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Dance and the Quality of Life

 Springer

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Chapter 10

Pause. Listen.: Visibility and Freedom in Choreographic Practice

Simon Ellis

Authority

Inasmuch as I am at the heart of nature a simple given, nothing is mine. (de Beauvoir, 1987, p. 137)

I am a dancer.

I am a choreographer.

I work with others.

I am indebted to others.

Here is a chapter in a book about dance and the *quality of life*. The book's title presupposes that dance has some relationship to quality of life or even that it might improve the quality of our lives. But it is, I imagine, also a book implicitly about the lives, attitudes and desires of academics – each of us trying to carve out an existence through publication, based on a perceived (and sometimes even real) authority and expertise. Don't be fooled: each of us is contributing to this book – or indeed any other book – because our quality of (academic) life demands this kind of writing and scholarship. And don't be fooled again: each of us so-called authors are dependent on the lives and experiences of others. We define ourselves while defining others around us; we are made through them as we write of and about them. We are 'blinded' by ourselves (Cage, as cited in Larson, 2013, p. 187) and by our (perceived and real) authority and power.

Here is a chapter in a book in which I reflect on and write about the conditions of production and performance of a dance called *Pause. Listen.* (2014). In doing so I aim to reveal some of the ethical values in making and presenting the dance, and how these values might contribute to conversations and experiences in dance of ownership, attribution, responsibility, and status. The chapter is divided into five parts: (1) *Authority*, this current section in which I introduce and frame the writing

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in relation to authorship and personal ambition; (2) *Visibility*, to discuss agency and (in)visibility for dancers and choreographers; (3) *Other Voices*, a small collection of writings by other artists in response to their experiences of *Pause. Listen.*; (4) *Freedom*, in which I draw together thinking by Simone de Beauvoir, Ilya Prigogine and Henri Bergson to consider indeterminacy and freedom in relation to novelty and an ethics of choreography; and, finally (5) *Letters*, a collection of letters I wrote to dancer Chisato Ohno at the very beginning of what would become *Pause. Listen.* Together, I hope these seemingly disparate written forms will help to imagine a new type of choreographer-as-author: the *steward*, whose role and attributes might challenge how the dance community and marketplace valorizes choreographic authorship. I should be clear that *Pause. Listen.* is not a dance *about* freedom or visibility or ethics, but that, within the dance's processes, performances, and underlying values, rests an opportunity to consider dance and the quality of life.

But whose lives, and what qualities?

Pause. Listen. is a dance by Chisato Ohno (performance), Jackie Shemesh (design), and me – Simon Ellis (choreography). The brackets around those words – performance, design, and choreography – are more than syntactical economy; they are meant to allow the artistic roles-as-words to be ghost-like, floating between uncertainty and clarity. The three of us are marked by those roles in this dance, but marks can be deceiving. *Pause. Listen.* was a small dance, for a few people. Its ambitions were – and remain – discreet. Since the three of us expressed interest in making a work by understanding and adapting performance practices and environments, it was developed only through residencies: first in the Garage Nardini space at Bassano del Grappa in Italy in October–November 2013, and then again in the Founders Studio at The Place in London in August–September 2014. This residency approach meant that each version of the amalgamated choreographic, dance and design practices would be shaped – or afforded – by time in the spaces we were working and performing. We hoped to inhabit these spaces-to-be-danced-in in order to evoke what anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000) describes as a “poetics of dwelling” (p. 26), a term he uses to describe the sensitivity and responsiveness akin to intuition, and developed through time in environments.

Pause. Listen. was also another opportunity for me to question the role, status, and ethics of the choreographer in collaborative processes (e.g. Ellis 2010, 2015) – to seek methods of practice and performance that would bring into focus the tremendous corporeal and cognitive intelligences of the dancer Chisato Ohno, while exercising humility as a choreographer. There is a paradoxical desire here in the dance and this writing: to acknowledge or recognize my role as the choreographer while attempting not to draw attention to it. Further still, the chapter is written without the direct voice or perspectives of Chisato; a problem or perhaps *friction* that produces a matrix of absence and presence between her, me, the performance and this writing.

Two overlapping questions stayed alive throughout the processes and experiments of *Pause. Listen.*: How might I invoke choreographic absence, or somehow reduce my authorial presence in the work? What is the least I need to do in order to make space for – or get out of the way of – Chisato's readiness to practice

performance? For my part, a key aspect of the development and performance of *Pause. Listen.* was to heighten my sensitivity to the experience, thinking, skill and decision-making of Chisato, while finding strategies to minimize the impact of my taste, vision and general authorial presence on her dancing and the work itself.

