

Materialization of a Choreographic Process through a Cross-Disciplinary Approach

Volume I

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ABSTRACT

This practice-led research project examines how combining painting and choreography can reshape artistic identities and challenge traditional dance forms. From ballet's strict structure to modern dance's liberated expression, this research project explores the possibilities, obstacles, and progression of transitioning from established techniques to more unbridled forms of artistic expression. The work aims to illuminate the transformative power of cross-disciplinary practice in broadening traditional dance aesthetics.

A new cross-disciplinary method called *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is introduced, which incorporates fluid acrylic flow paintings created by dancers to inspire movement. Through a seven-step process, dancers translate their visual art into dance, freeing themselves from established techniques. Emphasizing the dancer's connection to their artwork enhances and enlightens the execution of their movements. *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is grounded in the theory of agential realism, developed by physicist Karen Barad, which acknowledges the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman elements. Drawing on Barad's conceptualization of the world as an ever-evolving network of entities as a theoretical framework, the project recognizes the continual transformation of material forms and explores the dynamic interplay between dancers, paintings, and choreography.

Eight projects designed to explore creative expression, underscoring the power of cross-disciplinary art, are described and discussed, suggesting that this approach enhances choreography and fosters personal development and a deeper understanding of the artistic identities of dancers. The outcomes emphasize the benefits of collaboration across the artistic disciplines of painting and dance, illustrating the capacity to harmonize freedom with structure, technique with creativity, and tradition with innovation. In essence, the materialization of a choreographic process through a cross-disciplinary approach can be a catalyst for artistic growth.

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I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with such amazing dancers at Merseyside Dance Initiative (MDI). The MDI studio felt like home during my summer residency in Liverpool, England. Furthermore, a sincere thanks goes to Dance Professor Eric Rivera from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) for inviting me to conduct a workshop for his highly skilled students in the dance department. It was an honor to share the choreographic methods derived from my research with VCU's student community.

It is exciting to share that I presented a workshop at the National Dance Education Organization Conference in 2022, an experience I eagerly anticipate continuing. Additionally, in the fall of 2023, my professional peers honored me with a nomination for the New Jersey Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance Teacher of the Year, an award I proudly accepted in February 2024.

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Amidst a seemingly endless ocean of information, this dissertation may seem like a mere speck of sand. However, I cannot express enough gratitude to all those who played a role in bringing this sand to the beach. Your contributions have been essential to this work.

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Declaration

I, Dawn R. Schultz, declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

INTRODUCTION

Unveiling the Narrative

When I was six years old, I was introduced to the enchanting universe of dance within the mirrored confines of a bustling studio that seemed to twinkle with the luster of a thousand dreams. I was immersed in a world of *chassés*, *pliés*, and *pirouettes*. It was here that the cadence of codified technique was etched onto my core like an unspoken dialect, a language that spoke not in words but in motion. Afternoons spent at the barre and dedication to perfecting positions became a routine as familiar as breathing. From the ballet slippers that adorned my feet to the disciplined bun that crowned my head, every fiber of my being was devoted to mastering the finesse of the structured dance form. With its worn-out wooden floors and lingering scent of rosin and sweat, the studio became a second home.

When I stepped into the college dance studio, I discovered the dynamic world of modern dance. From Martha Graham's contract and release technique to Merce Cunningham's chance operations, modern dance was a sea of boundless possibilities. Here was a dance form that broke the rigid bonds of codified ballet technique, embracing the freedom of movement in its raw, unfiltered form. The study of modern dance was as stimulating as it was challenging. After years of studying structured ballet, every muscle within me yearned to return to the familiar. However, every faltering step only fueled my curiosity, pushing me to break the barriers that held me. I was taught to listen to my body, to tap into my internal rhythm and let it guide my movements. Once a place of relentless repetition, the dance studio transformed into a sanctuary where I could discover, experiment, and express myself.

Building upon these formative experiences, I ventured on a journey of dance education. The transition from the regimented world of my childhood dance studio in New Jersey, USA, to

the liberating realm of modern dance ignited a desire for exploration and experimentation. My lived experiences sowed the seeds of question. What could be gained, or perhaps lost, in this shift from codified technique to the expansiveness of modern dance?

The catalyst for this doctoral research project occurred when I was asked to examine my choreographic practice in my first post-graduate degree at Florida's Jacksonville University in 2018. I began to critically analyze the metamorphosis I had undergone as a dancer, the contrasting methodologies I had been exposed to, and their profound impact on my personal and artistic development. I designed dances with the intention of an audience viewing them from the seats of a theater. I focused my dancers on telling a story and emoting through their movements, but what if there was no music or story to tell when devising choreography? Why, in dance education, is it so important to teach students what we call the 'foundations of dance' or 'codified technique'? What if we looked at the foundations of dance as finding a sense of comfort within one's skin and the ability to move freely and comfortably within one's own body? As a dance educator witnessing the efforts of my students to grasp dance techniques, a question emerged: do my young students know the physical reach, expansiveness, and capabilities of their own bodies? Furthermore, how does one find comfort within their body and the ability to use their voice through movement?

Considering this question, I moved my arms to their full kinesthetic reach. I did the same with my legs and then across my body, pulling from my right fingertips to my left toes. I then integrated material and found myself literally playing with string to inspire movement. Continuing to investigate ways to engage the whole body in movement development, I purchased more supplies, including paints and canvases. One of my friends asked what I was doing with all the supplies, and before I answered, she had poured paint onto a canvas, introducing me to a

painting technique she had discovered on YouTube. From then, I began experimenting with acrylic paint and pouring mediums that continued guiding my research questions. I acknowledged myself as a movement artist, never a visual artist, but I continued playing with paints, mixing colors, and watching videos to learn new techniques. I witnessed artwork come to life on the canvas just as a dance comes to life on the stage.

This unexpected venture into visual arts opened up a new perspective for me. The spontaneous and unpredictable nature of fluid painting served as a juxtaposition to the precision and meticulousness of my childhood dance training. As I observed the patterns and colors transforming on the canvas, I interpreted these images as bodily movements. The canvas became a blueprint that captured the movement of the paint, serving as a conduit for my physical actions. Through the relationship between painting and dance, I realized that the two artistic mediums inform and influence one another. By engaging with the paint and creating paintings from pour methods, I encountered a cross-disciplinary approach to movement-making. This approach challenges the boundaries of conventional dance practices. I developed a choreographic method called *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. This method uses cross-disciplinary practice to guide movement-making. It encourages the uncovering of an individual's organic movement language rather than relying on habitual choreographic processes in dancers.

This thesis examines how dancers can let go of their ingrained, deep-rooted technical practices by seeking new movement possibilities using *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. In using visual art to propel the body into action, the dancers would first create *flow paintings* with the improvisational act of pouring paint onto a canvas. The participants then interpret these paintings and the underlying structures to discover new patterns for the body to explore movement. This improvisation encourages a sense of releasing technique within the body,

enabling stimuli to guide the translation of the painting as a choreographic score. The paintings serve as a stand-in for the codified movements and techniques that dancers learn to rely on throughout their years of standardized training. This process moves beyond traditional approaches to movement creation by integrating visual art into the choreographic design.

This work is based on the exploration, discovery, and transformation of the choreographic process. It is the culmination of an experience through the realms of dance and painting, an examination of the intricate relationship between movement and imagery, and a reflection on the influence of visual stimuli on the creative choreographic process. Eight projects highlight the power of cross-disciplinary practice and its ability to influence our understanding of artistic identities. It steps outside the known, examines how we perceive and experience movement and embraces a path that intertwines creative media.

The first chapter of this thesis, 'Exploring New Modes of Choreography', aims to identify new choreography avenues and challenge traditional methods. The research objectives include blending mediums, investigating new methods, and unpacking core concepts to develop new ways to inspire and craft new choreographic movements. The ingrained habits of dance, identifying the norms and stereotypes in the discipline, and their effect on the creative process are also unraveled. Ultimately, this project aims to challenge those ingrained norms and patterns.

Chapter Two, 'Theoretical and Artistic Discourse Encompassing Choreography', explores the work of dance practitioners, artists, theorists and researchers that influenced this project. Rudolf Laban offered comprehensive systems for understanding and notating movement, known as Laban Movement Analysis. Laban's pioneering attitude also inspired my quest for new choreographic tools. Trisha Brown, a pioneer of postmodern dance, significantly contributed to developing site-specific choreography and redefining movement, which challenged the

boundaries of choreography and, in many ways, permitted me to challenge them myself.

Jonathan Burrows, an influential choreographer, created unique choreographic scores, challenging traditional structures and boundaries in dance. Burrows' tendency to build upon traditional techniques to develop new ideas was inspirational as I sought new paths to create movement.

John Cage, a leading figure in 20th-century music, introduced elements of chance and indeterminacy into composition, dramatically influencing the landscape of avant-garde music and performance. The concept of chance was particularly influential in several projects I conducted with the dancers. Jackson Pollock, an iconic abstract expressionist painter famed for his 'drip paintings,' highlights the dynamic interplay of energies in action used in painting projects within this research project.

Karen Barad, a renowned feminist theorist, and quantum physicist, and their theory of agential realism emphasizes the intrinsic relationship between the inseparability of intra-acting agencies, which influenced the project by considering the relationship between material phenomena of human and nonhuman forms of agency. Henri Lefebvre, a French Marxist philosopher and sociologist, posited theories about the social production of space, implicating the canvas of our lived world. Lefebvre was influential in this project because of his theory on the social production of space, how dance as an art form is intimately connected to space, and how dancers move through it, shape it, and are confined or liberated by it.

Lastly, William Forsythe, a groundbreaking choreographer, innovated the field with his concept of *Choreographic Objects*, extending choreographic practice beyond the human body. Similarly, I endeavored to extend the choreography practice by marrying it with another visual art form. This fusion of disciplines allowed me to explore new dimensions of artistic expression.

The third chapter, 'Phenomenology as a Reflective Practice', highlights the process of creating dance from a phenomenological perspective. It offers an in-depth look at the eight projects that emerged through this work, delineating the specifics of the creative practices employed. In this chapter, the reader is led through the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* model that emerged from the eight projects. Each project reveals different facets of the creative process, such as contemplation and risk-taking. It illustrates participant's artistic evolution, showcasing how they stepped out of their comfort zones and plunged into the unknown. These projects challenged their preconceptions, stimulated their creativity, and fostered an environment that celebrated artistic expression.

As an example, in Figure 1, we can see a participant from the project, *Throughline*, working on a painting in the dance studio. She was guided through a ring pour technique and encouraged to tap into her own creative process encouraged by an understanding of Barad's agential realism, which permits the transference and movement of paint on canvas to influence future/present choices. In each project, participants were asked to perform a series of movement tasks inspired by the paintings they created. This approach encouraged the dancers to remain focused while creating their paintings.



Figure 1—*Throughline* (project #3): exploring ring pour method painting, 2021

Figure 2 offers a snapshot of the dancer immersing herself in an improvisational task while creating *Throughline*. As I embarked on this project, I was driven by my own curiosity to document the intertwining paths of painting and movement and to bring them together in a way that could foster new ideas for what choreography is and could become. Paintings merge with the process of creating choreographic works through score reading and improvisational movement tasks. To encapsulate this rich artistic exploration, *Throughline* is presented in a film that provides a comprehensive insight into the creative journey, illustrating how the creative process of painting ultimately inspired the dancers' choreography. The film can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjgw3Kecmuo> or by scanning QR Code 1.



QR Code 1—*Throughline*, YouTube link to the screendance

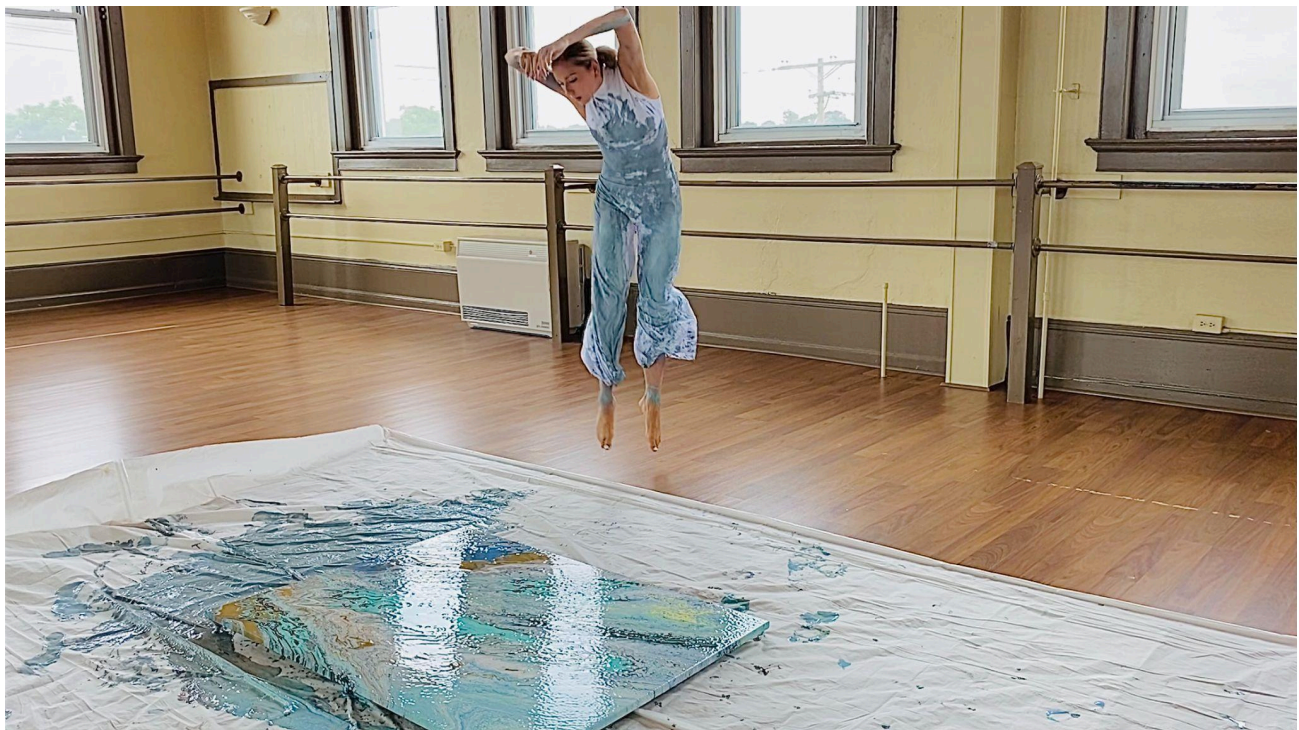


Figure 2—*Throughline* (project #3): participant engaged in an improvisation movement task, 2022

Chapter Four, ‘Thematic Analysis of the Project Data’, provides an analysis of the creative works presented. A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to reveal insights that influenced the creation of choreography. Emergent themes and phenomena of interest were dissected and considered within this analytical scope. Data collection was a multi-pronged approach involving dancer reflections and questionnaires completed by 28 individuals with varying dance experiences. First-hand observation notes taken by myself during the projects complemented data collected from participants. The data was organized and thematically analyzed, leading to six themes related to developing new and creative methods for generating choreography, with *Synergetic Agential Choreography* emerging as a method that can be adapted to meet the diverse needs of choreographers.

Chapter Five, ‘Unraveling the Tapestry’, presents insights accumulated throughout the research. The chapter highlights the research project’s original contribution to knowledge: the method of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. Each step of this method is outlined and establishes its potential as the catalyst for expression. The chapter concludes by addressing the implications for practitioners, discussing potential limitations, and providing final thoughts on the project’s significance.

Finally, the conclusion, ‘Materiality in Retrospect’, brings together the project’s threads, providing a richer understanding of the exploration, its implications, and its potential impact on future dance choreography. This chapter invites the reader to leverage *Synergetic Agential Choreography* in their own artistic endeavors.

This thesis outlines a history of the work from its inception to its current iteration as a method to develop new avenues of choreographic creation. In conjunction with Volume 1, a

comprehensive digital portfolio titled *Synergetic Agential Choreography: Volume 2* was designed to provide visual documentation of the research and findings elucidated within these pages. Volume 2 offers readers additional insight into the work through an illustrated experience, presenting critical data, visual aids, and other relevant multimedia elements organized chronologically. By navigating through the digital platform, readers may gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter, extending the academic presentation to a robust, digital landscape. Navigating between the two volumes offers flexibility in approaching the material. Volume 1 contains the theoretical framework, literature review, methodology, and core academic arguments. It lays the groundwork for the reader, presenting the critical thought process and analytical narrative that underpin the research. Familiarization with Volume 1 provides context for the array of visual documentation in Volume 2.

Volume 2 presents the development and outcomes of the practice-led research, diverging from the traditional written thesis format by offering a multimedia experience. It documents the research process not just in text but through visual and interactive media. This includes video documentation, interactive data visualizations, audio recordings, and photographic evidence. This volume is particularly significant in presenting the practical aspects of the research, offering a tangible and experiential understanding of the concepts discussed in Volume 1. Engaging with Volume 2 differs from engaging solely with Volume 1 because it provides a visual experience for the written work that text alone cannot convey. This includes the research setting and the intricate details of the physical response to tasks.

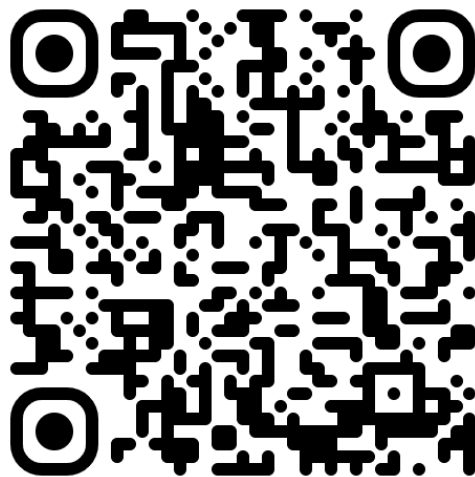
Alternatively, readers may choose to engage with both volumes simultaneously. This approach allows for a dynamic interplay between the written thesis and the digital portfolio,

enriching the reader's comprehension. As the reader progresses through the theoretical discussions in Volume 1, the reader can immediately see these concepts brought to life in Volume 2 through various multimedia elements. This synchronized reading experience facilitates a more immediate connection between theory and practice.

While it is necessary to encounter both volumes for a full understanding, Volume 1 also functions as a standalone academic text. However, engaging with Volume 2 enhances the reader's understanding and appreciation of the research. It allows for a more comprehensive and multisensory engagement with the subject matter, bridging the gap between abstract academic concepts and their practical, real-world implications. This dual-volume approach exemplifies the synergy between theoretical knowledge and practical application, providing a holistic understanding of the research. Access Volume 2 by clicking the link below or scanning QR Code 2.

Synergetic Agential Choreography: Volume 2

www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com



QR Code 2— Link to Digital Portfolio

CHAPTER 1

Exploring New Modes of Choreography

This doctoral research project uses the dance studio as a laboratory to observe dancers' interactions during the creation of their own visual artworks and the translation of this art into their embodied movement vocabulary. The objective of immersing dancers in the visual art-creation process is to cultivate a mind-body connection and encourage the body to function as a thinking tool while exploring diverse choreographic compositions. This investigation focuses on techniques that enrich dancers' movement capabilities by assimilating self-created visual art into choreographic designs. This is achieved by reading artwork as a score and responding to improvisational tasks that help dancers transcend their roles as actors. The artwork serves as stimuli that broaden the spectrum of movement. By incorporating these actions, the choreographic design gains an additional dimension, enriching the body's movement aesthetic.

From a philosophical standpoint, this thesis positions dance within the purview of intersubjectivity, challenging traditional hierarchies between humans and objects. By redefining both as entities, the research lays the foundation to explore balance by deconstructing the relationships between dancers and materials. A vital aspect of this research involves dancers actively participating in the creation of their paintings. The process starts with using acrylic paints, pouring mediums, and canvas to create the paintings. Following this, the dancers use the paintings they created as a basis for improvisation tasks that inform and inspire the choreography. This process develops a deep, reciprocal relationship between the dancer and the visual art.

Laban movement analysis is a valuable tool for capturing, visualizing, and interpreting human motion in a structured and comprehensive manner. Developed from the work of Rudolf Laban, it provides a framework for exploring movement through the pillars of Body, Effort, Shape, and Space, with each component essential to creating and interpreting art. The Body component focuses on the physical and structural characteristics of movement, including how body parts are connected and move in relation to each other. Effort, or dynamics, delves into the qualitative aspects of movement, reflecting the inner intention behind actions. Shape examines how the body changes form during movement, integrating the physical with the spatial and emotional. Space involves the interaction of the body with its environment, emphasizing spatial patterns and pathways. By engaging in improvisational tasks, dancers can explore the multifaceted nature of movement and refine their abilities. Paintings and other notational devices help reveal a full range of movement capabilities for dancers to explore. By blending subject and object within the same context, these artistic representations capture the essence of dance.

Driven by sensory stimuli, the imagination propels inquiries that underpin the methodology, fostering a holistic exploration of choreography. This approach results in cooperative artistry that produces new creative works. For example, Figure 3 illustrates participants from project #2, *Patchwork*. *Patchwork* is the name of a painting created by two participants who engaged in a pour-and-swipe method with the paint. Based on the method of moving the paint by swiping, the colors of the paint are layered on top of one another. The idea of layering was the driving force behind the choreographic exploration. The act of swipe painting influenced discussions on movement choices and encouraged critical thinking. Figure 4 showcases the participants meticulously scrutinizing minute details in *Patchwork* while undertaking specific movement tasks.



