterance requires. How they direct their bodies in relation to the audience or between themselves is equally inconspicuous. An amendment to the rule of not negotiating with the space involved avoidance of the tendency to move toward the middle of the stage. The stage center was defined as a "forbidden place," although the dancers didn't apply this interdiction strictly. The sheer pronouncement of this condition indicates their wish to remain always off center, and thus get rid of the central view on two bodies that essentializes their presence on the stage.

The dancers clearly avoid facing the audience or each other in a straightforward or significant manner. Their gazes wander throughout the space, dissociated from the directions of their bodies. The two bodies never enter into physical contact or acknowledge each other's presence, yet the dancers are careful not to stand in each other's way.

They seem to be neither together nor ignorant of each other—the same attitude they entertain towards the audience. This doesn't exclude that the dancers practiced exactly the opposite: how to "stay together." Ritsema explains how their objective was to develop the awareness of the presence of one another, "but also the presence of all that was there, the walls, the audience, the ceiling, the pillars," in order to frustrate self-indulgence or self-absorption, so common to performers engaged in improvisation. About how awareness of the things in space is expressed in their dancing, Burrows and Ritsema say, "We could see it in the video recording of a rehearsal, but couldn't explain what it precisely was, and how it could be proven" (Cvejić 2008c, n.p.) (see Figures 11 and 12).

The second condition forbids negotiation with time, or, in other words, it is meant to hinder the strongest patterns that occur in "extemporization": rhythms, accents, and patterns of action–reaction

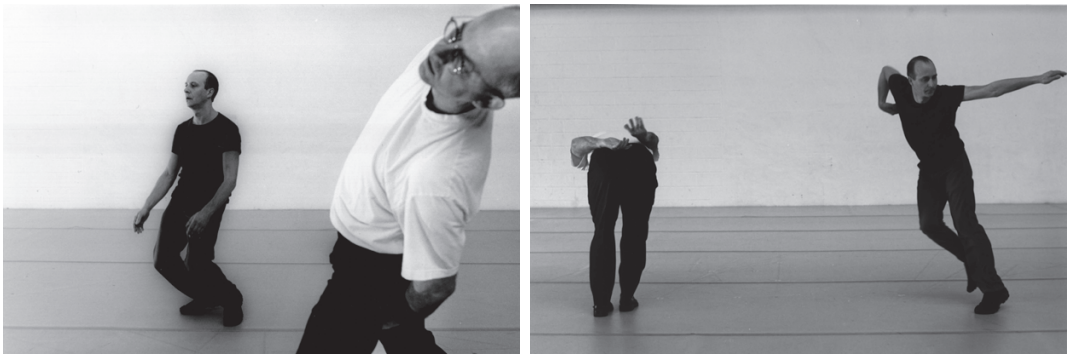

Figure 11 Weak Dance Strong Questions © Jonathan Burrows Company, 2001. Photography Hermann Sorgeloos

Figure 12 Weak Dance Strong Questions © Jonathan Burrows Company, 2001. Photography Hermann Sorgeloos

or question–answer. If these patterns do appear sporadically, they are abandoned abruptly before they become a tendency. For instance, Ritsema sometimes bursts into sequences that combine running, jumping, and turning in a simple manner. These short outbursts last only long enough to break the medium-slow speed of hesitation and loitering in a spot. Burrows' outbursts have the same purpose of disruption, yet yield a more irregular rhythm, as if the dancer knows how to efficiently prevent stabilization of a comfortable pace of movement.

As an antidote to the array of time-related clichés, the third condition is supposed to help the dancers explore duration. Unlike Paxton, who favors a synthetic approach to the psychic nature of duration as the experience from which improvisation should spring, Burrows and Ritsema go into a process of atomization, of dividing each movement into ever smaller and unequal movements. Ritsema explains it with a metaphor:

> Usually I am not interested in what happens between departure and arrival, reaching the goal seems to be the only importance. I have to change this. I have to split big distances into tiny ones. Going to Moscow starts with locking my apartment door, taking the elevator, opening the outside door, walking to the railway station, and so on. This takes the fear out of the big trip. This is how I have to dance, from movement to movement and all the time face every change. At first only the bigger ones, and then slowly on, going more into details. (Burrows and Ritsema 2003: n.p.)