The challenge here and now is to write, represent and reflect on this choreographic work, and the work of these people involved, that is not “replete with clichéd, ready-made (some would even say cowardly) ideas of proprietorial authorship, the book, originality, fixity, and the finished object” (Hall, 2016, p. xiv). Such a proposition demands sensitivity to ownership, privilege, power and authority. It demands that you the reader remembers that these ideas are constructed as they are written, that I am – even as I type *these words here and now*, and whether I like it or not – in the process and muddle of expressing desires: to make sense, to be clear, to acknowledge accurately the work and roles of the collaborative team, to be open and vulnerable, to ask difficult questions, to not pretend, to not seek regard, to not make absurd claims. These desires are qualities I would like to have in my professional life, and although ambitious and beyond my capacities, they are how I want to come to dancing, and they are how I attempted to approach *Pause. Listen.*

Visibility

Man cannot escape from his own presence, nor from the singular world that his presence reveals around him; his very effort to uproot himself from the earth causes him to dig a hole for himself. (de Beauvoir, 1987, p. 138)

In *Performance as a Political Act*, dancer, sociologist, and Marxist Randy Martin (1990) applies the terms *conceiver*, *performer* and *consumer* to the production of dance. He suggests that performance is the “spatial and temporal terrain upon which the conceiver and consumer meet,” and what is mediation for the choreographer and audience is “experience for the dancer” (p. 83). This claim was part of Martin’s efforts to elevate the agency of dancers over the authority of the choreographer, and his agenda was born out of the anecdotal history in dance of *silent dancers*, or dancers understood as being on the receiving end of (choreographic) authority and power.

Dance scholar Sally Gardner (2007) has criticized Martin’s industrializing the roles of the dancer and choreographer as not reflecting the history of modern dance (in which the choreographer was often also one of the dancers). Furthermore, Gardner expresses concern that Martin’s “industrial metaphor” (p. 49), in which the “dancers are workers to the choreographer’s ‘capital’” (p. 47), eclipses the choreographer by a type of transfer of power from mind (choreographer) to body (dancer), whereas in historical modern dance the choreographer authored the dance through her body.

There continue to be multiple versions of the ways in which choreographers, dancers and choreographer-dancers access, devise, manage, and question their work together. Yet the agency of dancers in choreography continues to be a sore point in

contemporary dance practice; sore enough for the Swedish site *Sarma* to have produced *The Dancer as Agent Collection* (Parkinson & Peeters, 2014). The site is edited by Chrysa Parkinson and Jeroen Peeters and contains a broad collection of materials (video, writing, drawing) that celebrate and foreground the work, thinking, and actions of dancers, many of whom explicitly avoid calling themselves choreographers.

Whereas Martin pulled apart the roles of choreographers and dancers in order to elevate the value and agency of the worker-dancer, Gardner's (2007) argument is that contesting the choreographer-dancer binary (a binary that doesn't survive historical analysis) makes possible more complex processes of "transmission where authority might remain with the choreographer but also belong to the dancers" (p. 50).

What can the dancer and the choreographer know and be with respect to one another in modern dance if we do not accept that they simply fall on either side of binary divisions between art and craft, self and other, subject and object, mind and body. (p. 37).

Notwithstanding Gardner's concerns about the pertinence of Martin's Marxian framework for thinking choreographic *production*, his description of conceiver, performer and consumer provides a useful means to question who is responsible – and when – for authoring choreographic work and to what extent the terms of this responsibility are able to be disrupted or circumvented in ways that reflect Gardner's challenge to various binaries.

Martin's diachronic approach – a process of transferring authority over time – doesn't necessarily reflect more common choreographic processes that involve a synchronic *give and take* between the artists. Martin (1990) himself recognizes this synchronic transfer of roles in the work of John Cage and Merce Cunningham in which "the conceiver is located inside the performance rather than in the process of conceiving it" (p. 84). There are also many examples of choreographers looking to bend and extend rehearsal dialogues and practices between choreographers and dancers into performance.