Figure 3—*Patchwork* (project # 2): participants collaboratively create their painting, 2020



Figure 4—*Patchwork* (project 2): dancers analyze small images within the painting before engaging in a movement task which required them to pick one patch and find an image within to translate into a gesture, 2021

Here, dancers transition from creators to critical analyzers, reflecting and building upon the artistic elements that manifested on their canvases. This phase of introspection and discussion further blurs the line between the dancer and the material, nurturing a realm in which artistry and physicality intertwine in a dance of reciprocal influence. The improvisational tasks reflect the physical artworks and the processes and dialogues between the two, encouraging a deeper understanding and interpretation of the dancers' creations. This layered methodology fosters a rich, cross-disciplinary approach to choreography. For example, choreographic transitions are enabled between dancers and their artwork through intra-activity, dynamically influencing and reshaping action.

Consequently, this also crafts a space for audience members, inviting them into an explorative journey, empowering them to the intricate layers, and becoming active interpreters of the creative process. Ultimately, this approach aspires to elucidate the profound interplay of artistic forms, functions, and performances, serving as a beacon to inspire new choreographic creations.

Blending Disciplines

As a dance artist, my performance and teaching careers have been shaped by years of codified study. My experience conforming the body to standardized ideals shaped by ballet underlies my interest in uncovering the personal movement language of the individual dancer. In my experience, the ideals of dance have become inseparable from the codified languages that have defined the art form since its evolution from the post-modern era (Reynolds & McCormick, 2003). This research was conceived to identify ways in which dancers can tap into individual expression, unencumbered by the confines of dance derived from codified techniques, to expand upon the breadth of unpredictable movement and choreographic possibilities. Through engaging with visual art created by dancers and interpreting their paintings, individuals are guided through a process that aims to reveal movement responses to visual stimulation. They are encouraged to establish a conversation between visual cues and physical responses, thereby integrating the disciplines of dance and painting. This process informs new ways of movement-making.

In the various landscapes of artistic expression, determining the boundaries between different art forms raises intriguing questions. Artistic disciplines are broader categories encompassing the methods, theories, and practices within particular artistic fields and include structured frameworks guiding the creation and interpretation of art. Dance and painting stand apart as disciplinary practices that engage the senses and convey concepts. Dance is an

impermanent performance art form that brings movement to life through the body, engaging audiences in a multisensory experience of motion, rhythm, and material flow (Cunningham, 1955). On the other hand, painting is often a permanent visual art form that portrays moments in time through visual depiction, appealing to a viewer's sight and imagination (Quinn, 2009). The creative synergy utilized in this research between the two artistic disciplines, dance and painting, permits a dialogue to unfold between permanence and impermanence and demonstrates how engaging in a cross-disciplinary practice creates space for an unexpected product to emerge. Professor Michelle Clayton of Brown University describes the impact of a cross-disciplinary approach to art making.

Once you open up the lens of dance studies onto another field, a whole range of different apertures opens up. You start to see multiple languages in conversation with one another, multiple art forms, actively engaging with and generating new ideas. [...] One of the ideas this generates... is the notion of the temporality of an action. We find a number of writers and theorists in the early twentieth century demanding precise attention to a moment, and to the small moments within a moment itself, but also holding open a space of time as a time for experiment, insisting on the importance of not specifying the end product. And this allows a certain series of movements to unfold, which involve conversations within or between different spheres.

(Clayton, 2013: 12)

Merging the artistic disciplines of dance and painting aligns with Karen Barad's theory of agential realism. This theory suggests the world consists of intertwined matter and meaning, with distinctions between entities arising through their intra-actions (Barad, 2007). From this perspective, blending dance and painting becomes an act of entanglement between mediums to foster new expressions and meanings. This fusion maintains the distinct attributes of each art form and accentuates the continuous interplay and connection between the artistic practices, thereby enhancing choreography through this cross-disciplinary collaboration.

This approach treats the creative process as a continuous negotiation between material and conceptual energies by examining the emergence of dance through the reading of paintings. It encourages artists to explore the intersections between disciplines, paving the way for new choreographic forms. Through enriching cross-disciplinary practice, artists are invited to blend visual and kinetic languages, creating a dialogue between movement and imagery. Doctor of Arts and Associate Professor and researcher Maarit Mäkelä describes this process, “By examining intersubjective activity, we highlighted the importance of anchoring the notion of thinking through making not only in human-material interaction but also in social practice.” (Mäkelä, 2021: 11). Engaging in movement creation through an entry point of visual art-making broadens the understanding of choreography and challenges viewers and creators to approach dance beyond traditional categories, exploring the rich interplay between visual imagery and movement.

When exploring how different types of art can come together, it is essential to set clear boundaries and guidelines. This helps to stay focused and ensure we are looking at the subject in a way that makes sense. By doing this, we can investigate the different ways that art can create something cohesive and meaningful. Despite the evolving three-dimensional capabilities of painting on canvas, which present innovative approaches to texture, form, and depth, my research approach opts to adhere to two-dimensional and three-dimensional distinctions between the two artistic disciplines of painting and dance (Kalina, 2012). By distinguishing painting as primarily a two-dimensional visual art form and dance as a three-dimensional performance art, I aim to analyze each discipline's characteristics to the collaboration in the research study. The *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method is designed to enhance understanding and innovation in choreography.

In this research project, taking this approach to dance and painting serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it creates a conceptual framework assisting with the study's methodological design, highlighting each art form's distinct spatial and dimensional qualities. This, in turn, enables a more in-depth exploration of their aesthetic and expressive potentials. Secondly, it provides an opportunity to analyze how two-dimensional visual art can enhance the three-dimensional performance art of choreography. By following these definitions, the thesis aims to make a valuable contribution to the ongoing conversation throughout the research about painting and dance as artistic disciplines and the potential for cross-disciplinary innovation and creativity.

Integrating practices across the visual and performing arts, in this case through the integration of dance and painting, provides a profound way to explore human creativity and self-expression. By examining the synergy between different arts, we can assess the benefits and methods of incorporating them into practice-led research projects. Nancy Yunhwa Rao, a distinguished professor at Rutgers University, insightfully explores how 'Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Artistic Collaboration' underscores such partnerships with artists. She states,

Instead of disciplinary rigor, such a collaboration requires that the participants take part in the creative work of unfamiliar arts, slowing down the process and letting interdisciplinary types of creativity and innovation emerge and lead the way. The process creates an alternative to what would have been had the boundaries of the same discipline been observed. Such an interdisciplinary collaboration requires constructive mutual listening between teams drawn together from different artistic disciplines and traditions, and brings the diversity of necessary skills and perspectives upon which the newly creative work will depend.

(Rao, 2023: 138)

Similarly, dance and painting can mutually inform and enhance one another, highlighting the value of cross-disciplinary engagement in the arts to stimulate creativity. Nancy Yunhwa Rao emphasizes the transformative power of interdisciplinary collaboration in the arts, emphasizing

how it can push creators beyond traditional boundaries toward innovative and unexpected results. This perspective is especially relevant to choreographers who integrate visual art into their work, thus urging them to explore new methodologies for more dynamic and unforeseen artistic expressions.

Understanding the connection of cross-disciplinary research is crucial for sketching the significance of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. By engaging with and situating this practice-led research project within choreography, I can more effectively understand the findings in the conclusion. In Susan Liggett's work on positioning the arts in research, she states, "Most researchers are aware of the need to position themselves in relation to other fields or disciplines in order to reveal the particular characteristics of their research findings" (Liggett, 2020: 9). She examines the difficulties in bringing together both clear, stated knowledge and the unspoken, intuitive kind; highlighting the unpredictable aspects of artistic research, mainly when the objectives are meant to be flexible. This is important in the context of combining the act of making a painting and reading it as a score to influence the creation of movement and design of the choreography. The cross-disciplinary process emphasizes the challenges of weaving together different types of artistic skills and insights, as there can be limitations to the study.

Synergetic Agential Choreography explores painting and dance to create new ways to design choreography through a cross-disciplinary approach. The insights of Nancy Yunhwa Rao and Susan Liggett guide this research project to merge visual and performing arts. Rao emphasizes that cross-disciplinary engagement can foster innovation, encouraging a departure from conventional methods towards more dynamic and unpredictable results (Rao, 2023). She also expresses the individual and community well-being as a reflection of collaboration, stating, "True happiness in this regard involves going 'beyond' one's own creative training and methods,

being actively engaged in and interacting with another type of creative discipline, and cultivating new perspectives that shed light on one's own creativity and performance" (Rao, 2023: 157).

Liggett's discussion on the role of arts in research highlights the importance of articulating the unique contributions of interdisciplinary endeavors (Liggett, 2020). By integrating the interpretation of visual art into the choreographic process, we enrich the creative landscape of dance, advance our understanding of movement as artistic expression, and open new pathways for innovative explorations in choreography.

Research Question and Aims

The guiding question this project looks to answer is: How can alternative modes of choreography be achieved through a cross-disciplinary approach that involves painting as a medium? The intentional embodiment of movement and dance can reveal inherent rationales in an art form encompassing diverse approaches. By actively engaging with one's body and the physicality of mixed mediums, the individual becomes both the mover and the moved. Cross-disciplinary correlations can facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, and practice-led research approaches illuminate those correlations. This section outlines the research aims that guided this practice-led research project.

Research Aim 1: To use visual art to cue pattern shifts within and through the dancer's body while preserving the embodiment of the image throughout the creative process.

The senses stimulate our imagination, allowing us to connect ideas, images, memories, and the world around us. Dance philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone articulated this well stating, "If body movement is the object of the image, then body movement will appear imaginatively as a

form having no actual existence. This negation will become clear as we proceed to describe the imaginative representation of the body and the body in movement” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015: 92). As Sheets-Johnstone suggested, stimulating the imagination and senses can foster body responses that inspire physical thinking and prompt movement exploration. The translation of movement from image to body becomes the same, co-existing as a shared image.

Research Aim 2: Identify strategies that intertwine visual art-making within and through choreography and consider how this can be used as an interpretive tool to propel dancers to use art as a choreographic device.

When opening the performance space to an audience, a dance event becomes a part of their world, their reality within the performance. Multidisciplinary artist Ana Sanchez-Colberg discusses the interactions between spectator and performer, noting, “They engage in a process of discovery to uncover the layers of the work so they can truly be interpreters of the work” (Preston-Dunlop & Sanchez-Colberg, 2010: 17).

Engaging with visual art can prompt people to examine things differently, expand their consciousness, and foster new ideas. Awareness is subjective to the individual experience, and an understanding of movement requires the audience members to make their connections. The meaning-making process can result in profound and enduring impressions, depending on how observers connect the performance to their personal experiences.

Research Aim 3: Observe dancers’ connection to visual art materials and analyze how the relationship transforms their perspective and affects their embodied response within the environment.

When individuals analyze and interpret materials through improvisational tasks, they manipulate movement in response to their environment. Anthropologist Tim Ingold’s views of entanglement

proposed that “If a person can act on objects in their vicinity, so it is argued, can objects ‘act back,’ causing them to do or allowing them to achieve what they otherwise could not” (Ingold, 2010: 7). Considering this, the body can be manipulated by dancers’ visual interpretations of artworks, causing the body to react through physical movement, creating sometimes unpredictable responses. Such responses may unintentionally create further movement possibilities by changing speed and direction. Thus, the symbiotic relationship between visual art and movement illustrates how external stimuli can dynamically influence and reshape the body's physical expression.

Research Aim 4: Instigate movement through the reading of paintings as a choreographic score.

By observing such interactions in the studio-laboratory, it can be observed how the body is manipulated as dancers discover new movement possibilities, as suggested by Sheets-Johnstone, who says that the intention of consciousness to apprehend movement imaginatively means that movement will become the object of an image and will appear as an imaginative visual-kinetic form (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015: 92). To compose the score, it is essential to identify patterns that combine the embodied experience with imagery in and through the body, reflecting connectivity.

When developing methods for experimental studio practice, it is essential to select key concepts that connect ideas to the inquiry. The key concepts can assist in further informing the dancers during the choreographic process by providing context and cues for movement development. The selection process is based on ideas that inform and illuminate the relationship between the research aims and the research objectives.

Fundamental Concepts and Key Terms

Defining and understanding key terms used throughout this research project is crucial to understanding and implementing the research aims by providing clear definitions and highlighting the relevance of each term to ensure that the analysis is comprehensive and rooted in a solid theoretical basis.

Synergetic Agential Choreography: is a choreographic method emphasizing dance creation's collaborative and intera-active nature. Synergetic refers to the combined and cooperative interaction of different elements to produce an enhanced effect greater than the sum of their individual effects (Buckminster, 1969). Agential is derived from the word agency, which refers to the capacity of individuals to act and make their own choices (Coleman, 2018). Choreography is the art of designing and arranging dance movements and sequences. It involves the planning and execution of dance compositions, incorporating various elements like timing, space, energy, and dynamics. Together, the creation of the phrase for this method involves dancers working together synergistically, each exercising their agency to contribute to the overall performance. This approach values the input and creativity of each dancer, leading to a dynamic and cohesive dance piece that reflects the participants' collective efforts and individual expressions.

Phenomenology: research in dance focuses on exploring the lived experiences and embodied consciousness of individuals engaged in dance (Fraleigh, 1991). This approach emphasizes the subjective perception and interpretation of dancers, choreographers, and audiences, aiming to understand the essence of dance experiences from the first-person

perspective. By examining how movement, space, and the interaction between the body and its environment are experienced, phenomenology in dance seeks to uncover the deeper meanings, emotions, and intentions embodied in dance practices.

Phenomenology provides the overarching theoretical framework that emphasizes the importance of lived experience, consciousness, and the first-person perspective in understanding the essence of dance. It focuses on how dancers and observers experience movement, space, and performance as a foundation for exploring the other concepts in depth. Through qualitative methods, including questionnaires, participant observation, and reflective practice, phenomenological methodology can articulate how dance is experienced, interpreted, and valued by individuals and groups.

Intersubjectivity: in the context of dance, refers to the mutual understanding and connection that develops between individuals. Sondra Fraleigh, renowned somatics practitioner, states, “Dance closes the distance between self and other” (Fraleigh, 1987: 61). When multiple dancers collaborate, they become acutely aware of each other's presence and actions within their shared space. Their predominantly non-verbal communication involves an exchange of movements shaped by each dancer's focus and spatial awareness. This interactive dynamic extends to their engagement with their environment and objects. Fusaroli et al. (2009) noted that cognitive semiotic research highlights the intricate interplay between the body and intersubjectivity, emphasizing that bodily language is a key medium of communication in this context.

Actively participating in the intersubjective space forges a direct connection with the dancers, allowing me to experience and understand their movements from an insider perspective.

In phenomenological research, intersubjectivity helps to explore how these shared experiences are formed and understood, emphasizing the relational aspect of dance as a communal and communicative act.

Intra-action: according to Karen Barad, refers to how individuals interact with each other and the material world, recognizing that these relationships are constantly evolving (Barad, 2007). This interaction produces new opportunities through complex entanglements between human and non-human materials. By understanding how materiality is continually reconfigured through these entanglements, we can trace the emergence of opportunities through various modes of production. This enables us to understand better how individuals and the material world interact and co-create.

Karen Barad emphasizes that agencies' *intra-acts* are only distinct in a relational sense, not an absolute one, and exist only in relation to their mutual entanglements (Barad, 2003). Both human and non-human elements involved in this practice are equally important, as the notion of inseparability coming to matter through shared agency enables theories to come alive through the murmurings of intra-activity.

Agency: as articulated in Karen Barad's work *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, posits that agency is not solely attributable to human actors but is distributed across the entire fabric of the universe, where matter and meaning co-constitute each other through intra-actions (Barad, 2007). This perspective rejects dualistic separations between subject and object, emphasizing instead the relational entanglements that shape all phenomena. In Barad's framework, agency emerges through these entanglements, where entities are understood as dynamic, ongoing processes rather

than static, isolated entities. This approach invites a rethinking of how we perceive and engage with the world, urging us to consider our responsibilities in the interconnected web of material-discursive practices.

Beyond human-to-human interactions, the study of dance necessitates considering human engagements with non-human elements. This research concerns the relationship that evolves from human interaction with the material paint and canvas, and how such engagement influences future movement choices. Uncovered in the process of studio research, the influence from non-humans on human choices suggests that our intra-actions and interpretations can transcend traditional boundaries, leading to a deeper comprehension of our experiences and relationships.

Materiality: in the context of art and performance, pertains to the continuous intra-action between our bodies and various materials in our environment. As it relates to dance, this concept underscores the intricate relationships between objects, different media, the surrounding space, and the people within that space. Andre Lepecki, a dance scholar from New York University, highlights the reciprocal influence between subjects (people) and objects. He asserts, "When objects and subjects are mutually influential, a change in the object's status invariably leads to a transformation in the subject's status" (Lepecki, 2012: 77). In this perspective, an object is not just a passive entity but actively influences and guides bodily movements.

Consequently, in intra-acting with these materials, the individual becomes a conduit or instrument through which the material or object expresses itself, particularly in the creation and execution of a movement score. Through the lens of phenomenology, researchers can delve into how the materiality of dance affects and is experienced by dancers and viewers, grounding the abstract aspects of dance in the physical world.

Material-Discursive Phenomena: refers to the interconnected and co-constitutive relationship between the physical (material) aspects of artistic creation and the interpretive (discursive) processes that give them meaning. This term emphasizes that the physical materials used in painting and the bodily movements in dance are not separate from the context that shapes their interpretation and significance. Instead, they are entangled in a dynamic interaction where the material influences the discursive and vice versa. Karen Barad states, “structures are to be understood as material-discursive phenomena that are iteratively (re)produced and (re)configured through ongoing material-discursive intra-actions” (Barad, 2007: 140). According to Barad, material-discursive phenomena are not just about how physical materials and interpretive processes interact but are about how they are fundamentally inseparable and mutually constitutive. These phenomena are entangled in ways that continually reconfigure each other, creating new possibilities for understanding and action.

In this research project, material-discursive phenomena highlight how the tangible act of creating paintings can inform and inspire choreographic movements and how the resulting dance can, in turn, influence the perception and understanding of the visual artwork. This concept emphasizes the importance of considering both the physical properties and the contextual meanings in the study and practice of art, aligning with Barad’s view that agency and meaning arise from the intra-actions of material and discursive elements.

Diffraction: refers to a methodological approach that emphasizes the interconnected and dynamic relationship between different forms of artistic expression. Drawing from Karen Barad’s concept, diffraction is not about reflecting or mirroring but about understanding and engaging

with the ways in which differences matter and shape one another. Barad states, “Diffraction is not merely about differences, and certainly not differences in any absolute sense, but about the entangled nature of differences that matter” (Barad, 2007: 381). Merging painting and choreography actively involves exploring and engaging with movement and visual art, recognizing the cross-disciplinary practices shaping and reshaping each other in meaningful ways.

In this research project, diffraction involves exploring how the painting's textures, colors, and forms influenced movements and gestures in dance. It highlights the process of mutual influence and transformation, where both painting and choreography are seen as material practices that, intra-act, create new meanings and configurations through their entangled interactions. This approach moves beyond simple representation to a performative understanding, where the act of creating and experiencing art becomes a dynamic process of becoming, emphasizing the liveliness and continual evolution of artistic expressions.

Score: in *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, refers to dancers using their own paintings as a guide to explore improvised tasks and discover new movement possibilities within their bodies. During this practice, the paintings only exist while creating the score and the use of them throughout the project. Afterward, they become artifacts of the work, preserving traces of the performance. In *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, paintings act as scores, capturing the embodied expressions of the dancers and serving as dynamic maps for improvisational exploration. As scores, the paintings visually represent movement dynamics, spatial relationships, and emotional states encountered during the choreographic process.

Jonathan Burrows' influence is profound in this context. He views choreography not as a set of prescribed movements but as a generative process rooted in improvisation and exploring new movement vocabularies (Burrows, 2010). Burrows' emphasis on scores as frameworks that guide and inspire dancers' creative decisions is significant. Burrows' approach encourages dancers to interpret and respond to the visual elements and textures captured on the canvas in the context of using paintings as scores. This interpretation is not just a task for the dancers but expands their improvisational capabilities and deepens their engagement with the choreographic material.

Creativity and Artistry: are often used interchangeably in the research, as they both involve a learning process where the participants develop new movement possibilities in dance, learn to create a new style of painting, make new observations, and reflect on their actions. This suggests that the work involves multiple dimensions, including the ability to adopt various perspectives and approaches. The following excerpt from Lars Lindström's article in the *International Journal of Art & Design Education* supports this notion.

Creative people often possess an ability to adopt a number of different stances or perspectives. When they look at their own work, they focus alternately on the technical aspects, the visual design, the ideas, and so on. They develop a set of standards or a checklist that directs their attention and helps them to monitor the creative process. In addition, they master a vocabulary that enables them to assess their work in multiple dimensions, so that they can pass more qualified judgments than just 'good' or 'bad.'

(Lindström, 2006: 57)

This ability to view their work from various angles and to use a structured approach for evaluation underscores the multifaceted nature of creativity and artistry, highlighting the importance of diverse perspectives in fostering innovative and reflective artistic practices.