Unlike dancers in Forsythe, who focus on the beginning of movement instead of its accomplishment in a form, Ritsema and Burrows strive to be in the middle of it ("neither from nor towards"), thus complicating it or splitting it into ever smaller movements—or what I will refer to as "stutterances."

The *Weak Dance* of stutterances

Burrows observes that "the process of questioning led to such a short time of thought or expression that we were almost dealing with interruptions only" (Cvejić 2008c: n.p.). Several difficulties arise when one tries to describe the dance in *WDSQ* accurately. The first difficulty concerns the object of observation—whether movement can be distinguished from behavior, and if it is movement that we are observing, how this movement could be qualified. The most appropriate term

for it is an utterance that breaks at the point where its shape tends to acquire the sense of a gesture that communicates meaning, a functional everyday ("pedestrian") movement, or an abstract form of a dance-movement. Qualifying this movement as "utterance" involves a linguistic term, thus drawing an analogy between dancing and speech. The analogy enables one characteristic: the movement *begins* as a voluntary action to move, without its being a statement motivated by something to express. The will to move is an intention to dance in the state of questioning, which is itself not doubted; it hence operates automatically. However, it can't sustain itself for long, and implodes. The utterance is cut short at the moment when it might resemble an intelligible form, something that the dancers recognize as such to the extent where they could repeat or vary it. Their intention to move is countered by the urge to stop movement from ever becoming subsumable under the given categories of gesture, pedestrian, task-based, or formal abstract movement. The two contrary desires—to move and yet not produce a cognizable movement—constitute the paradox as a matter of disequilibrium between, on the one hand, the possibilities that have to be eliminated, or "forgotten," and, on the other, dancing in a state of questioning.

The second difficulty occurs in demarcating where the utterance begins and ends, as well as in defining how parallel or disjunct the temporal structures of thinking and moving are. The performance invites us to wonder about what causes a movement to stop, if it is a particular question which arrests movement in that moment. Thirdly, it is difficult to discern what should be perceived and attended to and to find suitable words to describe the movement that refrains from a cognizable form or meaningful gesture. The spectator is at odds with a discrepancy between an excess of perceptible details and the poverty of available terms to qualify them. The following descriptive account in a review I wrote unravels the type of questions that watching this performance might raise:

> He draws his legs together, how will he undo the knot now? He could probably shift with the right foot forward, but what is he doing, he begins jumping with both feet glued together and suddenly stops and looks at the hands he held his legs with. Now my gaze passes over to the other, who is fumbling with his fingers to his back pocket and clinging to it as if all his body had to turn to his bottom. Does he stop because he realizes what he is doing or because he knows how this feels so his body ventures in a move forward and stumbles once, twice? Is he frustrating his own move, or this occurs before he could control and stop it? (Cvejić 2002: 28)

The fragment above demonstrates how a spectator might be prompted to wonder how movement emerges and why it stops. Formulating dance and questions on one and the same level in the title of the performance creates the problematic relationship between dancing and questioning. At first, it might appear that the dancers question movement in thought first, before they dance it. This is suggested by the dissociation between the head and the rest of the body. The position of the head and the pensive look disconnect the head from the body, as if the head resists being organically included in the posture or kinetic flow. It is more common in contemporary dance that the dancer strives to incorporate her head in the movement. The head is equated then with the other body parts, and exudes an air of commitment and belief held by the performer fully immersed in performing. In *WDSQ,* the heads of the dancers stick out, stand apart from the rest of the body. Their eyes wander, and the faces neither affirm nor negate the movement in which the whole body may be implicated. Soon enough, the extent of differenciation, in the sense of the actualization of the problem we explained in Chapter 1, and the priority of physical activity provide evidence that the dancers aren't verbalizing questions to the movement, but instead bringing their bodies to a state in which they make the movement question itself through itself. This process results in persistent cuts and interruptions in movement that could be compared with stuttering and stammering (see Figure 13).