In *Sunstruck* (Herbertson & Cobham, 2008) Melbourne choreographer Helen Herbertson sends instructions and feedback to dancers Trevor Patrick and Nick Sommerville via wireless earpieces as they perform the movement materials. Similarly, in *The Boom Project* (Crisp & Herbertson, 2015), Australian dancer-choreographer Rosalind Crisp dances while "artistic companion and provocateur" Herbertson quietly speaks responses, ideas and thoughts into the space to nourish Crisp's dancing. William Forsythe has long used live directorial strategies to explore choreographic possibilities. For example, in *Sleepers Guts 3* Forsythe (1996) directed the dancers what to say in real time (based on their text from the first act). In *Artifact* Forsythe (1984) "calls out [dancers] waiting on the side and gives drastically varying directions" (Caspersen & Steinwald, 2007). In the same interview Forsythe's long-term collaborator Dana Caspersen relates that [Forsythe] is "interested in how set structures change when a few basic instructions are altered" (2007). Perhaps his curiosity in structural and temporal complexities made directorial interventions at the moment of performance almost inevitable. Forsythe was perhaps

influenced by his historical predecessor Trisha Brown in *Solo Olos* (1976), for example, in which dancer Lisa Kraus leaves the dance to call out instructions to the four other dancers.

Dances like these collapse Martin's conceiver-performer-consumer description of production. At varying stages, choreographers are performing directions, dancers are adapting and conceiving while performing dances, and the performances to a certain extent (and more than is usual in choreographies) are consumed as they are produced; they possess a quality of aliveness that is built into their construction. Nonetheless, in the examples I have described, *at some point in time* each work contains some version of a directorial presence that extends beyond the rehearsal period, and that adapts, adjusts and sets possibilities in motion for the dancer to notice, absorb, manage, create and even reject.

This relationship between director and dancer(s) holds even for Rosalind Crisp's *The Boom Project* in which, although Crisp is described as both dancer and choreographer (akin to other examples at the heart of Gardner's 2007 article), it is clear from Helen Herbertson's visible yet subtle spoken interventions-as-companion that *direction* – even in the loosest sense of the word – is being communicated (Crisp & Herbertson, 2015). These choreographic-danced scenarios are distinct from the diachronic transfer of agency in traditional choreographic practices that follows the visibility of the key participants: at a certain point in the production process the choreographer-director steps back from her role and the dancers *assume* ownership of – and visibility in – its performance, with the audience subsequently assuming its (visible) role in experiencing and reading the work.

In these examples of dances by Crisp, Herbertson, Brown, and Forsythe, agency is shared between people and through and across time. It is a form of *distributed agency* in which making (or choreography) is stretched through time into performance, and the responsibility for it overlaps as it is distributed across the dance's collaborators (dancers, choreographers, designers, etc.). These are instances of dancers who make or create while in the practice of choreographic performance. The works contain degrees of visibility in the various roles and at various times for the participants-agents, and these degrees have dramaturgical value. That is, the means by which relationships of visibility are constituted both in outcome and process influence how the performances are practiced, experienced, and apprehended.

Furthermore, when distributed agency is built into the construction and performance of work, it has the capacity to reveal an ethics of agency, power, and authorship that might disrupt, for example, long-held patterns of the dancer's body as object that is "always directed and reactive" (Gardner, 2007, p. 44). In such an ethics, we can ask who might be responsible to make and practice performance, and how and *when* might the interventions or conversations between collaborators occur?

In *Pause. Listen.* I was interested in devising a system with Chisato in which – unlike the examples above – I attempted to remove my authorial taste and presence from the performance of material while maintaining for Chisato in particular a sense of distributed agency. Chisato and I created a lexicon of choreographed movements, stimuli, and micro-scores that were randomly combined and then projected

to her via three small screens hidden from the audience. The lexicon was long enough for Chisato to be unprepared for the combinations, and for her to have to build the performative, movement and creative opportunities afforded by what was displayed for her on the irregularly updating screens. The technology was not there to *command* Chisato, but to make complex propositions available in order for her to continue to question her own performance practice. As the *choreographer* during the performance I was only responsible for pressing start on each set of randomized projected stimuli.

The irony of what I understand on my part to be an ethical *desire* is that the mechanics of *Pause. Listen.* are counteracted by a much larger politics of authority. Such politics are independent of my relative (in)visibility and try as I might to step back from the performance-as-creation by Chisato Ohno in *Pause. Listen.* those ghostly brackets around my role-as-choreographer press me into high-vis visibility. Whereas Gardner and Martin are calling on histories and modes of production in relation to the politics of performance, I'm referring here to a type of popular or celebrity *culture* that lauds the choreographer-as-author and inadvertently diminishes the dancer as artist-maker. Perhaps a culture that prizes the obvious or straightforward author is an example of a conceptual framework "always at work making some things visible and sayable and obscuring others" (Gardner, 2007, p. 50; Fig. 10.1).