Spontaneity: in dance highlights the impromptu, unrehearsed aspects of movement and performance, which can be crucial for understanding creativity, improvisation, and the dynamic nature of dance. It involves establishing frameworks that guide subsequent actions and allow for the emergence of unplanned movements. In her discussion on improvisation and choreography, Sandra Minton emphasizes this concept, stating, "Movement exploration is inherently spontaneous, producing movements that are not pre-planned. Although this exploration process is spontaneous, it is often shaped by specific suggestions, leading to relatively brief movements" (Minton, 1997: 13).

Spontaneity relates to phenomenology by emphasizing the immediacy and authenticity of lived experience in dance while also connecting with intersubjectivity and intra-action by showing how spontaneous interactions contribute to the co-creation of meaning in dance. Inspired by captivating moments found within spontaneous movements, this research aims to develop a cross-disciplinary approach to choreography, integrating principles of spontaneity and structured guidance.

Together, these concepts form a theoretical framework for work that seeks to understand dance holistically, embodied, and dynamically. Integrating phenomenology in dance research emphasizes the importance of lived experience, consciousness, and the first-person perspective, focusing on how dancers and audiences perceive and interpret movement, space, and interactions. This framework aligns closely with intersubjectivity and intra-action, where mutual understanding and dynamic relationships between human and non-human elements co-create and reconfigure the artistic experience. Intersubjectivity highlights the non-verbal communication and shared space between dancers, while intra-action underscores the ongoing material

entanglements that shape and transform artistic practices. Diffraction further enhances this understanding by examining the interconnected and evolving nature of different artistic expressions, such as the fusion of painting and choreography. Using paintings as scores in *Synergetic Agential Choreography* exemplifies how visual art can guide and inspire new movement possibilities, emphasizing new-found creativity and artistry within the participants. This comprehensive approach underscores the importance of diverse perspectives, spontaneity, and structured improvisation in fostering this innovative and meaningful dance research project.

Unraveling Habits of Dance

It is crucial to consider the habitual dance body when developing and designing improvisational frameworks. Dancers actively work to create physical change by willing their bodies to develop technical patterns that engage muscle memory. As an act of voluntary force, strategies promote movement techniques that facilitate transformation within the body. Habitual movement patterns are formed as part of their internal makeup and retain their shape, becoming ingrained and reliable over time.

By recognizing the habitual body, dancers need not reflect upon each step they take. Once they have learned the foundation of dance, the movements become a part of a dancer's structure. Phenomenology and Feminist writer Phillipa Rothfield says that "Habits are a form of corporeal scriptwriting, a shorthand for the body...Habit's ability to function smoothly according to routine allows the individual to focus more fully on other matters" (Rothfield, 2013: 100). From dedicated practice, dancers develop corporal habits as a power beyond their consciousness, allowing their bodies to move naturally without visual imagery to guide their steps. A solid dance infrastructure enables the performer to balance various elements within the structure of a

choreographic framework. Results from this project provide new possibilities for choreographic movement that extend beyond these habitual patterns.

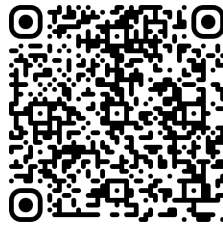
Emerging in the mid-twentieth century and as a response to the confines of composition and presentation in modern dance, postmodern dance challenges the technically trained dance body by insisting on movement development derived from gesture, pedestrian movement, and unconventional means of choreographic composition (Reynolds & McCormick, 2003).

Figure 5 from project #3, *Throughline*, provides a glimpse into this world of choreographic inspiration and the development of the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* research method. Scan QR Code 3 to view a video of this movement in action. One of the defining characteristics of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is its ability to challenge even the most experienced dancers by incorporating personal and improvised movements. In this context, I observe the dancer from *Throughline* as they explore a variety of improvisational tasks. I carefully observe the dancer's interpretation of the visual art as it is translated into a series of fluid movements.

To truly understand this form of dance, one must be willing to unravel the habitual threads that come with years of dance training. This requires the body to undergo a series of reinventions as the dancer learns to release preconceived notions and embrace the unknown. Rothfield remarked on the developing dancer, declaring, "Expansion is an impetus destined to go beyond the thinker as knower towards a body unhinged from the end gains inherent in motor intentionality" (Rothfield, 2013: 105). Preparing the body for unpredictable movement possibilities is a slow rendering that goes against the grain of habits. Since the dancer's aim is not to rely on what they already know, they must explore improvisational modifications and

investigate new movements. The dancer has to go beyond their preconceived knowledge so the body can deliver new movement possibilities.

<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/studio-laboratory/throughline>



QR Code 3—*Throughline* studio lab practice, methods in action



Figure 5—*Throughline* (project #3): observing the dancer's movement response to improvisational tasks, 2021

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical & Artistic Discourse Encompassing Choreography

This chapter examines the practices employed by artist practitioners, theoretical perspectives, and practical implications of influential theories and their relevance to the research project. I begin by discussing Rudolf Laban's movement analysis, focusing on Body, Effort, Shape, and Space and examining this relationship to my practice. I then reflect on Trisha Brown's work and recognize its foundational influence on organic movement and the essence of this research project's design. In the following chapter, I examine Jonathan Burrows and Nelson Goodman's work on scores and their influence on this research project's practice-led aspect. I also explore the innovative work of composer John Cage, observing how his methods of chance have inspired this research and shaped its direction. The discussion then pivots to the artistic techniques of Jackson Pollock, noting how his painting methods have influenced the painting techniques used in this research project. Moving on, I review Karen Barad's theory of agential realism, which best resonates with the interplay of dancers and material. Agential realism highlights the shared agency between human and non-human materials. Henri Lefebvre's insights on the production of space are also addressed, shedding light on its implications for dance and the body. In conclusion, I circle back to choreography with an account of my engagement with William Forsythe's *Choreographic Objects* installation, emphasizing its effect on the methodological approach.

Strands of the Medium

The architecture of our body provides a compelling site of communicative potential in exploring movement artistry. Rudolph Laban describes the body as living architecture composed of human

movement by building spatial relationships between tracing shapes in space. He believed in freedom of movement in both the body and mind and viewed steps as part of whole-body movement. Laban explained, “The living architecture composed of the trace-forms of human movements have to endure other disequilibrating influences as they come from within the structure itself and not from without” (Laban & Ullmann, 2011: 5). These influences are the relationship existing spatially within the body and how the body responds to the senses in a process while fabricating a dance. According to Laban, all forms and movement styles were united by common underlying principles referred to as Effort Actions. These actions included Space, Weight, Time, Flow/Flow, Directional Quality/Shape Dynamics, Directing Attention, and Body Qualities. Laban identified these actions as an effortless manner that can provide dancers with greater freedom when performing their movements with each category rather than having them focus on the right or wrong techniques, which would limit a dancer's creative expression. In Laban’s text, *The Master of Movement*, he stated, “Each movement originates from an inner excitement of the nerves, caused either by an immediate sense impression or by a complicated chain of formerly experienced sense impressions stored in the memory” (Laban, 2011: 19).

Laban believed, “The flow of movement is strongly influenced by the order in which the parts of the body are set in motion” (Laban & Ullmann, 2011: 18). He communicated finding a need to combine thinking and moving to understand the effort and action of moving from the inside out. The Body indicates the moving parts and the progression of their relationship in and through movement. Effort represents the inner attitude toward using energy, and Shape describes the bodily form and its space changes. Space is determined by spatial patterns, direction, range, and where the movement is happening. As dancers apply these aspects as understood in terms of frameworks and self-efficacy during the research, one can begin to embrace how each interacts

and illuminates the other.

Laban's insights offer a profound framework for understanding the intrinsic connection between movement and our perception of space and self. By considering the body as an architectural entity, we can appreciate the dynamic interplay between internal and external forces that shape our movement. This perspective not only enriches the practice and analysis of dance but also encourages a deeper exploration of how we navigate and interact with the world around us. Through Laban's perspective, every movement becomes a dialogue with space, a testament to the body's resilience and creativity in expressing the human experience. His theories and methods have become integral to many forms of modern dance.

Ana Sanchez-Colberg's insight adds a critical layer to this conversation, emphasizing the necessity of a grounded self-awareness as a preliminary step in the artistic journey. Sanchez-Colberg suggests “that developing the emergent artist must begin by nurturing the idea of each individual’s “body image” (as defined by Merleau-Ponty) as a way of grounding their experience of themselves as subjects at an experiential level before the manipulation of movement vocabulary from an anatomical/formal perspective” (Sanchez-Colberg, 1998: 20). In agreement with Sanchez-Colberg, it becomes essential to cultivate an awareness of one's own bodily perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs when venturing into choreographic explorations. It's not merely about maneuvering the body through predetermined paths but allowing oneself to be fully present, receptive, and expressive with every motion, steering through spaces with an understanding of one's individuality. This acknowledgment of self equips a dancer with the vital tool of introspection, enabling them to imbue their performances with a genuine essence of personal embodiment and approach choreographic tasks not as mere exercises but as opportunities to express their understanding and relationship with their body and space.

The transition between technique and developing choreography can be challenging for many dancers. Laban's "choreutics aspect" embraces how a dancer relates to space, both in the body and the body in space. Dance scholar and Laban expert Valerie Preston-Dunlop developed a method for dancers to materialize movement by designing dance material through spatial progression, body design, spatial projection, and spatial tension, giving the body intention for movement. Spending time investigating the body in relation to the aforementioned, also described as the Manners of Materialization by Preston-Dunlop, is fundamental for conscious awareness to give rise to evolving and articulating choreographic actions (Preston-Dunlop, 2021). Phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, "To understand is to experience the accord between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the realization – and the body is our anchorage in a world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 146). One becomes present within the experience as the body navigates through a carving out of space to move with intent through time and space.

My early dance research was a turning point when I encountered Laban Movement Analysis. The emphasis on effort, shape, and space provided me with a comprehensive vocabulary to articulate the use of dynamics within improvisational tasks. The principles became integral to my practice, enabling me to dissect and reconstruct movement with greater intentionality. In the quest to develop a cross-disciplinary methodology that employs visual artwork as a movement score, I found it essential to pursue greater specificity and complexity in dancers' movement abilities as they must be open to exploring the body and space beyond multiple influences.

(Re)mapping the Process

Trisha Brown was a choreographer and performer who hit the New York scene in the early 1960s. Her experimental, task-driven improvisational work redefined choreography as visual art (Rosenberg, 2017). Brown was influenced by John Cage's teachings, writings, lectures, and methods of compositional design. His ideas inspired Brown's use of chance method and non-subjective choreographic experimentation in dancing outside existing classifications. This exploration allowed her to produce a new movement vocabulary that she used as a basis for dance-making. Brown applied tasks as a structure in creating rules to materialize movement. Within an understanding of what constitutes choreography through the approach applied to visual art, her work integrated cross-disciplinary intelligence.

As I further consider Brown's use of improvisational tasks, I am influenced to create prompts that could facilitate the manipulation of dancers' codified technique to uncover movement potential within their bodies. Susan Rosenberg expresses in her introspection of Brown's work by stating that "Task enables movements' discovery in the act of improvisation – not by imitating already-given movement techniques or forms" (Rosenberg, 2017: 19). Tasks must be structured to not only uncover new-found movement within improvisation but to recite that found movement within the body. Improvisational dance tends to produce fleeting, unrepeatable movements, but in contrast, Brown contrived context-driven scores that allowed her material to be captured and replicated.

Brown created dance through the use of ideas, materials, methods, and practice. Material thinking allowed for an articulation of both logical and creative intellect. Her notable works include *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970), which utilized urban architecture as a stage, challenging conventional performance spaces. *Roof Piece* (1971) further explored this

theme by having dancers communicate movements across the rooftops of New York City, effectively turning the cityscape into a dynamic stage. *Watermotor* (1978) demonstrated Brown's unique movement vocabulary that blended fluidity and precision.

Brown combined both visual and movement art in her work. Her piece, *Locus* (1975), utilized a cube diagram representing space and a coding system of numbers related to letters of the alphabet. She applied a personal narrative to generate the rules for ordering spatial movement. After Brown explained her work's relationship to visual art, the New York Times considered her a conceptual choreographer. Rosenberg explains that publicizing this score provided “tangible evidence of the significance of drawing’s role in her works’ development and the underlying visual structures in her choreography” (Rosenberg, 2017: 153). Her score facilitated her capacity to choreograph from a gestural vocabulary that she had originated from a previous piece into movement language linked to prior experience and knowledge. The artwork was the choreography, and Brown worked backward to develop the performative nature of her final works.

In a 2017 article in *Frieze Magazine*, Susan Rosenberg remembers the artist who forever changed art and dance, stating,

In 1979, Brown transitioned from performing in non-traditional and art world settings to working within a framework traditionally associated with dance – the proscenium stage. With this decision she invited her contemporaries to contribute sets and costumes, as well as sound scores to her choreography, but it was always Brown who set the parameters of each unique dialogue at the outset.

(Rosenberg, 2017)

Her piece *Set and Reset* (1983), which had contributions from Laurie Anderson and Robert Rauschenberg, showcased her innovative use of improvisation within structured choreography. Lastly, an important piece to mention, *Astral Convertible* (1989), integrated technology into dance, creating an interactive experience that blurred the lines between performer, audience, and

space. Together, these works highlight Brown's legacy as a pioneer who continuously pushed the limits of dance by stepping out of their own disciplines, influencing countless artists and reshaping the landscape of contemporary performance for years to come.

I studied *Locus* with former Trisha Brown Dance Company members Eva Karczag and Shelley Senter in the summer of 2021. Reading about *Locus* and replicating the methods in my body with those who performed the work allowed my consciousness to transpire to a new level of awareness. I learned what I was doing with the material and my body, why I was doing it, and why it mattered. As a participant in the workshop, I studied the work as a choreographic tool for devising a score and then explored movement within the structured framework. The movement ideas came from the process of negotiating space within the cube. My movement was not contained but expanded as I was challenged to find new ways for my body to think visually and kinesthetically. The score facilitated a departure point and a set of location points determined by specific conditions related to the coding system used in *Locus*. It moved me...as I created a dance.

Trisha Brown's methods in manifesting choreography and her desire to uncover authentic movement from the body's facility are most impressive. In the text, *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue, 1961- 2001*, Deborah Jowitt remarks, "Brown developed a method of building a dance in part as if she were a chef – calling for and assembling known ingredients to produce unforeseen consequences" (Teicher, 2003: 261). She was a theoretical and practice-based genius who created over a hundred dances transcending disciplinary boundaries.

Brown collaborated with other artists on several projects. Rosenberg describes the aim of her first work with visual artist Robert Rauschenberg as a "coordination of dance and set to allow each its artistic integrity in a shared *visual* relationship" (Rosenberg, 2017: 231). Brown was

aware of the synergy between art forms and how they influenced one another. The work became a perceptual experience, co-existing elements deflecting from dancers and artists. Very seldom did Brown explain the structure of her choreographic process to audiences. She felt it strained them to see something they otherwise would not.

Trisha Brown was a visual artist of both ephemeral and permanent forms. Her meticulous frameworks incorporate drawings and text scores. They have been hung on the walls of galleries and museums. She has performed solo works, including mixed mediums, using her body as an instrument to draw and paint on canvas. These works have been mass-produced, reaching viewers beyond dance-based audiences. Her work has inspired and encouraged me to take risks and embrace the arts and my body as an instrument.

As a dance researcher, I share a similar approach with Trisha Brown in exploring the potential of improvisational movement tasks to create choreography. However, I posit a unique contribution to dance by utilizing visual artwork made by the dancers as a stimulus to inspire novel ways of moving and generating choreography. While improvisation can be open-ended, I understand the significance of structuring tasks to guide the dancers throughout the creative process. Unlike Brown's approach, I do not provide a score for my participants to follow or collaborate with other artists to create visual art for my project. Instead, my participants serve as the artists, creating paintings that will act as the score for the choreography.

Synergetic Agential Choreography builds upon Brown's legacy by integrating visual art into the choreographic process, thus nurturing new and meaningful dance practices. By treating visual art as an essential element of choreography, I strive to bridge a gap between the two disciplines. This approach inspires dancers to explore new movement possibilities and enhances their involvement in the creative process. In reverence to Trisha Brown's influence, my research

endeavors to expand the boundaries of contemporary performance by cultivating innovative and meaningful artistic expressions through the fusion of dance and visual art.

m AN u Sc r i PT

Similar to a composer using a musical score, a choreographer employs a dance score to plan out a sequence of movements, develop a structure of ideas, and organize details. This written work takes shape on the page either before the work begins, throughout the creative process, or after the performance. In dance, the score serves as a blueprint for the body to interpret movement throughout time and space.

Dance scores can vary in their scripts. This means that words and drawings can be interpreted in various ways without the use of specific symbols, known as notation. To address this, Benesh Notation was created for classical ballet, and Labanotation, developed by Rudolf Laban, was designed as a tool to document movement composition. (Laban and Ullmann, 2011). These notation practices use inscribed characters to describe movement elements, serving as a framework for preserving the work so that it can be revisited, re-staged, or reworked.

Nelson Goodman addressed the question of whether it is theoretically possible for dance to produce a notation system. He makes clear distinctions between art forms as autographic and allographic (Goodman, 1970). Autographic art is considered genuine if duplication is made, or a copy of it would be inferior to the original and considered a forgery, such as a painting, which is essential to its production history (Goodman, 1970). A score can determine allographic art independent of its production history. For example, the performance of a play-by-score where the original version of the artwork is not different from a later version would be considered allographic. Goodman also denotes that all arts are initially autographic, yet a notation must be devised to transcend the time limit. He believes dance is an art that is difficult to classify as it is

visual, like a painting, yet temporal, like music. He says it can be notated if it is allographic; this does not mean its notation can capture all of the performance's movement qualities (Goodman, 1970).

Goodman focuses on utilizing the key characteristics of choreographed works, considering them as the notation, substance, and identity of movement, a vital aspect of dance. The sequence of arranged actions allows the opportunity to create a score, which one can refer to and identify as a dance work with the possibility of preserving it. He concludes dance is closer to being allographic rather than an autographic art (Goodman, 1970). He considers notating dance successful and recognizes Rudolf Laban's system of tracking spatial arrangements, movement sequences, and dynamic qualities in dance because it is unambiguous of syntax and semantics. Goodman states, "All in all, Labanotation passes the theoretical tests very well – about as well as does ordinary musical notation, and perhaps as well as is compatible with practicality" (Goodman, 1976: 217). Labanotation is clean, neat, and easily readable.

On the contrary, Goodman also says, "The function of a score is to specify the essential properties a performance must have to belong to the work" (Copeland & Cohen, 2009: 404). I argue that contextualizing the aesthetic function of visual art allows the score to fabricate movement and inscribe work on the body. Therefore, multiple visual forms can function as the catalyst to apply physical intelligence and interpretation through body knowledge.

As a former classroom educator and a current dance and physical education teacher, I am familiar with deciphering coded academic language in texts, including words, symbols, numbers, chemicals, and letters, as well as familiarity with evaluating the investment and learned experience of my students by observing their body language and movement languages. I believe that the factors that best ignite life-long learning are considerably more prominent than those

visited on a script for performance. For example, Jonathan Burrows states that many dance-makers often use private notes that appear to one as:

Hieroglyphic that the dancer must translate directly. If a visual image is used like this to find movement, it is usually only a clue, a way to push the imagination of the performer out of habitual ways in the manner of some graphic notation for music. Any piece of choreography, any score, can work only if it enables the dancers to rediscover their own internal dance and let them take flight.

(Burrows, 2000: 32)

Is it necessary for dance works to have an exact, concise, notational structure on paper in our current times? This can be disputed in the age of technology, as digital documentation is more accessible with the widespread ownership of cell phones. However, because digital archiving is a product of advanced technology of the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond, it is fundamental that we preserve and respect the arts-rich history of our predecessor's work and theories prior to the widespread use of digital documentation. Understanding the historical context and evolution of dance notation systems is essential for the sustainability of dance scores and performative choreographic acts. In the introduction to an issue of *The International Journal of Performance Art and Digital Media*, Johannes Birringer suggests, "We live in a changing world of dance, and the level of discourse regarding dance and choreographic practice has been raised considerably compared to the mid to late 20th century" (Biringner, 2013: 8). With video cameras to capture dance today, the preservation of written movement scores can work in tandem with digitally archived compositions.

There is no universal dance score used, as there is with music. Instead, the author of the score can develop a framework to be used as a recipe to prompt, inspire, and design work. The choreographer is an architect, drawing blueprints to make what is imagined through the artist's eye visible. The score can even be created without a dancing body present, as when they meet, the experience entrusts body knowledge and breathes life into the score.

The intersection of dance and visual art through the use of scores highlights the evolving nature of choreography and its documentation. As a dance researcher, my approach integrates these historical and contemporary practices by developing *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. This methodology uses visual artwork created by dancers as movement scores, blending Laban's principles with the creative freedom espoused by Jonathan Burrows. My experience as an educator informs this process, enabling me to decipher and apply coded visual languages to inspire unexplored movement possibilities. By merging visual art and dance, my research honors past choreographers' while pushing contemporary performance's perimeters. This holistic approach fosters a deeper understanding of movement artistry, ensuring that the dynamic interplay between body, space, and creative expression continues to evolve and inspire.

Chance

Observing the unpredictable outcome when I create fluid acrylic art paintings allows the materials' placement on the canvas to be left up to chance until the paint has dried. The chance approach is a crucial choreographic design tool when reaching beyond codified techniques to create new choreography. As a dance researcher embracing this approach, I allow participants to interpret their painting's mapping and apply physical thinking to their movement choices, stepping back to see what unfolds throughout the process. This also leads me to question how much of my aesthetic preference will influence the final choreographic performance.