Each movement is a different utterance, a difference between differences that form the discontinuous flow of a stutter. The flow of interruptions is, nevertheless, itself unstoppable—it has interiorized cuts. The comparison with stuttering in language presupposes an approximation between two disparate expressions—movement and speech—which is here mediated through the notion of a syntax of dance movements.

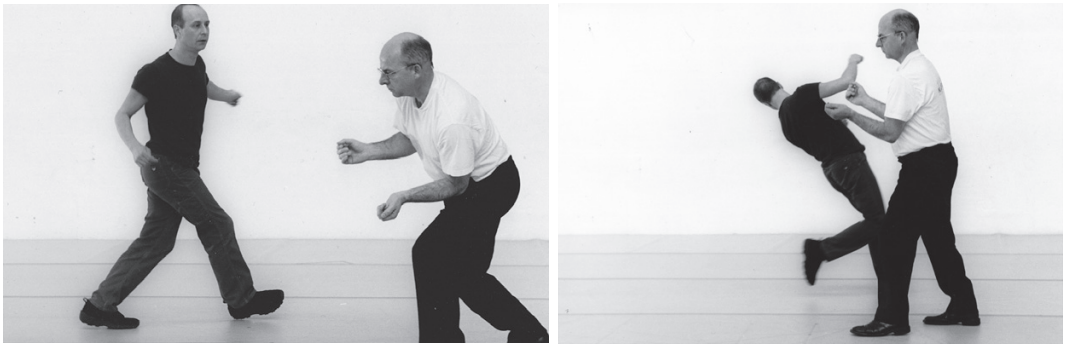

Figure 13 Weak Dance Strong Questions © Jonathan Burrows Company, 2001. Photography Hermann Sorgeloos

As discussed earlier, contemporary dance is judged by one of the foundational ideas of modern dance—mobility and kineticism—which yields an uninterrupted flow of movement. This idea has developed into dance techniques of continuity, among which "phrasing" is the most prominent. Phrasing results from connecting movements, gestures and postures in a continuous line, defined by geometrical (spatial) and/or dynamic (energetic) aspects. The term "phrase" is analagous to "sentence," from which it borrows the logic of "sense," even if the sense in dance can't be compared with linguistic meaning.[4] Hence, the comparison can hold only for the syntactical dimension of language; and if we follow the analogy with language, *WDSQ* develops a special syntax that strongly contrasts the imperative of kinetic flow. This syntax comprises a series of "stutterances," utterances that are cut before they can develop into a sequence comparable to a phrase. Each utterance appears like a new beginning and thus affirms the power of beginning and beginning again. These beginnings are the stutterances in which the problem of questioning movement by movement itself persists, as the following instruction from the notes of Burrows and Ritsema requires: "go from one moment to the next and ask question after question; question continuously" (Burrows and Ritsema 2003: n.p.). There is no semantic content to the questions that the stutterances seem to parallel. Dancing in a state of questioning expresses a distinctive syntax that underlies a series of stutterances, and this syntax is precisely defined by the terms and conditions of the problem.

The figure of stuttering deployed in coining the term "stutterance" comes from two sources that don't relate to each other beyond coincidence: Ritsema's theater poetics and Deleuze's writings on minor language. Ritsema often refers in the poetics of his theater to "stammering," which applies both to speech on stage and to all the other elements of theater, without making a reference to Deleuze. He writes:

> And it is necessary to eliminate all the aimed-at-one-effect techniques, strategies, aesthetics, manipulations of the old theatre aside, because they are implicitly made to be used to suck the audience in, repress them, and that is not what we want, we embrace a critical distance between what is offered from the stage and the audience. This does not mean that lights, sets, costumes, narratives, representations, expressions etc. can't be used, but always in such a way that they are juxtaposed, superimposed, deconstructed, *stammered* [emphasis added], interrupted never to support any other object or subject but always from their full being-there as one of the proposals, attempts,

> propositions that are offered in order to keep in existence all possible combinations with all the other objects and subjects that are presented. (Ritsema 2001: 43–4)