Fig. 10.1 Chisato Ohno at Centro per la Scena Contemporanea di Bassano del Grappa, October 2013. (Photograph: Simon Ellis)

Other Voices

There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot. (Cage, 1961, p. 8)

I commissioned three artists – Charlie Ashwell, Guadalupe Núñez-Fernández and Lucy Cash – to write reflective responses to their experience of *Pause. Listen.* They are welcome interlopers in this text and their writing functions to distribute authorship of this text that speaks to and about *Pause. Listen.* They are a reminder of the extended community of people – away from the author’s voice – that are involved in how performance is made and experienced. Excerpts are included below, and complete copies of the written responses, along with a video edit of *Pause. Listen.*, are online at <https://www.skellis.info/work#/pauselisten/>.

Different Ears: Guadalupe Núñez-Fernández (2014)

There was sound, but she was moving as if dancing to the music in her head, or with an invisible companion – not chasing her own shade but playing along with it.

I wondered what was prompting her from motion to motion, and from scene to scene, because her movement had pattern to it, punctuation, a continuum of beginnings, middles, ends, always beginning again. It felt new each time, unrehearsed, like breathing can be, each breath different than the one before – not assumed or taken for granted. Improvised somehow, though always ongoing.

To me, her dancing felt like a form of meditation, both for herself and for the audience, as she moved through the room and at once closed the windows, rolled down the blinds, made the place smaller and turned down the sound; as she walked to the edges of the space and found places, as if they hadn’t existed before; and as her breathing became something we could all experience a lot more closely. Its pace and the way it seemed to go behind and along all her movement was a mirror to all our darting thoughts. It wasn’t awkward, self-conscious or intimidating in any way. It was enrapturing.

I’ve been listening to my neighbors’ music with different ears since, whether it’s loud Eurotrash or Albanian folk, I’ve been remembering Chisato Ohno’s near silent dance and meditating as I listen to the breath under the floorboards.

Time Within Time: Lucy Cash (2014)

Time lies in this dance. There is the time of the church clock striking, people speaking and the cars as they pass in the street below. There is the way time feels inside the dancer and the way her mind reveals it for us to see. The time that it takes for her

body to remember these movements and the time that we have to see them. Time also lies in our thoughts as we watch. The last time we saw a head nod like this, and our anticipation of when such a nod might happen again.

There is time within time as the fragment of music arrives, extending itself into the present, reminding us of what we have already left behind.

The city lies in this dance. It is in the building that surrounds this dance; the ceiling that receives the shadow of the dancer before we can see the dancer herself. The floor that lies beneath the dancer, remaining constant. The windows that begin as open and will end as closed and that cast their shadow on the patient floor until the blind is drawn and erases the shadow ... The woman pacing in front of the window in the house opposite, her cigarette smoke, the road, the street lamps, the moon – these bits of city are also in this dance.

And air lies in this dance. It comes in from the night outside. It brings the city closer. It is the current beneath the dancer's arms, and our breath as we watch her.

Solitude with: Charlie Ashwell (2014)

Philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (2005) writes of thinking as “a mode of inadequation of the real” (p. 74). I like that. How about dancing as a mode of inadequation of the real, as well? Dance as excess; as spilling-over. Dance you cannot work out; perpetually not fitting any system; altering the very terms by which we might try to measure or value or even perceive it. I believe the woman next to me is not a serial contemporary-dance-watcher, although maybe she will become one. She cheers and claps loudly and enthusiastically at the end and immediately proclaims the piece a success.

She dances. She teaches. She gifts us the dance that she does. She makes it pretty good. She wraps. HA. She raps nicely. She riffs. Bone. Black. Wood. Applause. I borrow her moves. This dance is our library, hey? Moves we've not done. She dances them, many. She dances all there is to dance. I feel digested. Accounted for. Responded to. Cared towards. There is always that moment of crisis when a dancer goes ‘what am I doing with my life?’ She doesn't do that here. I've been trying to think about dance as a mode of criticality and then also a mode of healing, to some extent. What, I'm not sure. Perhaps dance doesn't heal wounds but airs them; doesn't bridge gaps but occupies and exceeds them. Dance as magnet; attraction and repulsion. Dance as salt.