As I read John Cage's *Composition as Process* (1958), I challenged myself to replace his word 'sound' with 'movement' as I am drawn to chance methods because of the parallel experience of chance observed through the paint's movement on the canvas. Cage states, "For nothing about the structure was determined by the materials which were to occur in it; it was conceived, in fact, so that it could be as well expressed by the absence of these materials as by

their presence” (Cage, 1953: 19). For me, the material is seen as being both the painting and choreography, but first and foremost the painting.

Various chance methods can structure the idea of merging movement exploration with the painting. For example, during my research with participants, I painted the end of popsicle sticks with different colors. I had the dancers pull them out of a cup, allowing chance to dictate the color they would choose to use as the impetus for them to map from their painting in the process of reading it as a score. I also wrote the names of various body parts on the end of sticks to be selected after the color stick, indicating which part of the body would initiate the movement. Additional sticks have several dynamics written on them, leaving how the action will evolve up to chance. Another chance method used during the research was a roll of the dice to prescribe the timing of the choreography. The possibilities of tasking through chance structures are endless. When we decide the choreography is performance-ready, we look back at Cage’s words. Did the paintings’ initial materials determine anything about the structure? It is so that the absence of the image can express the dance, yet without it, it would have never existed.

Figure 6 displays the sticks mentioned in this section on chance. After dancers produce acrylic flow paintings, these painted sticks guide the color selection from the painting to be used as a *score*. The sticks marked with body parts determine the initiating movement of that part. Once a dance sequence is defined, a stick from the left side is randomly selected, introducing an element of chance to the movement's dynamics. Conversely, the sticks on the right influence the spatial evolution of the movement. A deeper dive into this method is presented in the forthcoming chapter.



Figure 6—Sticks are used for chance improvisational movement tasks in projects #2 through #8

In Margaret Iversen’s book ‘Chance’, she expresses that the gap between intention and outcome is crucial to the meaning of chance in art. She asks the question, “Why should artists deliberately set up such a gap in their practice? And why should the viewer find it so engaging?” (Iversen, 2010: 12). As I understand this, it is the waiting to see what will happen—the unpredictability of an experiment’s outcome. Although instructions for improvisational research tasks can be controlled within the practice structure, unplanned, chance occurrences carry creative agency in generating the work. In response to Iversen’s text, I began to reflect on the idea of having a random variation of chance methods in an actual performance. The material of physical movement continues to evolve by bringing choreography into the street or a public

venue of specific site performance, creating methods based on the chance of encounters within social reality. The interpretation cannot be practiced beforehand, only performed within the moment. With no predetermined conditions, uncertainty is just a process with unpredictable happenings.

There is always intention and structure held within the method of practice. It is unceasing, one contained within and through the other in the developing framework of any project. The in-between, the gaps, the messiness, the risks, and the permission to allow the work to evolve and ultimately ‘turn out’ as it is meant to, up to chance, influences my research approach. I have realized that personal aesthetic preference exists in art-making, including documentation. As the impermanence of dance is fleeting in time and space and held within memory, capturing chance moments on film hidden in the methods creates a place for them to live. Here, I find myself in a new space, arresting the permanence of time. A place to suspend the matter and motion and how we will capture rehearsal and performance. Because this research project is contingent upon the movement of paint on the canvas that influences movement making and influenced by chance methods to inform the choreographic score, digital documentation provides a lens into the ephemeral nature of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*.

Through the research projects, I aim to capture and document these fleeting moments, ensuring that the fluidity of both paint and movement are preserved in a digital archive. This approach not only honors the transient nature of dance but also provides a new angle through which to understand and engage with choreography. By blending visual art with dance, my research continues the legacy of artists like Trisha Brown and Rudolph Laban, pushing the boundaries of contemporary performance and fostering innovative artistic expressions. The integration of chance methods and digital documentation ensures that the brief yet profound

moments of dance are accessible for future exploration and study, enriching the field of dance research.

Energies in Action

Like many dancers I work with, I never considered myself a visual artist. I am a performance artist and a choreographer. I have not received formal training in drawing, color theory, or visual composition. However, something about the act of painting resonates with me. It is the physicality, the energy it demands in the moment of creation. The process of painting is similar to choreographing a dance. It is movement and the power of flow as I apply paint to the canvas during the transformation process. It brings me to the same place of creativity and expression as when I choreograph a dance. Harold Rosenberg eloquently articulates this by stating,

A painting that is an act is inseparable from the biography of the artist. The painting itself is a “moment” in the adulterated mixture of his life—whether “moment” means the actual minutes taken up with spotting the canvas or the entire duration of a lucid drama conducted in sign language. The act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist’s existence.

(Rosenberg, 1962: 28)

Artists do not just paint. The action is communication with the canvas to watch it come alive and in abstract art, without an image or picture in mind. The canvas transforms according to the movement of the artist’s brush, materials in hand, and continual dialogue with these objects.

Jackson Pollock's ‘Drip Style’ paintings, which can be accessed on the website of San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art

<https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/1998/pollock/website100/index.html>, are

profoundly inspiring and captivating. Pollock struggled with a picture on the easel three years before starting this style. He decided to take the canvas off the easel, place it on the floor, and

pour paint on the surface to finish it. From that decision, a new set of creative possibilities opened to Pollock, and he spent the next five years of his career exploring them. With the canvas on the floor, he was not in physical contact with the painting. In the video on the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art website, he explained that walking around all four sides of the canvas made him feel nearer, more a part of the painting, like the Indian sand painters of the West (Pollock, n.d).

Pollock was an innovator of his time. Instead of using conventional artist brushes, he dipped, drizzled, poured, or splashed paint on the canvas below him. Painting with fluid paint, he designed a space to draw elements in the air before falling to the canvas below, sometimes thick, sometimes thin. Thus, a rhythm of poured paint would develop across the surface of the painting. He once stated that his "method of painting is a natural growth out of need" (Pollock n.d), emphasizing the importance of expressing his feelings through his art rather than simply illustrating them. In archival footage of Pollock, he noted, "Technique is just a means of arriving at a statement...when I am painting, I have a general notion as to what I am about" (Pollock, 1951). Pollock's art is an extension of himself and a medium to share the individual perspective with the viewer or audience. Similarly, the dancers using *Synergetic Agential Choreography* in my research project unearth more of themselves through the process of engaging with paint, canvas, and movement.

The act of pouring or dripping paint during the creation of a painting can have a trance-like or hypnotic effect. Rosenberg (2017) labeled this painting style "Action Painting" due to the ability to envision the actions taken throughout the process. Observing Jackson Pollock creating a painting on film is absolutely captivating. As a dancer, one can witness every movement, not just the paint splattering onto the canvas. There is a dance-like quality to the way

he shuffles around the artwork, rotating his shoulders, elbows, and wrists to create stunning works of art that seem to come to life before our eyes.

As a choreographer, this breathes new life into the possibilities of creating dance. It develops many questions for me, such as how is one moved creatively? How can incorporating the dripping or pouring of paint propel someone mentally, emotionally, and physically? How does the body act as a thinking tool? How is the act of painting translated into the choreographic score?

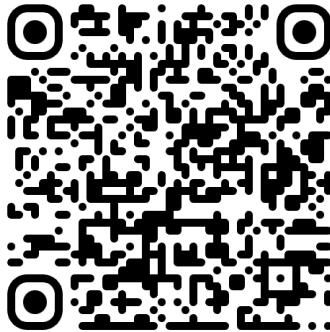
The work of Jackson Pollock, particularly his innovative 'Drip Style' paintings, provides a profound connection to dance research and the development of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. Pollock's method of placing the canvas on the floor and engaging with it from all sides, dripping, pouring, and splashing paint, mirrors the physicality and spontaneity inherent in choreographic processes. His technique, described by Harold Rosenberg as "Action Painting," emphasizes the inseparability of the act of creation from the artist's life, akin to how dance captures the essence of the performer's existence through movement.

In my research, Pollock's approach informs the integration of visual art and dance, where the act of creating fluid acrylic paintings becomes a choreographic tool. The unpredictability and physical engagement required in Pollock's painting style resonate with the principles of chance and improvisation in dance, as explored through John Cage's philosophies. By allowing dancers to interpret their paintings as scores, they engage in a dialogue with the artwork, much like Pollock's interaction with his canvas. This process not only fosters a deeper exploration of movement but also invites the audience to engage in the interpretation, where the body acts as a thinking tool, translating visual stimuli into dynamic choreography.

Linking my dance practice with the creation of paintings has enriched my understanding

of movement, enhancing the effort, shapes, and energies involved in performance. The unpredictable nature of fluid paintings, influenced by gravity and the canvas's tilt, parallels dance's spontaneous and evolving qualities. This synergy between visual art and dance not only expands the creative possibilities within choreography but also offers a unique approach through which to view the interconnectedness of different artistic mediums. Figures 7 and 8 capture moments from project #4, *The Impetus*, where dancers were engaged in creating flip-cup paintings. The web link and QR Code below allow viewing of the artwork's creation in motion, where dancers step into the activity without preconceived notions or understanding of the practice or image they would generate. The dancers were merely provided a collection of white garments, instructed to get dressed, and assemble on the stage. This was an authentic artistic experiment devoid of a correct or incorrect way of depositing the paint onto the canvas.

<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/performances/the-impetus>



QR Code 4—*The Impetus* performance, showcasing panting in action



Figure 7—*The Impetus* (project #4): dancers collaboratively manipulating paint on the canvas, 2021



Figure 8—*The Impetus* (project #4): dancers creating flip-cup paintings, 2021

Focusing on understanding how the natural, fluid movements used in painting can be transformed into choreographic prompts, I physically engage with Pollock's methods in creating Figure 9. There is an intention to bring a new perspective into the choreographic process. It opens a pathway to questioning and analyzing how movements can embody creativity. After creating the painting, the task was to create improvisational movement prompts and translate the visual cues from the painting into choreography, examining the natural patterns formed in the painting to carve out a choreographic score. It seeks to foster a connection between visual art and dance, ultimately enriching the creative process by intertwining the disciplines.



Figure 9—Personal project, the researcher investigating Pollock's painting method. [Link](#) to watch painting in process, 2020

Material-Discursive Phenomena, Shared Agency, and Performativity

The theory of agential realism shifts grounds and brings into question ontology, materiality, and agency in the scope of my research project. As a dance professional, I have recognized that traditionally, in dance, the director or choreographer dictates the desired aesthetics of the body, shapes, movement patterns, and the force of its organization through time and space and holds agency or power in the planning process in the classical dance and performative context.

American feminist theorist Karen Barad asserts, “If we follow disciplinary habits of tracing disciplinary-defined causes through to the corresponding disciplinary-defined effects, we will miss all the crucial intra-actions among these forces that fly in the face of any specific set of disciplinary concerns” (Barad, 2003: 810). Intra-activities compose a reworking of traditional ideas of causality where multiple components become meaningful, providing conditions for the possibilities of material reconfiguration. Therefore, to study the materialization of a cross-disciplinary approach, it is imperative that a rethinking of the relationship between discursive practice and material phenomena seeks to be understood in and through the practice.

Karen explains how the map offers insight into the various material-discursive mechanisms involved in bodily production and how they are interconnected in space and time, stating, “The map offers some suggestions of the specific entanglements of the multiple material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production and hints at how they are entangled in space and time, or rather in the materialization of spacetime-mattering” (Barad, 2020: 136). Engaging with the material sense makes the relationship between object and subject, observer and observed, and mover and moved apparent. The practice of creating choreography involves both the human and non-human elements of the body, and including painting in the process can result in a shared agency in crafting the final product.

My research project aims to demonstrate that in using *Synergetic Agential Choreography* as a method of choreographic composition, the painting would not exist or have relevance without the dancer, nor would the dance live without the art. They are inseparable. Entangled through collaborative analysis, the body becomes a tool for thinking as it reconfigures a response to the patterns and murmurings from its artwork. The body is brought to life as it diffracts rather than reflects agency as an active participant in an ongoing becoming for performance possibilities. Donna Haraway suggests, “A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the effects of differences appear” (Haraway, 1992: Barad, 300). Agreeing with this statement, I notice aesthetic possibilities that come to life through the shared conditions of the material-discursive phenomena and diffraction optics.

Material matters and their intra-activity are active participants reworking and reformulating action becoming materialized through their causal relationship. There is an intertwined practice of knowing the role played in the cause and effect within the parts of the whole. Bound to properties shared in emergent intelligibility to another, neither the visual art nor the choreography exists without the other. They are not absolute cause or complete effect but part of an open-ended becoming of agential intra-activity in performativity.

All bodies, not just human bodies, come to matter through continual intra-action during an art-making process. In dance, marks are transmitted on bodies, an inscription of the choreographic process allowing particular materializations for ontological reverberations. Barad describes the ever-influential intra-action, “Because agency is a matter of changes in the apparatuses of bodily production, and such changes take place through various intra-actions, some of which remake the boundaries that delineate the differential constitution of the “human”” (Barad, 2003: 826). The knowledge acquired when engaging with the *Synergetic Agential*

Choreography method transfers to dancers; and, in turn, conveys the relevance of concepts uncovered from their body in the choreographic process. The rediscovered language of the body influences future processes, practices, teaching styles, and various entangled enactments.

There is an apparent sense of vibrant materiality of open-ended ebb and flow of agency in the world. Within specific intra-action, phenomena come to matter through the ongoing performativity of material arrangements. Agential realism is a continuation of ontological inseparability, a constant giving of multiple entanglements responsive to experiences and liveliness. Art and its entanglement with theory and knowledge production enable us to reveal the extent to which the invisible is visible and the understanding of what is left to be unseen understood in the mind's eye.

Karen Barad's agential realism theory profoundly informs my research project by challenging traditional notions of ontology, materiality, and agency. Barad's insights emphasize the inseparability of the observer and the observed, the human and the non-human, highlighting that all bodies, human or otherwise, come to matter through ongoing intra-actions. This perspective aligns with my approach of integrating visual art and dance, where the creation of the painting and choreography are mutually dependent and co-constitutive. The practice of painting within the choreographic process allows the dancer to engage with the artwork in a way that is both material and discursive, fostering a shared agency in the creation of the final performance.

By applying Barad's concepts, my research demonstrates that neither the painting nor the dance can exist in isolation; they are entangled in a continuous process of becoming, each influencing and reconfiguring the other. This method reveals the aesthetic possibilities that emerge from the collaboration of material-discursive phenomena. Through this lens, the body becomes a tool for thinking, dynamically responding to the patterns and textures of the artwork,

leading to a richer, more nuanced choreographic expression.

Synergetic Agential Choreography embodies the principles of agential realism by acknowledging the vibrant materiality and agency of all elements involved in the creative process. This approach not only enhances the dancer's understanding and engagement with their own body but also enriches the collaborative nature of choreography, allowing for a more holistic and integrated performance. By fostering this cross-disciplinary practice, my research contributes to a deeper comprehension of how art, theory, and knowledge production are intertwined, ultimately expanding dance practice and pedagogy.

Canvas

Considering Henri Lefebvre's hypotheses regarding the concept of movement, making, and doing, I consider the position of the in-between and bringing matter into being. What facilitates the reconfiguring of space? Is this space a canvas? Not an empty void but a place full of unforeseen possibilities.

Through body effort and sensory investigation, space is defined and constructed of experiences. In a contemporary view of how the relationship between movement and space can be tied together, Sarah Rubidge, who specialized in choreographic installations, states "Space does not, indeed could not, exist before that activity, for material space always presents itself as an array that choreographers of whatever persuasion grasp and transform into a newly former experiential or intensive, space" (Ravn & Rouhiainen, 2012: 27). Once space is reconfigured, mapped out, transformed, and organized mentally and physically, space production feels familiar and has a sense of place.

This place becomes a sense of being in the world where knowledge emerges from practice. A new representation of space empowers spatial ability to become spatial knowledge as

movement occurs from the body. As Lefebvre proclaims, “The body with the energies at its disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space; conversely, the laws of space, which is to say the laws of discrimination in space, also govern the living body and the deployment of its energies” (Lefebvre, 2009: 170). The production of space comes to life as a dancer produces vibrations through their instrument, interweaving dynamic material forms. A layering of visual and textural experiences extends through the articulation of interplay as the trajectories of tension permeate between self and others.

Henri Lefebvre’s theories on space, movement, and the production of space provide a crucial framework for understanding the dynamic relationship between the body and its environment in this research project. Lefebvre’s notion that the body produces its own space by deploying its energies resonates deeply with the choreographic process, where dancers continually reconfigure and transform spaces through their movements. In the context of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, Lefebvre’s work reinforces the importance of viewing space as a canvas filled with potential, shaped and brought to life by the dancer’s movements and the intra-action of visual art. The process of mapping, transforming, and organizing space through body effort and sensory investigation allows for the emergence of spatial knowledge and a profound sense of place. This spatial production is not merely a backdrop for performance but an integral part of the choreographic practice, where visual and textural experiences interweave to create dynamic, material forms.

By integrating Lefebvre’s insights with the practice of combining painting and choreography, my research highlights the embodied production of space as a continuous, interactive process. This approach enriches the dancers’ spatial awareness and creativity. Lefebvre’s emphasis on the body’s role in producing space reinforces the idea that choreography

is a living, evolving practice constantly redefined through the dancer's engagement with their environment.

The close-up image in Figure 10 narrows down on a minuscule segment of a painting I created, serving as a precursor to Figure 11, which captures my body, embodying the essence of a fragment through a distinct shape in space. Deeply personal and individual, this translation steers clear of universal interpretations, inviting diversity in perception and representation. Within the dynamic interplay of this space, I encourage participants to embrace their unique perspectives, fostering expressions that validate each dancer's individuality and pave the way for equitable expressions throughout the research.

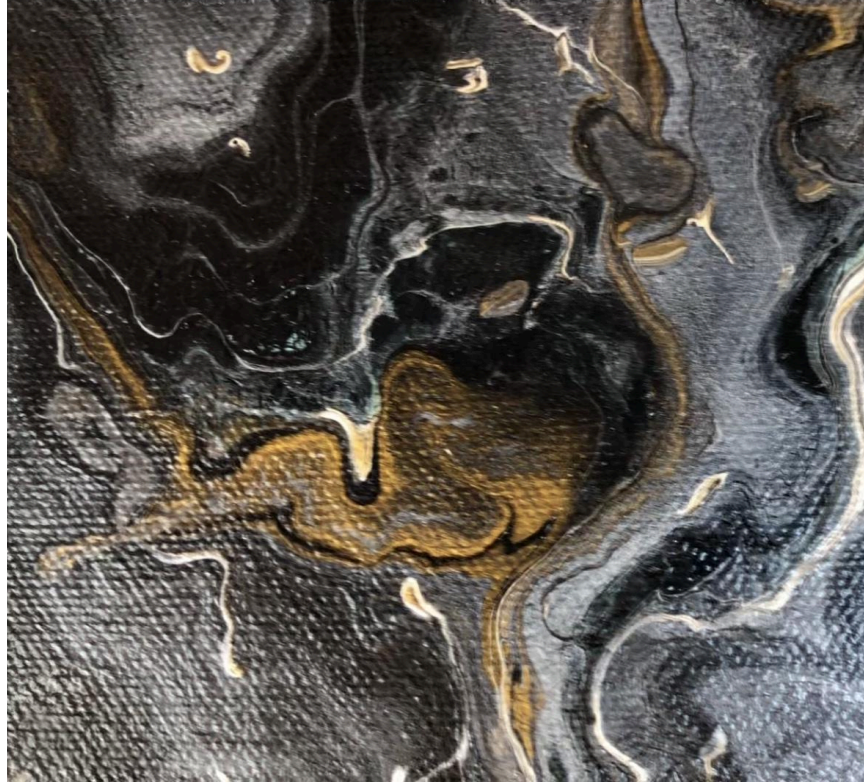


Figure 10—Personal experiment, close-up photo image within painting



Figure 11—Personal experiment, the researcher investigates the kinesthetic visual translation of the image

The constant flow and manipulation of paint on the canvas demonstrates impermanence from the moment of its inception. The dance, a fleeting artwork, captures its identity between pockets of matter and breath, connecting the movement process, merging humans and nonhumans, and building worlds. Claire Colebrook suggests, “If we consider dance in this new context, then dance is neither expressive of an already existing life nor a pure act that is self-sufficient and self-constituting. Rather, dance is a confrontation with life as a plane of open and divergent becomings” (Colebrook, 2005: 5). This perspective challenges conventional notions of expression, blurring the lines between where it begins and ends. The fluidity of the process allows the canvas to unfold continually, evolving with each practice and serving as a catalyst for future happenings. It becomes a dynamic entity, shaped not only by the intention of its creators but also by the ever-shifting interplay between perception, movement, and existence. As an art form, this dance becomes a living testament to the boundless potential of human creativity and its capacity to bridge the gap between the known and the unknown, between what is seen and what it can become.