In "Lecture on Improvisation" (2004) Ritsema invokes stammering again, this time in relation to another dance performance he was making at the time (*Blindspot*, in collaboration with Sandy Williams, 2005): "We should not make a performance about something, but the thing itself needs to be interpellated by itself. We have to find a language in which we stammer ourselves" (Ritsema 2004: n.p.). His insistence on stammering suggests comparison with the "stuttering in language" that Deleuze develops in his writings on the literature of Kafka, Céline, Melville, and others. In the essay "He Stuttered," Deleuze defines stuttering as making "the minor use of the major language" (*CC*: 109). The minor/major opposition indicates power relations in representation, where the literary canon is the major, normative language of a nation. Resistance to the major mode of language, for instance, in the writings of Kafka as a Czech Jew, a double-foreigner in the German language of Goethe, manifests itself in the variations in which literary language merges with speech (*CC*: 108). Although these variations, which he also calls modulations and bifurcations, relate to the content of expression, to the becomings of characters or situations in the novels that he discusses, Deleuze ascribes their workings to the very grammar of the language. The syntax becomes affected by a disequilibrium between the expressed and the expression, which is comparable to the problem that causes stuttering in speech. "Stuttering" in Deleuze is but a trope for a transformation in language: "*When language is so strained* that it starts to stutter, or to murmur or stammer . . . *then language in its entirety reaches the limit* that marks its outside and makes it confront silence" (*CC*: 113). The silence of movement here is stillness, the still point of the movement "neither from nor towards."

What does it mean exactly to stammer in movement, to become a stutterer in dance in the case of *WDSQ* if we think it in terms of the Deleuzian notion of "stuttering"? It implies a disjunction between the times of thinking and moving, whereby the problem of dancing and questioning are two divergent series. Although they must run parallel, they also try to interfere with each other without ever achieving the equation of movement = question. This destabilizes every utterance as a new beginning in which two disjunct series attempt to converge in vain. Movement stutters because it reaches its limit—in the stops, in the moments of stillness, when the dancer realizes that the movement may

yield to the habits, "the don'ts" specified by the terms and conditions. The movement stops when the dance can no longer maintain its questioning through itself, when the dancer recognizes any of the pitfalls he was trying to avoid: *mise en scène*, temporal pattern, gesture, and so forth. The problem of dancing and questioning dancing at the same time persists in its solutions, in the stutterances, because it maintains the paradox of a movement that grows from the middle, neither from nor towards, outside of psychological duration of the body and impulse of direction.

What constitutes the weak dance is a movement qua question, the problem of integrating two parallel but disparate processes: dancing and questioning. In *WDSQ*, stutterance is the problematic structure of the movement. It can also be regarded as a reinvented syntax of movement, in the sense that Deleuze attributes it to an invention of art: "A work of art is a new syntax, one that is much more important than vocabulary and that excavates a foreign language in language" (Deleuze in Flaxman 2000: 370). In the syntax of stutterances, Ritsema and Burrows render each movement "problematic" because they issue it and abort its development at the same time. My point is that such a process of creation isn't natural, isn't always already governing everything that disintegrates in time. It happens only by the force of a problem that makes their dance improvisation stutter—by the constructivist effort with which the two dancers persist with the constraints.

To repeat and to rehearse

WDSQ could hypothetically continue ad infinitum, were it not for the endurance of the dancers and the audience, and conventions with which this performance complies. As Deleuze would say, the problem "objectively persists in the solutions to which it gives rise and from which it differs in kind" (*DR*: 280). The dancers don't pursue an ultimate form which is supposed to equate movement with a form of questioning. In order to move in the middle, neither from nor towards, they need to question every utterance, preventing its development towards a goal. This makes the weak dance open-ended, capable of renewing itself ad infinitum. In order to present it as a performance before an audience, Burrows and Ritsema bracket its duration. At the beginning, Burrows addresses the audience with these words: "Good evening, this performance is called *WDSQ* and lasts fifty minutes." The frame is predetermined, the arbitrary length preset, and after 50 minutes, the two dancers walk off stage, cutting the performance off as abruptly as they

began it. In that way, it is a provisional goal of a countdown of time, if only for the audience.