There is a paradoxical idea that in solitude, we engage primarily with our peripheral vision – it is softer – more open and receptive to information from others. In company, in the conscious presence of another, the gaze hardens, things form – subjects and objects – and perceptions narrow. Watching another, with others, I try to delay this moment. Solitude in and as community, perhaps. Solitude *with* (Fig. 10.2).



Fig. 10.2 Chisato Ohno dancing in The Founders' Studio. (Photograph: Stacie Bennett)

Freedom

Artists talk a lot about freedom. So, recalling the expression 'free as a bird,' Morton Feldman went to a park one day and spent some time watching our feathered friends. When he came back, he said, "You know? They're not free: they're fighting over bits of food." (Cage, 1961, p. 265).

In Simone de Beauvoir's (1944) first philosophical essay, "Towards a Morals of Ambiguity, According to *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*," she asks, "under what conditions, if any, may I speak for/in the name of another?" (Bergoffen, 2004, n. p.) and queries the limits of "any human project" (de Beauvoir, 1987, p. 136).

Pause.

I need to be careful.

My appropriation of de Beauvoir's ideas here in a book about dance and the quality of life is awkward at best. *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* was first published just after the liberation of France in 1944, and in it de Beauvoir grapples with the ways in which freedom and violence are common to human experience, in which "one always works for certain men (sic) against others" (de Beauvoir, 1987, p. 139). And yet here I am ostensibly writing about choreographic practice and how it is that choreographers and dancers *are* in relation to each other. This is academic hubris at the very least, but perhaps mining de Beauvoir's war-time thinking might help afford certain ways of being between choreographers and dancers, and how these ways, approaches,

and *values* might extend into the future. Aren't we all, whether we like it or not, implicated in experiences of agency, power, and freedom?

At the heart of de Beauvoir's understanding of freedom is that although we all share freedom, it is only, for example, the miserable who "can declare themselves free at the heart of misery" (p. 140). By not helping, de Beauvoir states that she is in fact the "face of that misery" (p. 140), and that in this case freedom exists only for the other and cannot be directly touched by them (Bergoffen, 2004). De Beauvoir's non-negotiable freedom is to choose whether or not to accept the other's misery.

The essay starts with a conversation between Pyrrhus and Cinéas in which Cinéas repeatedly questions Pyrrhus's desire to continue with new projects of conquest. De Beauvoir celebrates Pyrrhus's restlessness, for it is by continually finishing and starting projects that transcendence – to make a change in the world – is possible. But for these projects, we need others, and in fact we "depend upon the freedom of the other" (de Beauvoir, 1987, p. 142). In her outline of *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* philosopher Debra Bergoffen (2004) writes that in order to give our projects a future we need others and are "enjoined to appeal to their freedom" (n.p.).

Perhaps I can suggest that in *Pause. Listen*, I was appealing to Chisato's freedom – that she was not simply fighting-dancing over bits of food? Regardless, it is in the way de Beauvoir signals that freedom might make possible uncertain futures that interests me in this part of the chapter, not least because it invites a conversation that includes thinking by philosopher Henri Bergson and physical chemist Ilya Prigogine. De Beauvoir (1987) writes:

We must assume our acts in uncertainty and risk; precisely here does the essence of freedom lie, it isn't decided in view of a salvation accorded in advance; it signs no pact with the future; if it were defined by the end it aims at, it would no longer be freedom. (p. 142)

This seems critical: although we can be clear of our aims, if we are defined by what any version of the end will be (and how we are getting there), then we are not acting freely.

In 1997 Belgian physical chemist Ilya Prigogine published *The End of Certainty*. The book is an account of Prigogine's thinking and research into nonequilibrium thermodynamics and indeterminacy. It seeks to reconcile the disparity between the feeling human beings experience or sense that time is moving forwards, with the notion in classical physics that time is reversible in that its laws hold regardless of the direction of time. He asks, "How can we conceive of human creativity or ethics in a deterministic world?" (p. 6).