Choreographic Objects

William Forsythe was one of the most influential choreographers of the late 20th century. He was known for his innovative choreographic approaches, ingenuity, and ability to push boundaries and challenge traditional conventions. Forsythe worked with codified dancers in ballet and used *Improvisational Technologies*, which he devised. Former dramaturgy of Ballet Frankfurt, Rebecca Groves, explains, “Forsythe’s award-winning pedagogical CD-ROM, *Improvisation Technologies* (1999), aimed to explain and demonstrate the Ballett Frankfurt’s working methods for improvising” (Groves, 2012: 119). Among his most influential pieces is *In the Middle*,

Somewhat Elevated (1987), initially created for the Paris Opera Ballet. This iconic work revolutionized ballet with its fusion of classical technique and contemporary sensibility, characterized by dynamic choreography and intricate spatial patterns. *Artifact* (1984) is another seminal work challenging traditional narrative structures in ballet, known for its avant-garde choreography and use of spoken text. *One Flat Thing, reproduced* (2000), mesmerizes with its exploration of spatial and group dynamics, challenging conventional ideas of stage space. Alongside these choreographic masterpieces, Forsythe's *Choreographic Objects* (1991-present) stands out as innovative installations blurring the boundaries between dance and visual art. These interactive works invite viewers to engage with movement, space, and perception, expanding the possibilities of artistic expression.

William Forsythe is a visionary in the world of dance and choreography. His influential work transcends the traditional boundaries of ballet, delving into the realm of choreography with objects and space. Forsythe designs physical environments that encourage interaction (*The Differential Room*, 2018), challenging our understanding of movement, space, and the body in the choreographic process (*Nowhere and Everywhere at the Same Time*, 2015). *Choreographic Objects*, as conceptualized by Forsythe, are installations or environments that prompt a choreographic experience without the presence of dancers, aiming to inspire movement and integrate participants into the work (*The Fact of the Matter*, 2009). In his essay on *Choreographic Objects*, Forsythe states, "...and so it is with the choreographic object: it is a model of potential transition from one state to another in any space imaginable" (Forsythe, n.d.). This broadens the concept of dance to include the interaction between individuals and their surroundings.

Forsythe's methodology involves an understanding that choreography need not be limited

to dance. Within the context of traditional ballet, Forsythe explains that he “derived unexpected kinds of movement from the vocabulary of the classical ballet through the development of his methods” (Forsythe, n.d.). Through his work, he has taken a body trained in the origins of technical dance and attempts to manipulate their physical thinking. His *Choreographic Objects* encompasses interactive sculptures, video installations, and participatory environments that require audience engagement. By blurring the boundaries between performer and observer, Forsythe invites participants to engage in the choreographic experience. These innovative concepts redefine choreography to encompass the interaction between individuals and their environment and objects expanding the definition of dance itself.

I had the opportunity to visit Forsyth’s exhibit firsthand. In December 2019, I traveled to the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, Massachusetts, to explore the conditions surrounding Forsythe’s installations. While interacting with the objects and tasks, I discovered no right or wrong way to welcome dialogue with particular materials. When I entered each room, my body reacted in harmony with the environment, as if I became an extension of the objects around me and my body functioned as a thinking tool. Forsythe proposes, “You develop the skills to solve the challenges of centrifugal force and gravity and balance, plus fulfilling all these aesthetic criteria at the same time — it’s very, very complicated, and I liked that” (Forsyth, n.d.). Observing non-dancers engage with the installation, I noticed how everyone interacted uniquely and created dance without being aware of their movements within time and space.

William Forsythe's exhibit gave me a unique opportunity to explore the potential of using objects as a score to inspire movement. Forsythe’s concept of a choreographic object emphasizes that it is not a replacement for the body but rather an innovative space for instigating and organizing actions. In his description of a choreographic object, he explains:

A choreographic object is not a substitute for the body, but rather an alternative site for the understanding of potential instigation and organization of action to reside. Ideally, choreographic ideas in this form would draw an attentive, diverse readership that would eventually understand and, hopefully, champion the innumerable manifestations, old and new, of choreographic thinking.

(Forsythe n.d.)

Inspired by Forsythe's *Choreographic Objects*, I am intrigued by his novel use of objects to generate new movement possibilities. As a result, I have incorporated such objects into my choreography practice and, throughout my research development harnessed the potential for materials to become valuable choreographic devices.

The impact of *Choreographic Objects* on audiences and the choreography field is profound. Engaging with Forsythe's installations offers a unique experience that challenges preconceived notions of dance and encourages creativity. His work represents a departure from traditional performance-based dance, pushing the boundaries of choreography and inspiring new forms and methodologies. At the core of Forsythe's work is an understanding of how bodies are organized and propelled through space by their surroundings. His background in classical ballet informed his methods, leading to unexpected movements derived from its vocabulary. This manipulation of physical thinking extends to participants in his installations, where interaction with objects serves as a score for movement.

The emergence of choreographic processes is through the body, which serves as both a subject and an object, a tool, and a material. This approach liberates dancers from the confines of conventional practices, opening doors to discover novel movement possibilities. Guiding the body into action while interpreting a painting as a choreographic score entails relinquishing control over ingrained technical habits.

As a researcher developing *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, I am inspired by

Forsythe's innovative use of objects to generate new movement possibilities. My research focuses on using paintings as guiding scores, leading dancers through improvised tasks to discover new movement vocabularies. This approach reflects Forsythe's notion that a choreographic object is not a replacement for the body but an alternative means of understanding and organizing action. Using paintings as dynamic maps for improvisational exploration, I emphasize the multifaceted and reflective nature of imagination, fostering innovative and meaningful dance practices.

The profound influence of Forsythe's work on choreography and audiences underscores the importance of engaging with objects and environments to inspire creativity. By integrating principles of spontaneity, structured improvisation, and cross-disciplinary practices, my research extends Forsythe's legacy while broadening the definition of dance to include the interplay between human and material elements. My journey in developing new methodologies for choreography is guided by the pioneering work of William Forsythe, highlighting the potential of using objects and materiality to free dancers from conventional practices and unlock new movement possibilities.

The guidance of prominent predecessors and the documented work of those who have come before me have ignited my curiosity, sparked questions, and deepened my understanding. Their influence has instilled in me the courage and passion to explore innovative choreographic techniques. Dance is physically fleeting, trapped in the folds of memory. Merging visual art and choreography is a partnership, a marriage, wrapped in a canvas to be hung on a wall and shared with others. It offers a new perspective on art, dance, and the process of choreography creation.

In the subsequent chapter, I present the research study's methods, practice, and process. This detailed examination includes the study's design, the participants' selection, and the tools and techniques employed for data collection and analysis. My intent is to inspire readers by sharing the steps I took to ensure the accuracy and validity of the results.

CHAPTER 3

Phenomenology as a Reflective Practice

The following section will explore phenomenology as a philosophical approach, focusing on the body's lived experiences and how various energies influence the shaping of matter within this research project.

Qualitative Inquiry

This research project uses a qualitative methodology to investigate practices that explore new movement possibilities in dancers through paintings to merge with creating choreographic works through score reading and improvisational movement tasks. On 8 April 2021, I was granted ethical approval from Liverpool John Moores University's Research Ethics Committee (reference: 21/LSA/001) to undertake data collection. As the researcher, I spent hours with each group of participants in the studio, collecting data through engaging in practice with the participants and then time alone to sort through the data. Then, I examine and consider the data, constructing meaning by documenting descriptive narratives. Interweaving myself into the text as a reflective method by questioning my approaches and analyzing multiple levels of interrelated themes to more abstract dimensions, I explored various angles one can engage with in utilizing this work for choreographic practices.

In the act of exploring tasks in the studio collectively, practitioner Sandra Fraleigh would identify this as the “language of phenomenology,” which is ““intersubjectivity,” or transcendence of self toward others and the world” (Fraleigh, 2000: 56). Dance can be studied from this perspective, taking a phenomenological approach and exploring embodied knowledge and the

conscious embodiment of movement. It examines the individual's place in the world, intertwined with others and emerging influences. By analyzing the interplay between bodies and their environment, I seek to uncover innovative choreographic methods and deepen our understanding of dance creation and performance.

Adopting a phenomenological methodology aims to capture the material of the performative nature from both movement and reflection. I must be aware of the personal interpretations and assumptions I bring to the work and ensure I do not have limitations based on personal aesthetics and preferences. I accomplish this by using a phenomenological lens to influence how I receive movement information because the research demonstrates the participants' lived experiences.

The research method involves gathering participant information using questionnaires, video diaries, and personal journals. Three participants chose to share a personal narrative of their experience with the researcher to include in the data collection. At the end of the projects, each participant was sent an online questionnaire containing several closed- and open-ended questions. The focus was on gaining qualitative insights rather than statistical analysis. This approach was helpful for understanding dancers' opinions, experiences, and perceptions. In Chapter 4, I will analyze this qualitative data using thematic analysis. This method allows for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data, facilitating a structured examination of the data. I chose this method because it can uncover distinctions of the creative process in practice-led research. This method will assist in making meaningful connections and interpretations of the participants' experiences. The data collection methods were chosen for their efficiency and compatibility with thematic analysis, ensuring a coherent analysis.

Collecting qualitative data in participatory practice-led research is essential to understanding the shared experiences of individuals. This data collection is marked by the discovery of connections, like threads in a web, that emerge through shared experiences (Ingold, 2008). With *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, participation begins with dancers in the studio, each bringing their unique histories, experiences, physiology, and psychology to the collective exploration of movement tasks. Incorporating phenomenology as a reflective practice deepens this exploration by focusing on the lived experience of dancers, not just as performers but as conscious beings engaging with space, time, and emotion. This approach encourages dancers and researchers alike to reflect on the essence of their experiences, exploring the ways in which movement is felt, perceived, and understood from a first-person perspective. Doing so provides an understanding of the intra-action between the body, mind, and environment, discovering connections in this cross-disciplinary research.

Creating Dance through the Perspective of Phenomenology

As a dance researcher, I observe dance through a phenomenological perspective to illuminate that the art form is in constant flow, ever-changing, and evolving. Phenomenology is used as a tool to examine dance and describe the structures within the lived experience of movement. One can capture movement components in crafting choreography works through the practice and action of reflective methods.

I recognize that the study of technical dance demonstrates that the creation of movement is an example of the intersection of thinking and doing; dancers consider movement development and present their thoughts as embodied expressions. However, this practice-led research investigates the relationship between dancers and materials in an attempt to alleviate preconceived movement ideas and instead create movement based on attending to the body in the

process of painting and reading their painting as a score. During the studio practice, I have witnessed the disappearance of preconceived thinking, leaving the dancer entirely present in the creative process, demonstrating an exchange between dance and materials, and reconstructing familiar choreographic tendencies.

Through a practice-led research approach (Candy and Edmonds, 2018: 63), I am exploring the interconnection of the emergent relationship between dancer and material through the lens of phenomenology. Understanding phenomenological philosophy underscores the experience of the dancer. This is because dance generated through the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method produces embodied ways of knowing and of experiencing whereby intention influences perception, allowing dualistic language dialogue to emerge. This can be observed in the ever-evolving relationship between the dancer and the painting that guides the development of the choreography.

The phenomenological methodology used in this project aims to capture the material of the performative nature from both lived movement and journal reflections. Sondra Fraleigh, somatics educator and leader in dance proclaims, “When phenomenology is true to its intent, it never knows where it is going” (Fraleigh, 1991: 11). A choreographer must rely on trust held within the experimental process to arrive at meaning. Considering phenomenology is present-centered, while phenomena are held within time consciousness, reverberation is contained within past-present, which flows into a succession of ‘the now’ reflection that unites a series of retentions. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone discusses the notion that “past, present and future – form distinct interrelated units...whose meaning derives from their being intrinsic to the whole” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015: 12). Through an understanding of Sheets-Johnstone’s unique perspective, one can build a deeper relationship between experience and movement through

reflective analysis of inquiry that corporal revelations develop meaning in creating works of art.

A phenomenological perspective provides insightful ways we experience creating choreography and a deeper understanding of the nature of our experience. Max van Manen declares in his text *Phenomenology of Practice*, “Phenomenology is also a project that is driven by fascination being swept up in a spell of wonder, a fascination with meaning... and then infuses us, permeates us, infects us, touches us, stirs us, exercises a formative effect” (Manen, 2007: 12). It is through imagination that visual imagery comes to life through the aesthetics of the human body. Through a choreographic phenomenological investigation, the dance composer could attempt to uncover structures through framed experiences in a rehearsal that illustrate descriptions to be formed within the art-making methods. For example, *Synergetic Agential Choreography* develops impressions by exploring visual-kinetic imagery in the studio with dancers and not from preconceived movement representation intentions.

Phenomenological reflection interprets the relationship between passive thinking and active doing by which consciousness becomes aware of itself in the world. One cannot reflect on the lived experience while living in the moment before it has been appropriated by reflection. As in viewing dance, we cannot predict the final choreographic score through chance movements. Foucault expressed this accurately when he stated:

I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it? What is true for writing and for love relationships is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end.

(Foucault, 1988: 232)

In creating frameworks to explore unique modes within choreographic structures and developing choreography works, I must be objectively receptive to individual experiences when

working with a group of dancers. The necessity is outlined by the approach to abandon preconceived ideas and honor the choices of the unsolicited body. To ensure that my approach matches that of the dancers' tasks, I accept inspired movement and guide dancers who are compelled by technical movement choices to investigate the root of the movement. This way, the movement materializes from intention and provocation, not habit.

As the choreographer, the studio is the laboratory, and the phenomenological reflection guides the performative assessment possibilities. Through philosopher Edmund Husserl's "Bracketing," the reduction process removes judgment from the choreographer's bias from the work and allows the practice to speak for itself. This kind of confident faith is where the choreographer gets out of the way, removing their ideas and conditions on the artwork's meaning and allow perceptions to emerge through the process or flow. Interpreting these meanings signifies an internal perception of impressions, which Husserl suggests "is brought to appearance in the actual momentary phase of the flow of consciousness – specifically, in its series of retentive moments – are the past phases of the flow of consciousness" (Husserl, 1907: 88). Here, meaning is constructed and reveals correlations between movement and painting and how the movement of the painting is presented through a kinesthetic practice.

Moving back and forth through the process includes a reflective analysis of observation, reduction, and self-reflection. As in Figure 12, gaining transition moments during movement finds a performative quality, and transitions become realized through visual imagery within the choreography composition. The development of choreography through phenomenology is essential to challenge the aesthetics of movement as a dimension of interpretive inquiry. It makes a dance what it is and could not be without it. It strives to materialize its essence and describe the composition and significance of emerging methods in creating a choreographic score through a

lived experience.



Figure 12—*Adaptation* (project #6): photo captured during the experimental painting of a large canvas on the ground using the participant's body and costume as a tool to paint, 2022

Creative Practice Design

The following section outlines the participatory practice-led research method adopted for this research project, emphasizing the role of creative practice in generating knowledge and insights. A participatory practice-led approach is particularly relevant in fields where the creation process

is not just an output but an integral part of the research inquiry (Anttila, 2015). Thus, my approach harnesses various methods, including experimental art practice, movement tasks, and performative installations, among others, to explore and understand the embodied experiences of participants.

Practice-led research is defined by its focus on the practice itself as both the source and method of research. This approach is grounded in the idea that knowledge and understanding can emerge through creation, whether in art, design, performance, or other creative disciplines (Smith, 2009). It contrasts with more traditional research methodologies that prioritize theoretical or empirical data collection and analysis as primary sources of insight.

For this project, participatory methods are particularly effective in capturing the subtle ways in which participants interact with and are affected by the creative process. By involving participants directly in creating and analyzing art and movement, I bridge the gap between subjective experience and academic inquiry. This approach also allows for the emergence of new insights that might not be accessible through more conventional research methods.

A notable benefit of this research methodology in the context of my practice-led approach is its collaborative nature and the use of mixed media. By working closely with participants and employing a variety of mediums (e.g., painting materials, mobile phones for capturing video, and musical scores to complement movement choices), the research fosters a multidimensional exploration of the subject matter. The dancers and I worked together to determine the musical score for the performance. Musical scores were played during movement exploration, decided upon through the investigation of the paint on canvas and the movement generated based on reading the canvas as a score. Music pairings were chosen to enhance the dynamics between painting and created movement, amplifying moments of shape and stillness or

magnifying quick or isolated movements. The final music choice for each project was layered after choreographic phrases were developed, with the movement originating from the creation of the painting and the finished artwork. This inclusivity and diversity of tools and perspectives enhance the depth of the insights generated and the ability to share them with others.

This thesis showcases a participatory practice-led research methodology that embodies a holistic approach to exploring the creative arts. By placing emphasis on the creative process and participants' experiences, this methodology guides the development and implementation of the *Synergetic Agential Choreographic* approach. Not only does this contribute new knowledge to the academic field, but it also enhances the participants' comprehension of their own creative capabilities and experiences.

Research Methods

The following section describes the methods employed in the eight projects that comprise this research project. As I began this research, the dancers I collaborated with during my MFA were curious about my ongoing education and expressed their interest in working with me on future research. Through the initial two projects, I recognized the significance of engaging with dancers from diverse ages and backgrounds. To this end, I proactively reached out to local institutions and dance companies, forging valuable connections with those eager to collaborate with me. This proved to be a pivotal step, as it enabled me to work with dancers I had not previously had the opportunity to collaborate with.

Whether it was *CANVAS*, the very first project featuring talented high school dancers, or *Throughline*, which brought the finesse of a seasoned professional ballet dancer to the forefront, each project was crafted to investigate the cross-disciplinary interactions of dance and painting. Likewise, *Patchwork* showcased the dynamism of revisiting and building upon past works, while

Tunneling embraced modern methods of virtual collaboration. *The Impetus* and *Adaptation* stood out for their inclusivity, demonstrating that dance is a universal language, transcending traditional training. *Carousel* showcased seasoned professionals with a proactive approach, embodying the spirit of collaboration. Finally, *Together* bridged geographical divides and celebrated the richness of global dance cultures. In this section, readers will encounter the processes, the participants, and the inspirations that drove each project to materialize the choreographic process.

The eight projects were designed to engage dancers of varying backgrounds in the developing method of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. For each project, I collected data through questionnaires, dancer reflections, personal observation notes, video documentation, photographs, and reflective writing. Expressing my personal phenomenological experience of the work I witnessed, I wrote notes while I was in the studio (see Appendix E) and transcribed them with additional notes into a digital archive (See Volume 2). This comprehensive documentation permitted me to revisit each completed project and identify throughlines in the most effective ways to engage dancers in the choreographic method.

Furthermore, questionnaires were distributed at the end of the projects (See Appendix B) to understand the dancers' experiences best. This way, my language, instructions, and ways of presenting the method and materials continuously evolved to engage in best practices determined by the dancers' experiences in the studio and after the practice. As I progressed through the projects, I documented each creative process through video recording (see Volume 2), which was reviewed and aided by personal observation notes taken throughout the projects. The choreography developed throughout each project was integrated into screendances that showcased the connection between painting and choreography.

Visual Art Making Methods

To best explore choreography through the cross-disciplinary entry point, the various fluid acrylic paint pouring methods were employed in the eight research projects:

Dirty Pour

Various paint colors are poured into a cup and poured onto the canvas.

Flip Cup Technique

Various paint colors are layered into a cup and then flipped onto the canvas.

Ribbon Pour Technique

Pour paint in the shape of a ribbon onto the canvas and tilt the canvas until the desired image.

Ring Pour Technique

Paint colors are layered into a cup and slowly poured onto the canvas in a circular motion.

Straw Blowing Technique

After pouring paint onto a canvas, use a straw to blow the paint in the desired direction.

Swipe Technique

Drizzle paint colors on the canvas and use a tool to swipe lightly across the painting.

Materials and Tools

The following materials and tools were used in the eight research projects. Some materials, such as canvas and paint, were used in every project, while other materials and tools were only used based on the pour method executed in the specific project.

Materials

Canvas, Acrylic Paint, Glue, Water, Silicon Oil

Tools

Paint Swatches (for swiping), Straws, Cups, Tarps, and Stir Sticks

CANVAS / Project #1, April - June 2021

This project began during the COVID-19 pandemic, introducing some challenges for studying dance. The pandemic's effects, including public health guidelines like lockdowns and social distancing, made traditional methods such as in-person observations and group discussions more difficult. These methods are essential for understanding the subtleties of dance. Additionally, the ability of dancers to perform together and participate in group activities was limited, affecting this study of dance in its typical group settings. However, we adapted by using online tools for research and communication, even though we missed out on the direct interaction and energy of live dance settings.

Day 1***Acrylic Swipe Paintings***

The participants in the first project were four high school students from Ocean, New Jersey, between the ages of 16 and 18. Meeting in the studio, they were shown a painting demonstration of the swipe technique with acrylic pouring paints on canvas. Figure 13 is a photograph of a swipe painting I demonstrated to show the participants in project #1 how to engage in this method of painting. They were given three canvases (2, 8 inch x 10 inch & 1, 16 inch x 20 inch) and chose colors for their project before creating their swipe painting. It was noted that one participant strictly followed the directions in the demonstration, one swiped their painting vertically and horizontally on her small canvases and diagonally on the larger one, another participant swiped all three canvases in wave motions, and the final participant deviated from the directions altogether. I did not stop anyone or redirect their process. I allowed the art to live and grow through them.

The two paintings in Figure 17 (used for project #2) were created collectively on 24-inch x 36-inch and 36-inch x 48-inch canvases. The participants were still utilizing the swipe technique. When given directions, “*I would like you to make a patchwork together,*” surprisingly, the one participant who fully strayed from the directions in the first exercise followed my exact directions when creating this painting. The other painting turned into a galaxy of paint cells and waves. As our time painting together came to a close, the participants worked in pairs rather than altogether on one piece or their own.