Apart from announcing the length of the performance in advance, at the beginning Burrows addresses the fact that the door (or in some venues the windows) will remain open during the performance, which can affect the temperature in the performance space. His comment draws attention to a deliberate decision to let in the theater's outside, with the street noises appearing almost intrusive. The frame of the performance is thus weakened, suggesting that this dance should be placed in a continuum with non-theatrical, chance-oriented, everyday movements, sounds, and sensations. The extreme reduction of the technical means of the theater apparatus—a bare studio-like space; general, unchanging "wash" light; the absence of intentionally added music/sound; and the functional, everyday clothes of the performers, down to the shoes they wear—points to a minimum of difference between a rehearsal as a non-staged everyday reality and a performance as a fiction of staging. The difference lies in having an audience before whom the dancers will dance. Certainly this isn't just a minor detail, but also at least a nominally constitutive difference; yet, for an audience, the performance with its "poor" aesthetics might look like an open rehearsal. Once they invented their dance in the state of questioning, or stutterances, Burrows and Ritsema practiced *WDSQ* in the same way that they presented it before an audience. As a result, the rehearsal and the performance of *WDSQ* are brought close together by the process that always engages the same idea but differenciates itself anew. Thus the process of differenciation doesn't depend on the presence, i.e. absence, of the audience; it sustains itself through a production of always new stutterances. At the same time, the stutterances actualize the same procedure of questioning, enacting in each one a new beginning, a new trial.

In *WDSQ,* the notion of repetition can be approached in two senses: the technical sense of repeating as a reperforming of the same performance, and the philosophical concept of repetition. In his ontology of difference, Deleuze couples repetition with difference as its necessary counterpart, which is the main thesis of his seminal book on metaphysics *Difference and Repetition*. Second, but not any lesser in importance, is the register of repetition specific to performance, such as rehearsing and performing again. These two registers—a metaphysical and an empirical one, both related to the medium of an art—aren't only disparate and seemingly incompatible, but also diametrically opposite concepts. Deleuze conceives repetition as differential, producing difference in and through itself, while repetition in rehearsing and performing dance,

theater, or music implies an object that is being reproduced, or, in other words, a *mise en oeuvre*. *WDSQ* is a case which requires that the relation between the two registers and two contradictory accounts of repetition be considered. The first of these accounts will be the concept of repetition in Deleuze, particularly drawing on the second chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, titled "Repetition for Itself" (*DR*: 70–128).

Deleuze's project in *Difference and Repetition* is to argue that repetition, as it figures in Nietzsche's idea of "eternal return," isn't a matter of the same thing occurring over and over again. Repetition and difference are two forces of creation, entwined in a process that produces variation in and through every repetition. Deleuze entangles difference with repetition in order to affirm the power of the new and the unforeseeable. To repeat is to begin again, and to regard each beginning as an experiment. There is no originary point out of which repetition can generate itself. Repetition doesn't involve a model, or any identity, but instead sustains itself in perpetual change. Repetitions don't form a linear sequence with a direction or a final goal; they coexist, renewing an open whole. Hence, Deleuze's differential repetition is distinguished from what is usually understood as the repetition of the same, or what he considers as the actual, material, or bare repetition, which is static and ordinary, belonging to the representational order of concepts. In contrast, the repetition of difference is clothed or enveloped, as it is interior to the Idea; it is dynamic and excessive. Resemblance implied by reproduction appears only as a secondary effect, an illusion that is functional in the need to produce identity. Considering what this notion of repetition means for the different arts, Deleuze writes that

> each art has its interrelated techniques or repetitions, the critical and revolutionary power of which may attain the highest degree and lead us from the sad repetitions of habit to the profound repetitions of memory, and then to the ultimate repetitions of death in which our freedom is played out. (*DR*: 289)