The so-called "arrow of time," developed in the early twentieth century by Arthur Eddington, is analogous to irreversible (entropic) processes in the universe. According to Prigogine, such processes play a "fundamental constructive role in nature" (p. 27) and demand an understanding of the laws of nature built on "possibilities" and not "certitudes" (p. 29). The arrow of time has both unity and diversity. There is unity because the arrow is common to all parts of the universe ("your future is my future; the future of the sun is the future of any other star" (p. 56)), and diversity as we only need look around us. In a dynamic system with distinct and known

initial conditions, we cannot predict the outcome, only possibilities. There are many different and unpredictable ways for this (dis)organization to occur. For Prigogine, the “universe around us is only one of a number of possible worlds” (p. 59).

Prigogine cites philosopher Henri Bergson for whom time is a “vehicle of creation and of choice” (Bergson, 2007, p. 98) and its directionality proves that there is indeterminacy. Indeed, Bergson understands time to be “indetermination itself” (p. 98), and in *The Possible and the Real*, he argues that the possible does not precede its reality until its reality has appeared. In other words, the possible is “the mirage of the present in the past” (p. 107). If we put the possible back into its proper place, evolution becomes something quite different from the realization of a program: the gates of the future open wide; freedom is offered an unlimited field (p. 110).

In the overlap between Bergson’s philosophy of time, Prigogine’s understanding of thermodynamics, and de Beauvoir’s (1987) thinking that freedom has “no pact with the future” (p. 142), we end up with an indeterminate and irreversible “flow of unforeseeable novelty” (Bergson, 2007, p. 112).

What might all this have to do specifically with *Pause. Listen.*, and more generally choreographic processes, and dance and the quality of life?

Pause. Listen involved a delicate organization of people, space, time, environment, and action, but with many possible and unpredictable ways of being performed and experienced. It involved a single stance to developing choreography – represented by residencies in the performance and practices spaces – which made possible the system within which the time irreversible performance occurred. The performance’s irreversibility was foregrounded by devising very specific conditions by which Chisato Ohno made possible the performance; she brought its trajectory – a trajectory unable to be determined by what precedes it, including the work of the choreographer – into being. I imagine that Chisato was able to author the body and the experience to make what dancer Chrysa Parkinson (2014) describes as “agential cuts in the fabric of culture,” cuts in which dancers have choices to author “experience itself” (p.17).

Together, these thoughts on novelty, indeterminacy, freedom, uncertainty, and time invite an ethics of choreography that *does not know*, and under which the simplest of working conditions afford indeterminate possibilities. It is an ethics that queries the cultural status of the choreographer as author, and foregrounds the artistry, autonomy, and intelligences of the dancer; it is choreographers that begin to understand that the freedom of dancers cannot be touched, and who recognize that (after de Beauvoir) they – the choreographers – are the face of the disempowerment of dancers. It is an ethics of choreography that reconfigures our relationship to time and novelty, whereby our role as *makers* is minimized by the ongoing trajectories and incalculable possibilities of practice-as-performance.

How then might we – choreographers, dancers, and academics – continue to challenge the commonly held hegemonic status of *the choreographer*? It is a status afforded to “signature artists” (Roche, 2015) by the contemporary dance marketplace, in which the creative work of dancers is predicated on disappearance (p. 2). What kinds of violences are perpetuated by this dominant order? What violences –

“the violence that [dominant] order does to themselves and others” (Martin, 1998, p. 26) – have I committed or been privy to?

Here is a call for alternative ways for choreographers to be in the world, and to be (un)seen in the world:

Thus, my environment is the world as it exists and takes on meaning in relation to me, and in that sense it came into existence and undergoes development with me and around me. Secondly, the environment is never complete. If environments are forged through the activities of living beings, then so long as life goes on, they are continually under construction. (Ingold, 2000, p. 20)

Anthropologist Tim Ingold writes of the environment as Ilya Prigogine writes of thermodynamics. They both experience time and nature in which novelty and ongoing construction place human endeavor in perspective. This perspective is akin to the conditions in which I understand the *choreographer-as-steward* to be working:

A steward is someone who accepts responsibility for taking care of something that is deemed worthy of care. Stewardship implies a lightness of touch and time in which the steward—at the request of someone else, or acting on their behalf—may manage resources, frames or contexts, materials and even culture. A steward is accountable and responsible. (Ellis, 2015, p. 98)

The steward is constantly and lightly aware of being in relation to the (eco)systems of change and possibility. They are uncertain of the future and understand that along the arrow of time there are many possibilities to accept the status and work of the other. They revel in the paradox of acute responsibility for the conditions of the performance of the work, while acknowledging their role is finite as the work extends through time beyond the boundaries of its performance. The *choreographer-as-steward* is not the choreographer as “manager, facilitator, or director of all those involved in the collaboration” (Foster, as cited in Kolb, 2013, p. 35). Instead, they are an author that positions the intelligences and autonomy of the dancer-as-artist, “a source of knowledge and as capable of self-representation” (Roche, 2015, p. ix) – ahead of all other concerns.