I was especially intrigued by the ‘choreography’ of the paint on canvas. The shared agency between humans and non-humans in the production, the unpredictable movement, and the pouring medium added to the process demonstrating a place where method meets art and art meets method. Somewhere in between digested and reverberated diffractions are murmuring of material thinking. An entanglement of practice and processes. A transformation of enactments and re-articulation recapturing relationships. This could open space in the dancer’s imagination and activate self-experimentation, which is essential to understanding the art-making process.



Figure 13—*CANVAS* (project #1): researcher demonstrating swipe technique to participants, 2020

Day 2

First Movement Investigation with Bodies

Participants chose a painting they created on day one to investigate and explore body movement by visually mapping it. First, they mapped their painting, with their fingers reading it as a score to lead the movement, allowing the body to follow. The dancers improvised body movements for 5-10 minutes and video recorded themselves. They were then asked to review the footage and identify new movement patterns that stood out to them. This could be a phrase or movement that was repetitive in motion. They then set this pattern as a phrase. Next, they were asked to explore movement dynamics, such as lightness, then tension with the newfound movement phrase. They were then asked to incorporate traveling in space and reflect upon how the paint travels on the canvas. The layering of the tasks added texture to the movement, simulating texture in their paintings.

The dancers used their paintings as a blueprint for movement exploration. Some of their movements were interesting, fresh, and original. Still, some were elementary, as if they had a pencil in their hand (or foot) and were trying to trace the movement of the painting on a two-dimensional plane in space. By manipulating their initial movement and adding layers of dynamics to the movement, the dancers engaged more in the sense of freedom in their movement. Since this was the first time they read their paintings as a score, they wondered if they were doing it *right*. It was as if I could see their conversation with this painting. They were looking and listening for the movement on the canvas to transfer to their body, not just diffracting the image but applying it comfortably to the body and skin.

Day 3

Sharing Choreography

After creating their movement phrase, each participant was taught the pattern they had developed with the group. The dancers were required to recall their movements and explain the set pattern, including the dynamics hidden in the in-between moments. This choreography allowed for exploring new possibilities between the dancers and the nature of the creative act between object and self and self with others. The self turns inside out as it is given to others to explore unfamiliar movement patterns. Reflecting on this, I wonder how much will be altered throughout the practice and what will remain the same.

Connecting the Phrases

To create the movement material for the performance piece, I combined different techniques, such as tracing one's hand to map another dancer's foot movement and using painting as a guide. Each phrase smoothly transitions into the next, allowing the dancer's voice to express itself through the use of space. The body's history influences techniques, including *rond de jambe*, leg

in *attitude*, and pointed feet. However, I am curious as to how best to push the dancers beyond these established techniques. How can they use their painting as inspiration and translate it into body language that goes beyond their usual boundaries?

Day 4
Stop the Movement

I wanted the dancers to stop and reflect on stillness. Shapes are captured within the permanence held within the painting, not as movements within an already determined image of dance. The dancers were asked to link the concept of texture trapped on the canvas to the bodily structure. I wanted the dancers to reflect upon what moves us, not how we move, and feel the energy shift within their bodies. At this point, I was still determining how this layer would be added to the final piece of choreography. I wanted the dancers to stop moving, read the score, and transcribe it through intentioned gestures.

Figures 14 and 15 show several photos from this task. Two dancers seize five different images from their painting and capture them in time and space. The shapes of their bodies are derived from their interpretations of the paint on canvas and then pieced together as a choreographic phrase. The phrasing is influenced by the movement of the dancer's gaze when viewing their painting.



Figure 14—*CANVAS*, (project #1): dancer translating images from painting to gesture within the body, 2021



Figure 15—*CANVAS* (project #1): dancer translating images from painting to gesture within the body, 2021

Day 5

Connecting the Dots/Composition Process

This process was not a conventional way of creating or learning choreography for these young dancers. It differs from the typical codified movement they learn in their dance studios. It is not a style they are familiar with, yet it was produced from the creative power held within their voice.

A styling is produced from a reflective relationship with their paintings. In a sense, it is an aesthetic of shared territories and negotiating space.

At this point in the process, I was still unsure how to connect the dots. At first, movements were put together based on how easily one shape flowed into the next. However, I quickly realized that I needed to consider the information provided by the painting to influence the entire choreographic score, like the transitions between one movement and the next and the spatial patterns of bodies in space.

Figure 16 is a photograph of my notes, which I used in preparing the dancer for the transitions created in the dance composition. The dance started with the four dancers in a diagonal, in the same direction as the dancer referred to as "S" in my notes painting. As the dancers traveled in the patterns to get to their next placement, they traversed in a directional flow the dancer referred to as "Sc" in my notes and how their painting flowed. Joining to face center in the subsequent placement was connected to where dancer "O" swiped the paint on her entire canvas. In the last placement, they dropped one at a time, like the paint on the canvas, and in the end, they moved into shapes connected to this individual task as the dance came to a close.

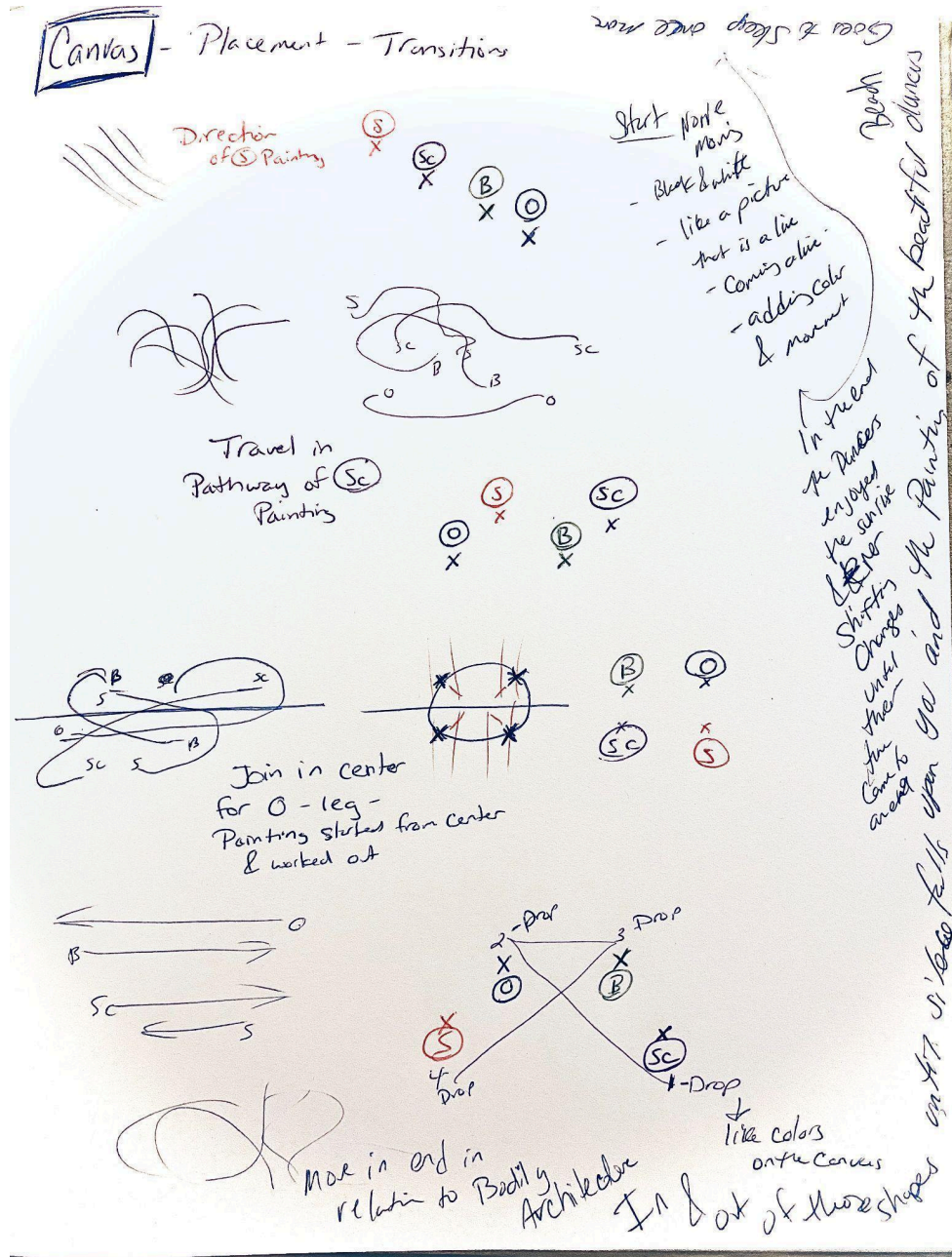


Figure 16—CANVAS (project#1): researcher notes for the transition of composition in space, 2021

To view studio-lab work for *CANVAS*, open the following link:

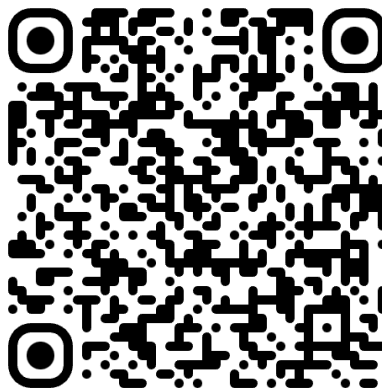
<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/studio-laboratory/canvas>



QR Code 5—*CANVAS*, studio lab practice

The performance from the *CANVAS* project can be view at:

<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/performances/canvas>



QR Code 6—*CANVAS*, performance project

Patchwork / Project #2, July - September 2021

The project *Patchwork*, shown evolving in Figure 17, features a painting collaboratively created by two participants working together on the large canvas in the photograph. These dancers participated in *CANVAS* and made the painting during that project. Here, art and dance combine, and dancers improvise movements inspired by the painting using chance methods. This improvisation, influenced by dynamic elements from the artwork, shapes the choreography and determines the final performance quality of the piece.



Figure 17—*Patchwork* (project #2): collaborative painting creation, 2020

Day 1

Developing a Sense of Chance within the Tasks

Influenced by the work of John Cage, I used chance methods to guide the development of *Patchwork* to structure movement exploration tasks based on images in the paintings. The popsicle stick method was used and expanded upon (as described on page 59), with the popsicle sticks having different movement execution dynamics written on them to leave it up to chance as

to how the actions were presented. A roll of the dice prescribed both the timing and repetition of the choreography.

Participant One

The participant chose a stick with white at the tip, which led them to pick a patch from the painting with white in it. The second stick she picked had the body part *fingers* to trace and map their painting/movement. In evolving the phrase, the third stick they pulled out of a cup was *vision/projection*. The final stick they drew from the cup was the *floor*, which expanded and varied the movement creation.

Participant Two

The second participant chose a stick with blue at the tip, leading them to choose a blue patch. The second stick they picked was a body part, *ribcage*, to trace and map their painting/movement. In evolving the developing phrase, the third stick they pulled out of a cup was *sharp*. The final stick they drew from the cup was *travel*, which expanded and varied the movement into a new phrase.

Figure 18 is a photograph captured as dancer two responded to the first task. As both young dancers had worked with me on the *CANVAS* project, they understood the work's ambition was to explore personal voice through their movement aside from codified technique.



Figure 18—*Patchwork* (project #2): dancer exploring movement related to chance method task, 2021

During the process, the dancers began to understand that the method was not about developing their existing technique but finding new ways for their bodies to move through exploring the painting as a choreographic device. They began discovering there was no wrong way to use their body as a thinking tool and to trust the knowledge their body was producing. As they faced the back of the room, the mirror did not assist them in determining aesthetics. When asked to turn around for me to film them, I noticed that ego might get in the way as one of the participants questioned their movement choice. I told them to trust the process and let the

painting guide their body. I was not worried about how it looked. I wanted the movement to be as abstract as the painting.

Allowing the energy to pass back and forth from painting to body and body to mind with new tasks enables different ideas about orienting oneself in and through dance and the world. As a group, we discussed how the pulse of humanity influences the decisions we make in our lives and that we become an extension of threads designing the fabric of our society. As for these young dancers, this process produces a new level of awareness. We talked about the last piece they performed and filmed as we began to think about how this one may be suited for a public venue, in a space where they could fade into the natural landscape and stand out for moments at a time.

This led to more profound thoughts, possibilities, and orientations to help them move out of their habitual models of movement and perception, something exciting in terms of the performative practice for these young dancers who have only performed on a proscenium stage. The idea of obscuring dialogue with additional patchworks of mediums within a public venue not only carries the thought of visual image impact for a film but also the projection of the human scale within the level of work. The score is becoming a means of shaping our thoughts beyond the dance into life itself.

Day 2 ***Roll of the Dice***

After seeing how excited the participants were with the previous chance structure, I wanted to continue to present something new to incorporate into the movement-driven tasks. A roll of the dice prescribed both timing and repetition of the choreography. Figure 19 shows the dancers filling out a chart used to collect outcomes from their dice rolls (see Appendix A). First, I had the

dancers evaluate how many movements they had developed within their phrases. They then rolled the dice many times for the number of movements within the phrase. The goal was to apply this number to the timing of each movement.



Figure 19—*Patchwork* (project #2): dancers filling out their roll of the dice chart, 2021

Detour

The dancers had a tough time with this task. The challenge was in the historical rhythmic dance of counting in eights or sixes. The participants had to keep looking back at their papers. We discussed if the movement had been choreographed to be sharp (1 count) or suspended (with 12 counts), this would be easier to remember. What was discovered is that not all methods in practice-led research are effective or worth repeating.

From this experience, I told the dancers not to focus on timing. I did not want to spend time on this task but be aware of their movement's duration. Sometimes, the audience needs time to digest their movement or gesture. I told them not to rush through the progression of their movement to get to the subsequent phrase work.

Repeat

I had the dancers repeat each movement within their phrases for the next dice roll. They had no idea what the task would be when rolling the dice. The repetition amount for each movement depended on the number of dice landed. Reflecting on the previous task, they could vary the timing of each movement repeated. For example, if they rolled the dice on a four the first time, the move could last for two counts, the second time 8, the next 4, and then 1 count. They had to repeat the move as many times as the dice dictated. They could also travel or change the direction the movement was facing to add additional texture to the choreography.

Day 3

Back to the Sticks

I wanted the dancers to generate more movement from various patches within the painting. I had them pick another stick to leave it up to chance what color patch they would be developing their movement from. They then picked another stick to dictate which body part would lead the movement. After the development of this movement, I had them roll the dice once. With the number they rolled, they were instructed to walk around the building, find objects of the same color, and create a gesture reflective of them. Why? Because the conversation of patchwork and society came back into our discussion and the idea of performing the final piece in public. At one

point in the performative piece, we decided they would look for a particular color within the space and embody that color in time and space.

Day 4

Self within the Patchwork of Art

As I immersed myself in the work, I began to explore the role of chance in the creative process. I soon discovered the beauty of randomness as I picked up a stick and allowed it to guide me toward a color patch on the painting. Another stick then determined the body part that would lead the movement, while another added texture and dynamics to the motion. The end result was not predetermined but rather emerged from a dialogue between the painting and my body. My aim was not to undermine the existing methods of the work but to actively participate in the process and contribute to the choreographic and performative aspects of the work. By doing so, I hoped to reflect on the meaning of the work and the discussions we had shared. Figure 20 shows photos of myself engaged in exploring these tasks.



Figure 20— Researcher personally exploring *Patchwork* tasks, 2021

After completing the tasks, I understood why some of the dancers were struggling with the movements they produced when they turned around to watch themselves in the mirror. The movement was not the typical aesthetic choreography produced in a dance studio. These participants were young dancers competing in state and national dance competitions. The movement would only be satisfactory for such stages if refined with music and timing, but that was not the objective. The goal was to flesh out codified techniques and discover new movement

possibilities by interpreting the painting as a *score*. The outcomes were unpredictable and unplanned chance occurrences. The next time I worked with the dancers, I taught them the phrase I had developed and explored timing together. This was the first time I shared my personal movements with the participants, and it was fitting because a narrative began to form with the dancers during our talks about art and society, shaping space and sharing our work with others within the community. Taking part in the research exploration personally and sharing more than just the concept but also the choreographic nature in reflection on the context added an element of inseparability, supporting the theory of agential realism (Barad 2021).

Day 5 Jumps and Turns

As I entered the final workshops with the dancers, I wanted to explore movements that would challenge them more than the tasks I had given thus far. Still working with the method of chance, I had the dancers pick two sticks with colors at the tip. They were asked to jump from one color patch to the next. Where and how would you land? Would you generate a shape or pattern in the air, during take-off, or in landing? They were asked to connect the movement. One comment made by a dancer that stuck out to me was, "The challenge is being able to be in the air long enough to get the shape in your body, especially when the movement in the painting is so organic...it is trying to find fluidity in the body."

The directives for the turning task were to pick a color stick and find an image within a patch that stood out to them. Turn like never before. How can the body take off or prepare to move or turn through space? What form or shape does it take in motion? Think of the body as a whole and embody this image as it rotates around the body. One of the dancers needed help with developing unfamiliar movements in this task. The turn creation was a mixture of recognizable

turns concurrently with a landing. The dancer stated, "I have something in my head. I just don't know how to do it." This suggests the project challenges the participant and provides her with creative opportunities to develop the necessary skills to find alternative ways to express their ideas.

Day 6 Shared Movement

As the concluding task of this project, I aimed to create a sense of cohesion among the dancers by encouraging them to connect their movements and collaborate. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these dancers had to maintain social distance while working together on *CANVAS*. They wore masks while working in the studio and we avoided physical contact with each other. However, they were now fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and the state of New Jersey no longer mandated mask-wearing indoors for fully vaccinated individuals. Although the dancers had already been observing and appreciating each other's work, I wanted them to physically connect and create something together using the movements that they had developed independently. Figure 21 illustrates the dancers working in collaboration on this shared movement task. For the final task, I asked them to select their favorite phrase and link it to a new one, ultimately creating a unified movement that concluded the dance.



Figure #21—*Patchwork* (project #2): participants working together on a shared movement task, 2021

To view studio-lab work for *Patchwork*, open the following link:

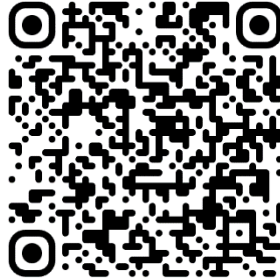
<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/studio-laboratory/patchwork>



QR Code 7—*Patchwork*, studio lab practice

The performance from the *Patchwork* project can be view at:

<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/performances/patchwork>



QR Code 8—*Patchwork*, performance project

***Throughline* / Project #3, October - November 2021**

For the project, *Throughline*, I collaborated with a professional dancer, allowing me to observe and reflect on dancing abilities at different learning stages. The participant had trained in a dance studio throughout their childhood, attended college to earn a BFA in Dance, and had been dancing with a professional ballet company for two years. With *Throughline*, I intended to explore how these techniques could be used as instructional tools for novice dancers still focused on perfecting their technique and experienced dancers who wore them as second skin.

Day 1

On the first day in the dance studio, the participant was introduced to the flow painting and ring pour techniques. She was then given a white costume that represented a blank canvas. I reassured her that she need not worry if any paint ended up on her costume. As the session began, there was a sense of uncertainty and curiosity about what would become of this project, this canvas, this body in costume, and this dance. I emphasized the importance of trusting the process and

allowing the art to take on a life of its own. She soon became fully immersed in the creative process.

Paint Flow

After completing the painting, I had the dancer explore movement tasks on the same day. This served as a more instantaneous bridge between the two art forms and presented a perfect opportunity for her to recollect the painting experience, reflect on the process, and take action and dance. The transition from canvas to movement was seamless. I was amazed by the participant's fluidity throughout the entire process. Her embodiment of visual art was raw and genuine, untouched by self-consciousness or the weight of external judgments. Not once did she exhibit egotistical behavior, nor did she second-guess her movements.

Notably, she refrained from looking at the mirror during her improvisation. During *CANVAS* and *Throughline*, I discouraged participants from doing so because mirrors often become distraction tools. Dancers usually become preoccupied with the form and shape of their bodies rather than immersing themselves in the essence of their movement. This dancer was wholly in the moment. Her dance wasn't just a series of movements but an extension of the painting she just created. The embodiment of visual art through movement was synergetic. It was a testament to the power of art to transcend mediums and evoke deep emotional responses. The experience left a mark on me, highlighting the boundless potential of this cross-disciplinary artistry.

Paint Hits the Canvas

The next task was to recall the action of the paint hitting the canvas. The improvisation was

informative in that it was as if the painting was speaking to the dancer. In response, they began a conversation, or perhaps their memory of the paint hitting the canvas spoke to them. They were sharing this experience; the dancer with the painting and the painting with the dancer. Their movements were intentional and graceful, as if they wanted the painting to hear them as if it were alive. I observed the dancer throughout this improvisational task and soon noticed they were developing a deep relationship with the painting. They were fully immersed in their artistic expression and seemed to be in a state of flow throughout the process.

Figure 22 is a photograph taken during the session. It shows the dancer intently focused on their painting while engaged in movement. Their gaze was fixed on their work, and they seemed to be in awe of what they had produced. It was as if the dancer thanked the painting for its inspiration, appreciative of the beauty they had created together. The ease with which they moved was impressive, with no hesitation or uncertainty in their actions. They were full of movement material, which was absolutely stunning to witness.