To illustrate his claim about each art having its own interrelated "techniques or repetitions," Deleuze goes on to offer three sundry examples from music, art, literature, and cinema in the twentieth century: the leitmotiv technique in *Wozzeck*, the Alban Berg opera from 1922; Andy Warhol's series of celebrity portraits from the 1970s; and the novel and film *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961), which explicitly short-circuits the present and the past, life and death, in memory. The three examples are disparate, indeed, but point to Deleuze's general understanding

of repetition in the arts. His idea of repetition here encompasses those procedures that are specific to each art medium and tradition and that technically seem to repeat, but actually generate difference. Warhol's technique of incorporating photography in painting for a series of copies of the copies of famous people is a controversial example, since it is based on mechanical reproduction, which in Deleuze's terms would be the negative kind of bare repetition. Yet for Deleuze the Pop Art series is "remarkable," as it pushes the copy of the copy to the extreme at which it reverses the original and becomes a simulacrum. The point here are the figures of the portraits, whose presence and meaning in Western culture make Warhol's "serial series" such that "all the repetitions of habit, memory and death are conjugated in it" (*DR*: 293).

If we search for the function and meaning that "repetition" as a technical term has in performance, we are confronted with one of the basic production techniques of the performing arts, be it dance, theater, or music. *Répétition* is the French word for "rehearsal," and denotes the preparation prior to performance, in which certain, if not all, elements of a performance are defined, planned, or "blocked" (i.e., fixed in space and duration, and perfected as to their way of execution). Repetition is also the fundamental method of generating dance movement: for a movement to be singled out, referred to, discussed, or learned, it must be repeated. Word and image provide ways of "translating" movement, but they can't enact it. Hence dance training to a large extent consists of learning how to repeat a movement. Or, as Forsythe explains the oral mimetic mode of transmission of movement through repetition, "we all pass on dancing primarily through imitation, visual exchange. We demonstrate for each other, that is the way our language is communicated" (Forsythe 1999: 22). Rehearsing a dance implies learning and perfecting movement in repetition.

The etymology of the English word "rehearsal" is telling here. To "rehearse" was derived from the French *rehercier* (ca. 1300), which signifies to "go over again, repeat," "rake over." The French verb *rehercier* originates from two Latin terms with distinct meanings, *hirpex*, *hirpicis*, which means a harrow, and *hercia*, the church chandelier. The French etymological dictionaries explain the morphology of *herse*, which in French means harrow, by way of an onomatopoeic expression of the effort of harrowing (*le hersage*). In 1765, the French *herse* acquired one more meaning: "a framework for carrying *lampions* to light a scene," drawing on the Latin *hercia*. In English, the designation of "hearse" as the vehicle for carrying a coffin was coined in 1640, whereas the meaning of the verb "rehearse" as in "practice a play, or a part in a play" was established earlier, in 1570. Both designations retain the image of

carrying a tool, the harrow or the hearse. The origin of harrowing in *rehercier* stresses repetition as a loop: in the return to the former beginning and the progression to the end, as in the image of harrowing the same field over and over again. Repetition appears cyclical here, and the etymological meanings recall the idiomatic expressions about various kinds of repetition in rehearsal—like "run through" or "top to tail"—that use a spatial model for an object to be repeated, rehearsed.[5]

The conventional notion of rehearsal involves repetitions as trials in striving to reach an ideal form that the performance is supposed to take. Thus, rehearsal installs the regime of representation, in the repetitions that re-present the same work over and over again toward its perfection. The work in such kinds of rehearsals is considered to exist already in a materialized form or as an ideal type—like a play, or a musical or dance composition. Its conception also contains the possibilities of its interpretation, as they are considered to reside within the work. Rehearsal and performance are, then, two different situations in which the same work is reinstantiated, and its reinstantiations vary in function and in degree of success, in their proximity to the ideal form. In rehearsal the work is practiced or exercised towards the ideal form or the goal that is then reached in the performance that is the presentation of the work. Yet, as Peter Brook pointed out, rehearsals at best carry a process of creation with little or no "bare" repetitions. In his encyclopedia definition of rehearsal, Patrice Pavis singles out a remark of Brook about the French word répétition, which "evokes a mechanical kind of work, while rehearsals are always different and sometimes creative. Otherwise, if they become mired down in infinite repetition, it is soon clear that the theatre has gone out of them (Brook 2008: 154)." Pavis then adds that the German *Probe* ("test") "gives a much better idea of the experimentation and the trial-and-error process involved before a final solution is adopted" (Pavis 1998: 308). Choosing to quote Brook, Pavis notes the tendency in theater and performance culture from the 1960s and 1970s onward to transform repetition in rehearsal into a process of creation. Today's legacy of the 1960s and '70s is recognized in the format that aims to conflate rehearsal and performance in one process and event, the so-called demonstration or performance of a "work in progress" or "work in process," which results from the practice of orienting performance toward research, which began in the 1990s. "Progress" or "process" here still reveals the intent of completion, even if the final form of the work might never be attained.