For all my attempts to redirect attention away from *me me me*, it is the nature of one’s *involvement* that is key. I am not apart from this world or these choreographic and performance practices. I am not a casual observer or innocent bystander. By attempting to separate myself from – or diminish my role in – the observation and stewardship of these choreographic and performance practices performed by Chisato Ohno in *Pause. Listen.*, I embody a dualism or binary that not only smooths over the edges of choreographer-dancer messiness (see Gardner, 2007), but is unethical. The ethics lie in understanding that “novelty, choice, [and] spontaneous action” (Prigogine, 1997, p. 12) are made possible by listening gently and carefully to the indeterminate potential of actions and the “reality of time and change” (p. 12) in others. As a choreographic steward I recognize that the nature of my propositions and interventions are limited and brief, and yet in their brevity lies a politics of authority that recognizes and celebrates the agency of the dancer-as-artist: their decisions, their understanding, their voice, their experience of time, and their capacity for newness; such markers of agency are qualities of living worth pursuing.

Letters

If one is making something which is to be nothing, the one making must love and be patient with the material he chooses. Otherwise he calls attention to the material, which is precisely something, whereas it was nothing that was being made; or he calls attention to himself, whereas nothing is anonymous. (Cage, 1961, p. 114)

Following are a series of letters I wrote to Chisato Ohno during our first meetings in the studio in 2012. Even at this early stage I toyed with the desire to diminish my role in the work to the extent that I would be absent from the performances of what would become *Pause. Listen.* I planned to leave these letters for Chisato before her performances, or perhaps even suggest that she read them out to the public. In the end, I handed Chisato three of the letters on different days just prior to sitting at a small desk at the back of the Founder's Studio in London to become *Pause. Listen.'s operator* – an ironic gesture and title if ever there was one.

The letters are at times terribly naïve on my part. How am I able to give something to another without imagining that I *own* it in the first place? They also clearly reveal the paradox of drawing attention to one's self while hoping to deflect or diminish that attention. For Randy Martin (1998) even "to be self-reflexive about the ability to speak to others can be problematic when that particular voice of self only amplifies a privileged position" (p. 27). These letters are a dance of words to the self, disguised, at least in part, as an expression of humility; isn't this the living breathing definition of privilege – that the choreographer-man thinks or knows he is in a position to dictate the terms of the economy, relationship, or exchange? Nevertheless, I've included the letters here as a way to exit the more scholarly ideas in the chapter with a reminder that dance, like so many other human activities, assumes its most valuable qualities when we attend to the nature of relationships.

Saturday 24 November 2012: A Different Kind of Death

Dear Chisato

We've been working together for some time now, but this is my first letter to you. It is a letter from a choreographer to a dancer, and I imagine that you will read it at some stage in the future. I wonder what will have transpired in the time between now and then?

Today you danced with remarkable breadth and playfulness. I admired – as we worked – your capacity to shift from quite staccato and strong movements to dancing like quicksilver.

But this writing is not really supposed to be about what we did today. It is more to set the stage. I would like to suggest to you that I have considerable doubt about how responsible I might be for how this performance is about to look and feel.

A while ago Roland Barthes (1977) wrote an essay called “The Death of the Author” (1977). He was challenging the idea that creator and creation are related, and that “to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text” (p. 147).

But I would like to suggest that my absence is a different kind of death. I like to think of it as the beginning of my silence. And this is probably quite funny for those who know me because I simply talk too much. (Even my mother would agree.)

So, I wish you good dancing, and I wholeheartedly give this work to you. Tonight. Now.

With best wishes, and into the silence,
Simon

Saturday 15 December 2012: Without Me

Dear Chisato

On the first day we worked together, you said “without me it won’t happen.” I liked this a lot, it stripped power away from me – the *choreographer* – and placed it between us. And there it has remained, although I should admit to being tempted to pick it up, and to wear that power as a means of protecting my vulnerability and uncertainty as our dancing relationship has developed.