Figure 22—*Throughline* (project #3): the dancer engaged in an improvisational movement task after painting, 2022

Day 2***Hand Tracing***

As the dancer mapped the painting leading with their hands, they were working deeply on the task. The dancer operated on a different level than the younger dancers, who would try to look in the mirror and question their movement. There were no questions. There was no wrong way to move. Like the day they made the painting, here again, the participant was having a dialogue with the painting, asking it a question, allowing the answer to guide their movement, and then looking back to the painting to gather more information. The material produced varied in level and energy. The dancer reviewed the filmed footage and set the phrase exactly as it was improved. The choreographic phrase evolved by adding traveling and transitions that were guided by information from the painting.

Shape / Gesture

The dancer was asked to select six sections from their painting that resonated with them. She was then instructed to use her body to replicate and interpret these visuals, allowing them to become a medium reflecting their perception of the chosen image within their painting. Figure 23 showcases three dance poses juxtaposed with the original images from the artwork, each portraying the participant's personal connection and rendition of the chosen images.

After forming these shapes, poses, or gestures, the dancer looked at their painting and connected these images, much like connecting the dots. They were instructed to imagine the dance floor as an extension of the canvas and navigate through it, tracing the pattern of the images in the painting onto the dance floor

Upon establishing the shapes and patterns in space, the dancer was asked to infuse dynamics into their movements when they reached the corresponding position in space. The goal

was to immerse the dancer in the experience emphasizing the physical form of visual input from the painting as opposed to a string of continuous movement. These dynamics encompass tension, release, vibration, sharpness, and lightness.

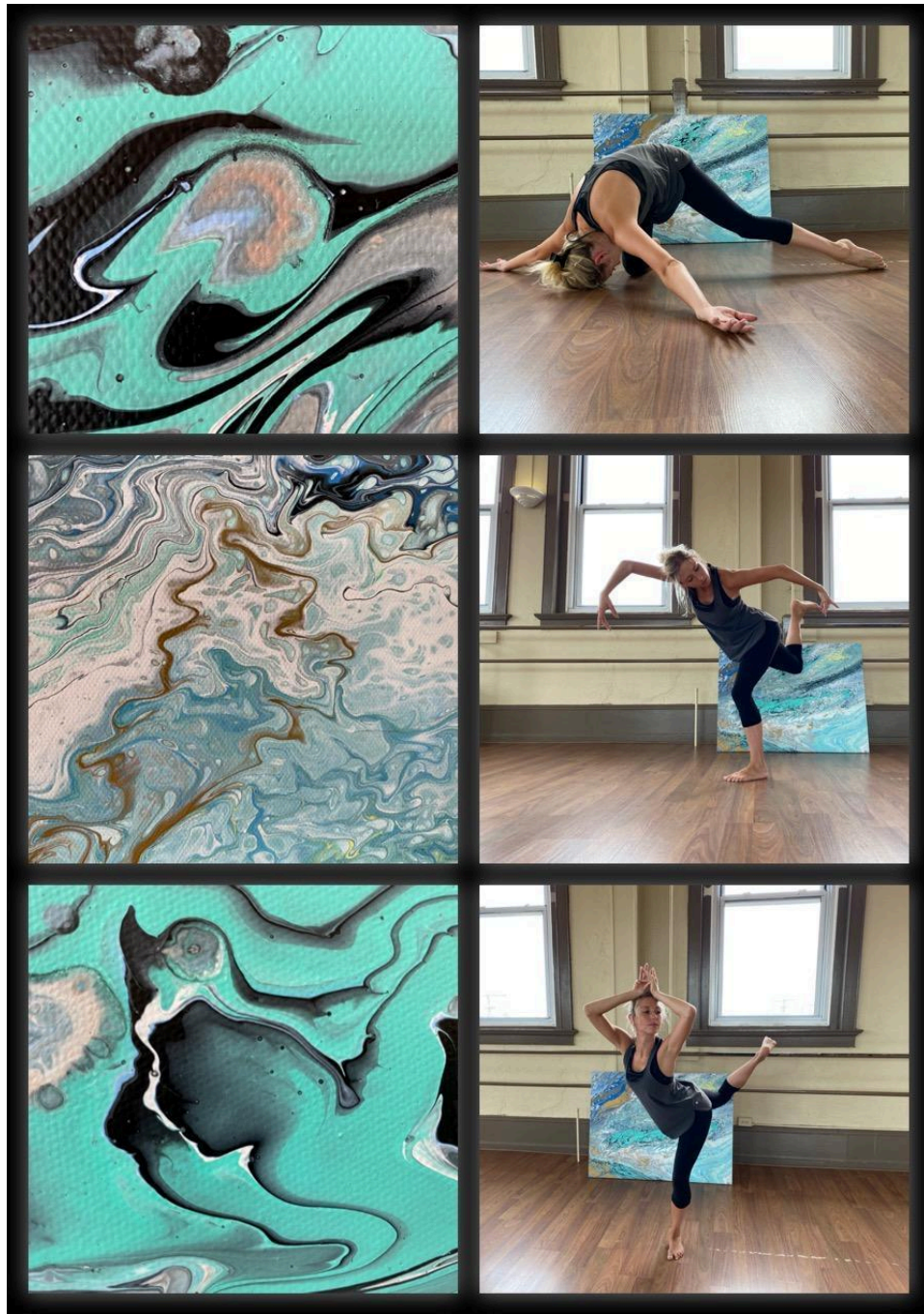


Figure 23—*Throughline* (project #3): photos of images within the painting and the dancer translating those images to their physical body, 2021

Day 3

Foot Tracing

As we moved on to the final task, I returned to the popsicle sticks and chance method to dictate what colors within the painting would be mapped and what body part would initiate the movement. The first stick the dancer chose was a *blue* stick, then a stick with the word *foot* written on it. The dancer stood up the entire time, which I found interesting as usually when I participate in mapping with my foot, I end up on the floor, and those next to me do as well. This is a moment when the act of intersubjectivity affects bodies in a shared experience. In this case, only one dancer participated in working on the task.

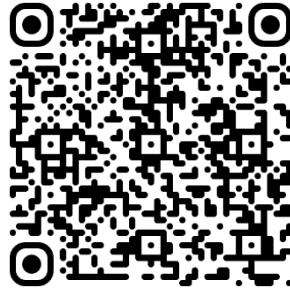
They chose another stick with the dynamic *sharp* which led them to add accents to the movement, and the final stick was *floor*. The dancer expressed that taking the movement to the floor was their favorite task. The participant completed the task smoothly. The dancer transferred the material they had carved in space while standing and carried it to the floor, adding volume and texture to the phrase. This, in turn, added multiple dimensions to the movement, affecting the phrase development and documented film footage demonstrating nuances and dynamics in the painting observed and translated by the dancer.

Choreographic Arrangement

After a few rehearsals, we had an abundance of movement phrases to work with. It was time to start piecing together the choreography. We began with one of the first movements we explored, then composed the work so that each movement flowed seamlessly into the next. Our primary focus was to connect with the paint-making process, the dialogue formulated with the painting, and the shared agency in the choreographic process. Studio-lab documentation and the finalized dance film of the outcome can be viewed here.

To view studio-lab work for *Throughline*, open the following link:

<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/studio-laboratory/throughline>



QR Code 9—*Throughline*, studio lab practice

To view the dance film, *Throughline*, open the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjgw3Kecmuo>.

The photograph in Figure 24 was taken on the final day. The dance was performed and filmed in Tony La Salle’s art gallery in Asbury Park, New Jersey, in fall of 2021. I found this gallery and artist’s work to be inspiring. After conversing with him and explaining the work I was doing with dancers, he invited us to bring our visual and performing arts to life within his space. We were determined to capture every aspect of the creative process, so we filmed the entire journey from the moment the paint hit the canvas in the studio to the last movement the body made in space in the gallery.



Figure 24—*Throughline* (project #3): final performance filmed in an art gallery, dancers painting on the wall, 2021

***The Impetus* / Project #4, December 2021 - January 2022**

The Impetus began with an open-call audition at a Middlesex College in Edison, New Jersey.

Eight emerging dancers were selected to participate. These dancers ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-two years old. Half of the dancers had technical training since childhood and were competitive dancers, while the other half discovered their love for dance in their young adult life. During the project, the dancers were given various tasks to explore movement with the paintings they created.

Day 1

The participants were instructed on creating paintings using the flow painting and flip cup techniques. They were given white costumes and masks and told not to worry about paint getting

on them. The idea behind the white costumes was that they were like blank canvases that would develop a piece of artwork on themselves, on the 18-inch x 24-inch canvases, and through their dancing bodies. The inspiration for the costume painting came during *Throughline* and although uncertain about what would become of the project, the canvas, the body in costume, and, ultimately, the dance, faith in the process of making and doing permitted the visual art and the dance to evolve through the shared agency in all aspects of materiality.

The participants held the paint in anticipation, waiting for the signal to begin. Venturing into unexplored territory, there are no mistakes, only ‘happy accidents,’ as Bob Ross, the American painter and TV personality, would say. (S11E13) The gravity and the velocity of the paint medium on canvas determined the dancers’ completed visual artworks. Their paint could splash on their neighbor's canvas, as their energy and movement choices would influence others as they created together.

After the participants made individual paintings and cleaned their hands on the costumes, four canvases were placed in the center of the floor to complete the paintings. They were instructed to create these paintings together, with their paintings on the peripherals of the canvases they were focusing on, making the act of painting and the material itself a shared experience. Figure 25 demonstrates captures the participants working collaboratively. The participants soon realized they could not carefully pour the paint onto the blank canvases, as it would inevitably splatter on the others. From the beginning of the process, they were instructed to accept the unpredictable possibilities of artistic practice through its process.

Once all the paint was down, the participants were asked to tilt the canvas with a partner. It was explained that when they work with others in a group, they need to support and explain what they need from one another. Following this, they told one another when to turn the canvas,

which way to turn it, and when to stop, appreciating the painting, discussing what they liked about it, why they liked it, and when they felt it was complete.



Figure 25—*The Impetus* (project #4): dancers working collaboratively to create paintings for investigation, 2021

After the painting session, I encouraged the dancers to move around the painting to observe variations in paint and find visuals that their eyes gravitated towards. I then had the dancers clean themselves up to prevent any wet paint from transferring onto the Marley floor on the stage. I asked them to remember the feeling of uncertainty they had before they began painting and the questions they were asking themselves about their painting. It was fascinating to see how they interpreted the choreography and brought it to life through their movements.

Uncertainty

The task required dancers to evoke the sensation of uncertainty typically felt before splattering paint onto a canvas. Though the directive was to convey uncertainty, the dancers expressed confidence. They eagerly showcased their skills during their first task. Instead of hesitantly easing into their movements, each dancer drew inspiration and energy from their peers, engaging in spontaneous improvisation.

Traveling

The task was focused on full-body engagement. I asked the dancers to envision their bodies as paint flowing across a canvas, with the dance floor representing that canvas. While observing them do this, I noticed some reverted to familiar techniques and choreographies. I encouraged them to move beyond established methods, urging them to discover unique movements within their body's capabilities.

Paint Thrown on Canvas

I urged the dancers to truly represent the collaborative qualities of when they were throwing paint on a canvas together. Noticing that they seemed to dance merely for the sake of dancing, they were asked to slow down and genuinely embody the process. Despite my instructions, their movements remained relatively swift.

Paint on Self

In this task, the dancers were to embody the act of treating their bodies as a canvas. Their movements became much slower and more deliberate during this task. This reduced pace might

have been influenced by the intimate act of transferring paint on to their bodies or the sensation of pressure on one's own body.

Evolve the Movement

I quickly paired the dancers, instructing them to integrate the movements they had just crafted. The goal was to ensure a cohesive flow, regardless of whether one dancer's moves directly followed another's or if one phrase seamlessly transitioned to the next. By pairing dancers with distinct movement styles, I aimed to enhance the emerging movement vocabulary through their combined improvisational phrases. I wanted this evolving language of movement to influence their thought processes and empower them to shape the choreography actively.

Day 2

Body Parts Led by 'Chance'

For this task, I used popsicle sticks to design a game of chance. The task was for each individual to map their painting, depending on their chosen color, and guide the movement, focusing on a specific body part. All paintings were dry, so participants could view them upright on chairs and music stands. I also asked everyone to record their movements on their phones. This allowed them to view and reflect on their improvisation. After their initial movement exploration, participants were asked to choreograph a 30-second dance phrase, using the recorded films on their phones as a reference. Later, I introduced another task. I circled with the jar again, but each popsicle stick had different dynamics inscribed. The dancers were then tasked with expanding and adapting their movements based on these new dynamics. They recorded, improvised, and finalized their phrase once more.

Day 3***Compose Phrases***

Throughout our sessions, the collaborative creative process among the eight dancers led to an expansive and diverse range of movement material, which proved to be an enriching experience that would have been impossible to achieve by just one or two dancers. Although it was initially challenging to integrate these distinct movement pieces and develop seamless transitions, we soon discovered that this challenge was an opportunity to create a cohesive dance from our collective choreography.

As our time together was limited, and we aimed to present a final performance and screendance recording, we focused on shaping the choreography. To begin, I visualized how each dancer could incorporate and influence the stage, considering the use of space and movement throughout the performance. Gradually, we incorporated movements inspired by each dancer's paintings, weaving them together to construct our work, creating a unique experience that showcased the creativity and talent of each dancer.

Day 4***Rehearsal***

During the rehearsal process, I observed that the individuals without formal training were more likely to explore movement organically. At the same time, those who were disciplined in codified techniques tended to stick to a structured vocabulary. However, the practice soon leveled out a sense of hierarchy, focusing on improvisational movement that led the body in motion. The dancers had been given the responsibility to represent to the very best of their abilities the movements generated by each contributing dance artist. Through this accurate movement

representation, the choreographic collaboration encapsulated each dancer's unique movement responses to the paint on canvas.

All the dancers' expressive choices were considered while developing the final piece. It was interesting to note that the training level was irrelevant in uncovering the performance. It was later learned that these dancers did not know one another before working on this project. They were open-minded strangers who shared the method of mixing mediums to create from an unpredictable blank slate. The learned choreographic phrase was then recorded and used as a dance film intended to be projected during the live performance.

Figure 26 is a still from the rehearsal of *The Impetus*. This filmed rehearsal proved incredibly valuable for the dancers involved in the production, as they referred to it repeatedly throughout their practice and utilized it as a tool to refine and perfect their movements in anticipation of the live show. Thanks to this rehearsal footage, the dancers could analyze their performance in great detail and make adjustments where necessary. Ultimately, this contributed to a captivating film that overlapped with the making of the paintings.



Figure 26—*The Impetus* (project #4): photo of dancers during filmed rehearsal, 2021

To view studio-lab work for *The Impetus*, open the following link:

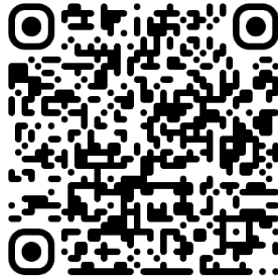
<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/studio-laboratory/the-impetus>



QR Code 10—*The Impetus*, studio lab practice

The screendance for *The Impetus* project can be viewed at:

<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/performances/the-impetus>



QR Code 11—*The Impetus*, performance

***Tunneling* / Project #5, February - March 2022**

Tunneling materialized from an ongoing dialogue with a professional dancer in Chicago, Illinois named Alia Montijo. Alia trained with BalletMet Columbus before earning an undergraduate degree from Ohio State University followed by a 15-year professional career with companies in New York, Michigan, and Chicago. During her ongoing professional career, Alia has studied the Cecchetti Method of ballet technique and the Horton Method of modern dance. Through numerous video call conversations regarding the work in progress, Alia would prompt me with questions that influenced various choices in my practice. These talks allowed me to present my research approach and discuss it with someone from the outside looking in.

During one of our conversations, Alia informed me about an upcoming visit to New York. I seized the opportunity and asked if she would be interested in participating in my research project. Unfortunately, time was a constraint, and we couldn't devote enough hours to create a flow painting. However, I suggested we work with a painting she had created as

live-performance art at the Conception Art Show in Chicago in 2019. The art show involved live painting on a canvas in front of an audience using her body as the painting tool, which was a fascinating concept to me. The painting method was different from the one I had been using. Still, it would be interesting to see how a participant would use a visual art piece they had previously created and use my research, the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method to design a dance.

Alia created her painting through the use of paint on her hands and feet transferred onto the canvas through a preconceived dance phrase based on her research on dance and quantum tunneling. Figure 27 showcases Alia in action, painting the canvas during the art show. Alia had not only created this piece but had also established a deep connection with it. The challenge was determining how one dance sequence would transition into the next.



Figure 27—*Tunneling* (project #5): dancer creating painting at an art festival in Chicago, 2019

Reading the Painting as Notation

Based on our different geographic locations, I in New Jersey and Alia in Chicago, I was not physically present in the studio investigation and this absence gave Alia movement autonomy void of in-the-moment directing. Therefore, she had to rely on our prior discussions spanning the last eighteen months, working without my direct guidance on technique and pace. I had simply instructed her to interpret the painting as a choreographic score. She was to note the specific parts of the painting that informed her movements, starting with tracing patterns using her hands, followed by her feet, hips, and rib cage. After this, I asked Alia to identify six distinct images within the painting and share close-up photos with me through text messages to document the exact visual impetus for their movement development. Once we discussed these chosen images, I directed her to adapt her body into forms resembling them, treating each image as a unique architectural blueprint within her physical form.

Choreo-Draft in the Studio

Alia composed the work by evolving the choreography, adding dynamics to the movement phrases, and including newfound body shapes. After I reviewed the development of the process through video documentation captured by Alia and shared with me, we discussed waiting until she arrived in New York City to work together in person on additional elements and textures to layer onto the piece. Knowing Alia's level of creativity and professionalism, I wanted to remove my influence from the step-by-step process that I maintained with the other projects. I gave her space to allow her painting to speak back to her so my aesthetic would not be expressed in this practice.

Together

I felt uncertain about articulating my expectations to Alia when we entered the studio. She was a seasoned professional, adept in ballet and the modern dance method of Horton Technique. Despite her petite stature, her dancing was powerful, characterized by elongated lines and an elevated torso. Setting aside my apprehensions, I approached this as a professional task. I trusted my research and the methods I had developed to shape the choreography. I sought clarification, asked the dancer how the painting influenced their movements, and occasionally pointed out familiar patterns in her dance. Our collaboration is captured in a photograph (Figure 28). Alia was receptive and valued my feedback. Together, we transformed ideas into the dancing body. Once finalized, the choreography was filmed and later transformed into a screendance developed to showcase and inform future creative processes.



Figure 28—*Tunneling* (project #5): working with Alia in the studio for the first time on movement choices, 2022

The final choreography for the *Tunneling* project can be viewed at:

<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/performances/tunneling>



QR Code 12—*Tunneling*, performance

Adaptation / Project #6, March - May 2022

Four students enrolled on a Fine Arts program from Raritan Valley Community College in Branchburg, New Jersey, collaborated on this project. These dancers' ages ranged from nineteen to twenty-four years old, and they came from various dance backgrounds with varying levels of dance experience. For example, one of the students had already graduated from the program, earned a bachelor's degree, and returned to continue taking dance classes at the college. Two students were majoring in dance in the program, while another recently took their first-ever dance class. One of the students attended a master class with me, where I brought in paintings and explained the practice.

Ribbon Pour Method ***Acrylic Paint & Silicone Oil***

After I demonstrated the ribbon pour technique, the participants were eager to start creating their own paintings. First, they selected the colors they wanted to use and the canvas sizes they wanted

to paint on. Everyone chose both a small and larger canvas to practice on. I allowed the dancers to combine paints into the cups independently. They did what is known as a *dirty pour*, where they dropped the paint into the cup without being conscious of layering the paint colors. As soon as they poured the paint onto the canvas, it spread from side to side. Then, they lifted the canvas to stretch the paint and allow it to flow over the canvas. Figure 29 shows one ribbon pour painting after the participant completed their piece.