With regard to the aforementioned conceptual distinctions and practices, *WDSQ* involves repetition on two levels. On the first level,

the performance is presented over and over again, and is, as a work of dance, nominally reproduced. *WDSQ* isn't a one-off event or happening, but a performance that is running over a period of time. This level, in Deleuze's terms, corresponds to bare repetitions, by which the same situation, involving two performers and the problematic of dancing in the state of questioning, is repeated, reinstantiated every time the performance is presented. On another level, no movement in its shape or duration and no spatial configuration of the two bodies is ever literally repeated. Each stutterance is a differenciation, or a singular solution by which the problems of questioning movement by movement and neither moving from nor to a place are "posited and determined" (*DR*: 280). This isn't merely the consequence of not setting movement, or of improvisation—because improvisation would engender personal manners and styles, as earlier shown; it is instead the result of severe constraints by which the dancers question and stutter in their movement. If certain movement patterns were to emerge, and with them the consciousness that they could be repeated due to the pleasing effect they had on the audience or because the dancers Burrows and Ritsema enjoyed dancing them, *WDSQ* would fail in its mission to problematize or question movement. The dancers were aware of the pitfall of emergent mannerisms, and so they strived to maintain the discipline of questioning. Dancing in the state of questioning often seemed like a struggle rather than the ludic exercise that improvisation often resembles. The frequent stops, cuts and silences, aborted beginnings, and the very syntax of stutterances manifest the edge of this struggle, where dance in the state of questioning falls silent.

Dancers who practice improvisation in performance rarely define the period that limits a certain improvisation practice. Quite the contrary. They aim to develop a method that can be regularly invoked on many occasions and that seems to run limitlessly, that is, until it transforms itself imperceptibly into something else. In 2004, three years after its creation, Burrows and Ritsema stopped performing *WDSQ*. Despite the strict frame of the constraints that they exercised, performing *WDSQ* in front of an audience time after time also bore the danger of consolidating new habits, finding ease in difficulty, and forming patterns. Hence performing *WDSQ* was a process that reached its end when Burrows and Ritsema began to affirm certain qualities of movement. This fact is significant because it shows that although the performance was made and presented as an open-ended process, its process did reach an end. The end lies at the critical point where "dancing in the state of questioning" stops being a problem. The problem is exhausted once the stutterances

no longer engender differenciation and begin to consolidate a ground of movement or expression held by the bodies of the dancers, an idiom that begins to reproduce itself in mechanical repetitions, at the point when "stutterances" acquire the look of personal mannerisms. This could explain why Burrows and Ritsema abandoned the performance of *WDSQ*.

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Now I would like to conclude the discussion that began by situating *WDSQ* within improvisation as an odd opponent to the main assumptions, motivations, and values thereof. Among the seven works discussed in this book, in *WDSQ* we encounter an exemplar of a creation by problem that operates in several registers: the object of an Idea of movement, the form of which seems impossible; a procedure constraining a process by conditions and rules for questioning movement, which results in the invention of a new syntax, a differenciation generated through repeating the same set of questions, rules, and terms; and a problematic relationship, and not an analogy, between sensibility and thought, dancing and thinking, the times of which are incommensurable and divergent. While we sought here to conceptualize the thought that arises parallel to movement, in the next chapter we will focus on sensibility and affect, which, unlike thought which questions, ungrounds, and denaturalizes spontaneous expressions of dancing, are considered essential characteristics of bodily movement in dance.