On the second day we worked together – this was in October 2012 – you talked about our meeting as being “Chisato meets Simon.” You were clear that this meeting was not a gendered one. I remember being interested in our gendered differences as being a key part of the work we would do together, but in three words – Chisato meets Simon – you reminded me that my interests and assumptions are built around fragile understandings of the world and people.

And so, I started to collect our similarities, the things that place us *together*. But at the same time, I think I stopped believing in metaphors, or perhaps there are simply none left? And what if, in this choreography, there are no metaphors and no representation? Just you – Chisato Ohno – moving, dancing, a very simple act of generosity towards these people who have gathered here today.

But at the same time, you and the way you move, are not beholden to anything, or anyone. Certainly not to me.

So, dear Chisato, this letter is only a beginning and that’s all. It sounds a bit serious, and I wish I could write a joke into it to make you smile, but it might cramp your style.

Dance well Chisato, and I’ll see you soon.
Simon

Wednesday 26 December 2012: Conquer

Dear Chisato

On our last meeting we went for a simple meal together instead of going to the studio. It was a chance to take stock, to see how – or even *if* – we should continue to work together, and if so, how to make that happen.

You seemed interested – enthusiastic even – to keep working, and I think I tried to play it a bit cool, even though I remember leaping (on the inside) at the possibility of what we might do, and what we might make.

My notes from that meeting consist of one word: *conquer*, but I don't really remember how it was that you (or was it me?) came to say this word. This letter, then, is (as ever) a fabrication or construction, a chance to try and make sense of something that doesn't really make sense, by writing about it.

I imagine that the word was related to either *fear* or *doubt*: to *conquer* fear; to *conquer* doubt. But this seems ridiculous, doesn't it? Because we were just talking about two people meeting in a dance studio in order to make a dance together, and for one person to be responsible for performing it. But perhaps fear or doubt are manifest in the most benign situations? Forget about war, or violence, or the places we normally associate with these words; what if it is the most simple or everyday encounters with fear and doubt that demand the most consistent action or actions? The fear of solitude? To doubt one's own ability to complete something? To doubt love? To fear our limitations? To doubt the words of others?

And so, Chisato, this letter is a simple way of saying that this dance we have made together is now yours to complete. It is yours to perform with pleasure and with heart. I give it to you willingly and with abandon.

Dance well, and I will see you soon.

Simon

Saturday 12 January 2013: Habits and Desire

Dear Chisato

Happy New Year to you!

We worked together in the studio this morning for the first time in a month or so. We discussed habits, and also the desire as a performer to extend beyond not so much our physical habits but the limits we place on what we are prepared to be seen doing or being.

I'm more and more aware of when to step in or add ideas when you are dancing in the studio. I recognize the delicacy and simplicity of what it is that you are doing. You walk into the middle (or edge sometimes) of the space and then start searching for things that make you curious. Often you worry about whether they might be

interesting from the outside (that is, for me as the one-person audience) but I try to discourage this kind of self-consciousness.

And now, here you are. Ready to dance for this different audience of more than one. What a pleasure, for you – and for them – to have these minutes to do and experience something that doesn't involve either screens or noise.

By gifting this letter to you, I'd like to fully give this dance to you. It is a collection and distillation of the work we have done together. I hope that it reflects your strength, your experience, and your tenacity.

Dance well Chisato.

Simon

Saturday 19 January 2013: Details

Dear Chisato

How are you? I'm writing on a snowy winter's day here in London and through my window the grey of the sky is muted by the white glare of the snow on the parks. And on these parks dogs are running with abandon, barking and revealing so much about how uptight adult humans tend to be.

But I suspect telling you this is just a way of avoiding what this letter is really about. Today we briefly talked about people who move and people who don't. On reflection, it's as if one of the privileges of being a dancer (or having had a life in dance) is how accessible the *idea* of movement is. Sometimes I want to yell at the world, 'LOOK AT WHAT YOU ARE MISSING OUT ON? DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?' But I'm not really a yelling type of person, and I doubt you are either.

So, then, here you are, about to dance, and watched by a group of people who are all sitting down, relatively still, relatively inert. But they are not missing out, because over these last months it has been such a pleasure to watch you revel in the deepest details of how a human being can be with her body.

This letter is a way of marking my absence without wanting to get in the way. Tricky isn't it? This is your dancing, for these people, today.

I wouldn't have it any other way.

Simon

PS Dance like nobody's watching, or maybe dance like everybody's watching.

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