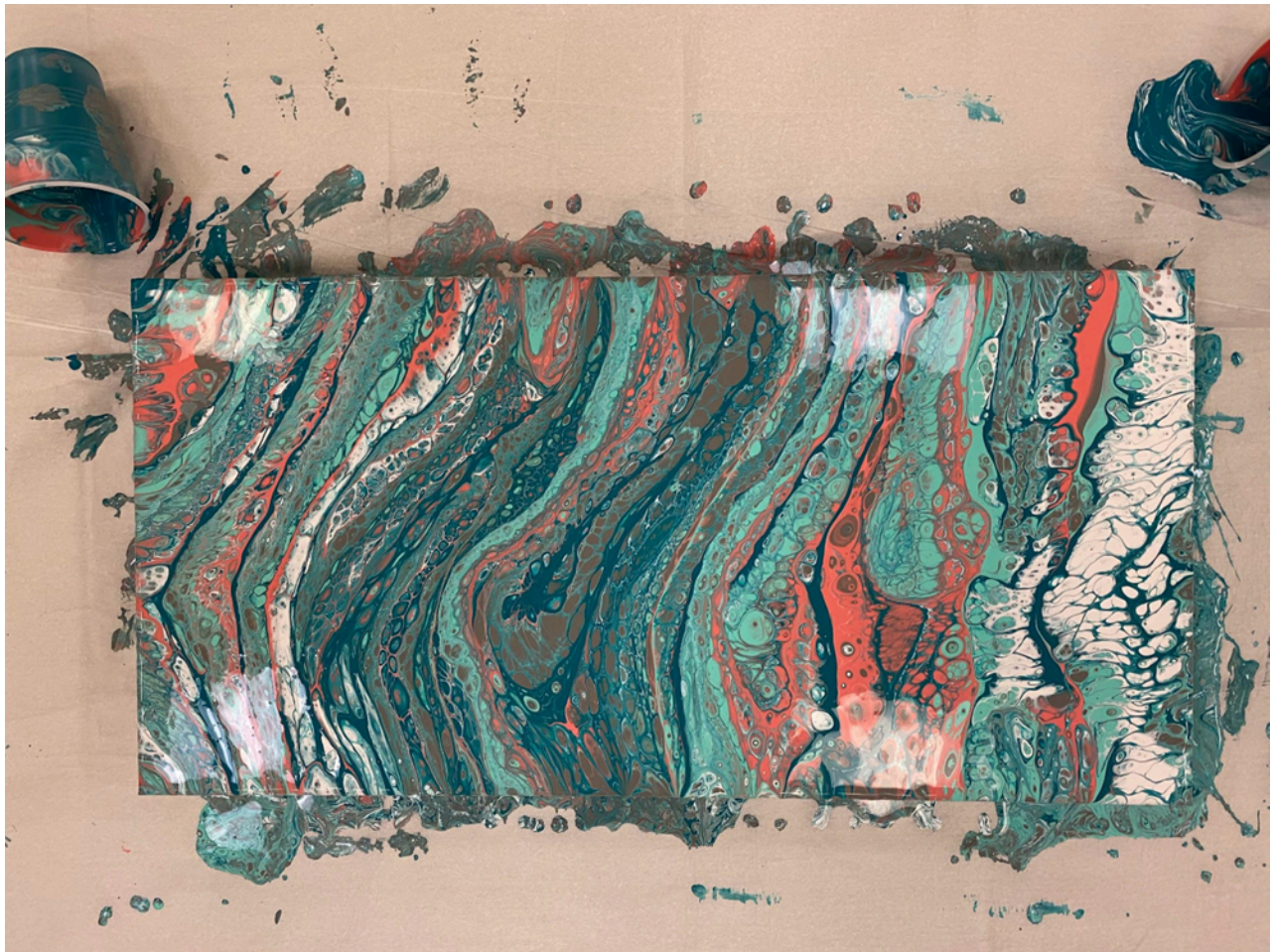


Figure 29—*Adaptation* (project #6) ribbon pour painting, 2022

First Improvisation Translation

After creating the paintings, the dancers were instructed to contemplate the process of pouring paint onto the canvas and represent this experience through their body movements, beginning with their heads. Then, they were asked to shift their focus to their knees, a body part less likely to lead the movement, to increase their awareness. Some dancers combined the movement of their heads and knees, incorporating the knees as an extension of the head movement. I then called for a volunteer to suggest the next body part, and a dancer proposed the hips. Following this improvisation, we captured the performance on camera utilizing both pictures and video. I had the dancers examine their paintings to identify a shape or pattern that stood out to them. I then asked them to consider translating this shape into a jump. Finally, they reviewed their videos and created a movement phrase for each task. Digital documentation affords dancers space from the painting and from each other to develop movements unaffected by the creative process of the others. It also provides the ability to zoom into the still-wet painting and identify layers, textures, and nuances difficult to perceive during the drying process.

During the next rehearsal, we created choreography by setting phrases for each dancer's tasks. Throughout the process, we discussed the behavior of the paint on the canvas and how it was manipulated. At the piece's beginning, the dancers move as if the dance floor were the canvas, embodying the movement of the paint flowing from side to side. Remembering the improvisation and resetting the phrases was challenging for some dancers as they struggled to recall what they had done during the task. I was glad this project could involve all bodies, regardless of their prior dance training. I soon noticed that the individual who had not been exposed to the codified technique was producing the most natural movement.

Shapes / Gestures

Shapes and gestures are like bodies forming architectural structures in space. The task was to choose five images from the painting that the dancer was drawn to and use the body as a site to transfer the image. Dancers were instructed to embody the visual information with mindfulness to their entire body in space. After creating the gestures or poses, we rolled the dice five times and noted the number on a chart. This number represented the number of times the dancers would repeat their bodily structure in space.

Next, the dancers looked at their paintings and connected the images, mapping the pattern in space as if they were looking at a canvas and the dance floor as an extension of their canvases. They traveled through space, repeating their gesture as often as the dice landed, arriving at each site. Ten photos (as seen in a collage in Figure 30) show the paintings and images translated to bodily gestures. A total of twenty gestures were created between the four dancers. Each dancer learned one another's gestures, but only the maker of the movement was familiar with their painting and where the shape was generated from on their canvas.

To view studio lab work for *Adaptation*, open the following link:

<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/studio-laboratory/adaptation>



QR Code 13—*Adaption*, studio lab practice



Figure 30—*Adaptation* (project #6): visual art image translation to physical gesture, 2022

The group titled this piece *Adaptation*, as that was exactly what the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method was for these dancers; an adaptation to learning and creating choreography. At first, the dancers were unsure of how to execute movement exploration, showing hesitancy and reluctance in their movements. After the first rehearsal, I questioned my ability to guide these specific dancers through my choreographic method. I wondered what made the execution of this project so different from my experiences in other guided projects. However, I maintained a level of confidence in the choreographic method, and by the second rehearsal, the dancers began to feel more comfortable with the newfound movement. The difference in the first and second rehearsals can be attributed to an example of my personal movement exploration based on my response to the paint on canvas. The dancers found recognizable comfort and confidence to explore new movement possibilities by witnessing my personal vulnerability. I was so used to taking the dancers out of their comfort zones; now, I was taking myself out.

We met once a week for four weeks to work on this piece and review the composition. At first, the dancers ran around the dance floor with their canvas to remember where to travel in space. They gave their gestures names so they could remember them, such as ‘Lady Francesca,’ ‘Stub My Toe,’ ‘Starfish,’ ‘Snake,’ ‘Cells,’ and ‘Bird,’ to name a few. The dancers seemed to need to name their movements to create coherent phrases. They created a language using known symbols to represent and translate their images connected to the body. They were developing context to the content of their work through the creative process. A professional photographer captured the performance rehearsal, which is showcased in Figure 36. When I asked the dancers how it felt to choreograph in unfamiliar ways, they expressed that it was refreshing and less stressful than having to be at the same time as everyone else. This process encouraged

individualism and permission to respond and create movement without regard to other dancers' movements. It seemed as though this method was liberating for the dancers.

From practice to process to product, we brought these pieces from the studio to the stage. As a class, we collaboratively discussed lighting elements and how we would transition the first piece to the second. In reflection, the work was about process, learning, teaching, and guiding the dancers to think with their bodies to explore new modes of movement and composition. The product, the performance, was a place to display that learning. It was not a place to assess the works as a final piece but to observe the dancers' growth and newfound movement vocabulary.



Figure 31—*Adaptation*, A moment captured during rehearsal, 2022, photograph by Mia

To showcase dancers' hard work throughout their choreographic experiments while creating *Adaptation*, we made a screendance titled *Staining the Score* on the college grounds in April 2022. Collaborating closely with the dancers, we generated and conceptualized artistic ideas from various sources of inspiration, like the painting they collaboratively created the cityscape, and the natural landscape. Utilizing the *Synergetic Agential Method*, the dancers captured their bodily reactions to the stimuli and transformed them into physical gestures, then movement phrases. Like the exploration in *Adaptation*, the dancers were asked to create from a place of physical response versus technical habit. The screendance amplified their ability to use this method to uncover unexpected movement choices. It complements the research and creative process undertaken during *Adaptation* by deepening the investigation initiated in the performance. Considered alongside *Adaptation*, *Staining the Score* provides an additional exploration of the methods learned in the studio. While movement generation was individually developed in *Adaptation*, *Staining the Score* was much more collaborative. Improvisations were guided by environmental stimuli as well as the movement responses of others. The work demonstrated choreography as an individual and collective endeavor and highlighted the impact of artistic partnership.

Staining the Score screendance can be viewed at:

<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/performances/staining-the-score>



QR Code 14—*Staining the score*, dance film

***Carousel* / Project #7, March - June 2022**

Carousel was a collaborative effort with mignolo dance, a professional dance company in Metuchen, New Jersey. It was my first time working on a project with a professional-level group of dancers. The six participants were seasoned professionals who have danced nationally and internationally. Most started their dance training very young, while one began as an adult and trained abroad. A couple of the dancers succeeded in winning national titles during their adolescence. I provided the dancers with film projects like *Throughline* for context and they arrived with an open mind to the first rehearsal, ready to explore and creatively collaborate.

Day 1

During the painting demonstration, I explained to the participants they would use the ribbon pour method. They could paint their canvas or use each other's canvases for a collaborative piece. The

dancers spilled their paint onto each other's canvas and picked their colors before pouring them into cups with the dirty pour method. Participants filled two cups with four to five colors and began painting their canvas. They were all wearing white and were given no specific instructions on how to paint their clothing, only that they could use their clothing to clean their hands and feet, see Figure 32. This clothing would become the costume for the performance.

I emphasized that this was a collaborative project and that their voice and choice mattered. Once they started painting, there were no rules or structures to follow. It was a time for experimentation and play, where their creative intuition took over. They started painting each other and even sat in the paint poured off the canvases, becoming canvases themselves.



Figure 32—*Carousel* (project #7): creating paintings and costuming, 2022

Task 1 ***Paint on Canvas***

Once the dancers finished painting and the visual artwork was complete, they cleaned up and began exploring the movement tasks. The participants were asked to embody the act of pouring paint on canvas. As experienced improvisers, they were given little direction. The dancers'

movements were diverse and vibrant, making it a true inspiration to watch them embrace the first task.

Task 2***Manipulation of Paint***

The objective of this task was to encourage movement throughout the body by using paint on a canvas. Participants were informed that this was a full-body activity not restricted to a particular body part. They could initiate the movement from the head and transfer it to different parts of their body or concentrate on a single body part if preferred. The prompt was open-ended, allowing for creative interpretation.

Task 3***Paint Cells***

During this task, the participants were requested to recollect and share the moment when the cells, or small, circular-looking bubbles of silicone, emerged in their paintings. They were also asked to replicate the action of the cells, which were formed from silicone oil in the paint, popping through the other colors. As I watched the dancers, I became captivated by their improvisation because they were deeply invested and attuned to their movements, resembling a trance-like state of exploratory movement.

Day 2**Task 4*****Color Stick***

Everyone's paintings had dried and were propped up in the room. I brought back the popsicle sticks, and each dancer was asked to choose one. The dancers were instructed to find the first

spot in the painting that their eyes caught with the coordinating color on their popsicle sticks. Then, the dancers were provided another popsicle stick with a body part written on it. The task was for each individual to map their painting, depending on their color, and guide their movement with a specific body part's focus. The image in Figure 33 captures this moment. I also asked each participant to take out their phones to record themselves so they could watch their improvisational response in capturing the generated movement material. After the first movement exploration, I had the dancers set the 30-second phrase they had just produced using their phones' cameras to recall the movement. This phrase was to be a set phrase for the dancers. Once we started composing the movement, we would teach it to one another.



Figure 33—*Carousel* (project #7): dancers setting improvisational work as a phrase, 2022

Task 5
Dynamics

During the dynamics task, the dancers selected new colors and body parts, which presented both excitement and challenges for some of the participants. Once they had selected their colors and body parts, they created a new phrase, and to add an extra layer of complexity, I introduced sticks with different dynamics written on the bottom of them. The dancers were required to alter their movements by incorporating these dynamics into their phrases, which resulted in a brand new set of movements. While the dancers found the improvisation aspect of the exercise easier, they soon discovered that teaching themselves the improvisation from the recorded videos was a challenging task, especially when it came to sharing their work with the rest of the group for documentation and recording purposes. Despite these difficulties, the exercise was a valuable learning experience because it demonstrated some of the successes and challenges of using this method, such as generating movement, documenting the choreographic phrasing, and recreating the phrase to teach and replicate on different bodies.

Task 6
Shapes

In task 6, the participants were instructed to choose five images that they could see in the painting . They were then asked to embody these images through movement to best represent the image's shape. After this, the dancers looked at their paintings and connected the images, creating a pattern they would map in space as if the canvas and dance floor were one. They were asked to travel through space, mapping a connecting route to the next shape with their bodies. When they arrived at a space in the room that signaled the end of one image and the start of another, they had to change their bodily structure and move on to the next. The dancers were

instructed to be aware of other bodies while traveling, sometimes coming together and drifting apart. Although unsure of how this movement material would be composed in the final piece, I liked the symmetry of bodies in space. Figures 34 and 35 illustrate the dancers rehearsing this task in the studio.



Figure 34—*Carousel* (project #7): dancers translating visual art images to physical gestures, 2022



Figure 35 —*Carousel* (project #7): dancers translating visual art images to physical gestures, 2022

Day 3
Task 7
Jump

For the next task, I instructed the dancers to choose another image that appealed to them. This time, their task was to create an image of their body in the air, as depicted in Figure 36. They aimed to keep their body suspended long enough to bring their shape to life. They had to consider where and how they would land and whether it would affect their take-off and landing, resulting in a different shape. The challenge was to make this jump look different from the jumps they were used to performing.



Figure 36—*Carousel* (project #7): dancer performing jump task, *Carousel*, 2022

Task 8 ***Turns***

For the turning task, the dancers were instructed to select a specific image from their painting that captured their attention and then to create a turn that represents the image as it moves through their body. They considered how the body prepares for the turn as it moves through space and what shape or form it takes during the turn. Doing so created detailed and comprehensive representations of the image throughout the turn.

Day 4
Task 9
Touch

The paintings had a lot of texture due to the layers of paint and the way they shifted and dried through manipulation. To help the dancers absorb information about the texture, I asked them to feel their paintings with their hands. One of the dancers even put their face against the painting and rubbed their cheek on it. After this, I had the dancers improvise for around 30 seconds to a minute, which I recorded. They then used this improvisation as a base to create a new phrase.

Task 10
Connect

As one of the final tasks of this project, I wanted the dancers to collaborate by connecting their movements. Although the dancers knew each other, they had yet to dance with all the group members. Therefore, I assigned them partners they had yet to work with before for this task. I requested them to physically fuse their shapes from Task 6 with each other and create a new phrase from the movement they had individually developed. Finally, I asked them to choose their favorite shapes and connect the movements to produce fresh material for the last task.

Day 5
Compose

During the rehearsal, we focused on putting together all the movements created by the dancers throughout the tasks. However, some dancers found remembering the unfamiliar movements they had produced challenging due to the week-long gap between the rehearsals. To overcome this, we played videos of the previous rehearsals, which made it easier for the performers to recall their movements while teaching them to others. We collaborated in piecing together the

dance phrase-by-phrase and decided on transitions and the placement of bodies in space.

Additionally, we discussed and finalized the filming site where this dance was to be performed and captured using an iPhone camera.

Day 6 *Self*

After thoroughly reviewing the dance, I felt the choreography needed to be completed as if there was no settled ending. In this way, the dance did not fully encapsulate the painting, as the painting looked like a fully completed work of art. I speculated that maybe the chosen music could have prompted the dance's timing to be faster than originally anticipated. Nevertheless, I had a one-on-one rehearsal with one of the dancers who couldn't attend the final rehearsal. I looked at her painting and started to embody the tasks I had given the other dancers to add additional materials. After working with this dancer and adding some material, I realized my phrase work alone would not be enough to finish the piece. I wanted to add more dance phrases and had an idea for additional tasks to be performed at the next rehearsal.

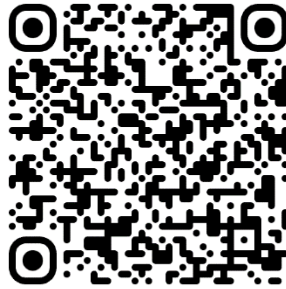
Day 7 *Sisters, Rehearsal/Timing, Music (in 6's)*

During our time together, I found that two sisters in the group had an easily identifiable energetic connection or chemistry, witnessed in how they danced alongside one another. I asked them to watch a video of our first improvisation task after painting and to work together to explore movement possibilities based on the painting. Once they finished, they taught the rest of the group and worked on timing the music. As a facilitator, my goal was to allow the dancers to have agency in the work, meaning I described tasks but did not dictate how the work should be made.

The dancers soon took over, and the group created a rendition of the choreography put forth by the sisters. Figure 37 shows a photograph of the dancers rehearsing in the studio, while Figure 38 captures the same dance section during the final performance. I enjoyed working with this group and observing how the research applies to all dancing bodies.

To view studio lab work for *Carousel*, open the following link:

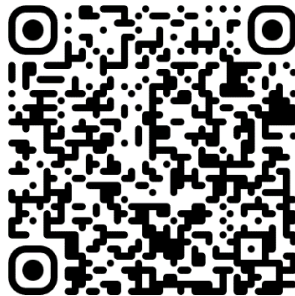
<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/studio-laboratory/carousel>



QR Code 15—*Carousel*, studio lab practice

Final choreography for the *Carousel* project can be viewed at:

<https://www.synergeticagentialchoreography.com/performances/carousel>



QR Code 16—*Carousel*, performance



Figure 37—*Carousel* (project #7): rehearsal, 2022



Figure 38—*Carousel* (project #7): performance [filming], 2022

Together / Project #8 July - 2022

I had the privilege of working on my first international project with dancers from four countries in Liverpool, England for a week in July of 2022. One of the dancers moved to England from Hong Kong just four months before the project, while another flew from Germany to Liverpool to participate. One dancer was local, and the final member had moved from Italy to attend school. As dance is a universal language, working with dancers from another country was an exhilarating experience, and I appreciated that they chose to participate. Each dancer was part of the Merseyside Dance Initiative and had varying education and performance experience, ranging from studio experience to a PhD in the Arts. Unfortunately, we only had a limited amount of time together. We spent one-day painting, the next day working on tasks and creating choreography, one day on rehearsal, and the final day on the performance and filming. Despite having the shortest time I have ever had with a group, I trusted the process and believed that the visual and movement art would fully develop.

Day 1***Creating Paintings***

The day we painted was sweltering due to a heat wave that had taken over the UK. Unfortunately, our building had no air conditioning, making the heat unbearable. The paint was not behaving as expected, probably due to the combination of the heat and the products I used to mix the paint with the medium. Since I was in another country, I had to use the acrylic paint and glue available at the local art supply store. While the paintings did dry quickly, the canvas's texture differed from what I had hoped. Two of the dancers ended up wiping their canvases clean and starting over. Figures 39 and 40 show the dancers creating their paintings.



Figure 39—*Together* (project #8): participants exploring acrylic pour straw blowing method with paintings, 2022



Fig. 40—*Together* (project #8): close-up photo of the participant straw blowing on acrylic pour painting, 2022

Day 2

I explained to the dancers that we would be using their paintings to bring forth movement.

Through my research, I discovered that while dancers often use other people's artwork as inspiration, the dancers themselves rarely create the visual art that leads to choreography. In this project, however, it would be different. The dancers would create the art that would serve as the impetus for their movements. Rather than relying on choreography, their paintings would guide them to create something unique and inspiring.

Task 1***Chance/Color/Body Part***

The tasks involved using chance methods to help the dancer determine their starting point for mapping their painting. As in previous projects and tasks, dancers chose a popsicle stick with a color that determined the paint trail they would follow. Then, they chose a popsicle stick with a body part to initiate the movement development. The dancers went through this process once and established a movement phrase.

Task 2***Dynamic***

As in other projects and tasks, dancers then selected a popsicle stick with a dynamic and integrated the dynamic with the developed phrase. The dynamic chosen influenced how the movements were executed, adding nuance and complexity to the movement phrase. Adding the dynamics resulted in phrase development divergent from the initial creation, and thus a new phrase emerged.

Process

While working through the tasks, I noticed two dancers jump in without hesitation. They took to the prompts and started moving, not questioning their physical response. Another dancer closed their eyes the entire time. I asked them if they were genuinely reading their painting or responding to the image in their mind's eye. One dancer looked at their painting for a long time, trying to figure out how to move without guidance. Once everyone was engaged in the process, the improvised composition of co-gesturing possibilities emerged.

Compose

I only had one day left to work with the participants to compose the dance with the material they produced before this project ended. We worked together to string the phrases together one by one. I asked one dancer to lead, and then, as a group, we decided whose movement would feed into the next. One by one, we pieced together the choreography. I played various music with different time signatures to see if the dancers would speed up the pace or slow down, but they did not. They were aware of one another in the space and worked together as their movement led the way.

At the end of the rehearsal, one of the dancers approached me and said they would not be able to come to the next session due to the Arriva Bus Strike in Liverpool that arrested all bus routes during pay negotiations. The dancer also expressed that they were uncomfortable with the new unfamiliar movement they were learning. This was the same dancer who needed guidance in the first task. I noticed they were picking up the new movement fine, but it was clear through our conversation that this individual felt intimidated. I told the participants they were doing great and assured them they had plenty of time to review all learned choreography. Another one of the

dancers who overheard our conversation chimed in and reinforced my expression. I hoped this person considered what we were saying but wondered if they would return the next rehearsal.

Day 3

Day 3 was the final day in the studio, and I was pleased to see the participant who previously expressed their discomfort return. Unfortunately, one of the dancers had to travel back to Germany and couldn't participate in the group performance. However, I filmed their solo in the performance space on a previous day with the intent of integrating the footage with the other film documentation. On the final rehearsal day, I focused on composing the work with placement and transitions, and there was still one last task I wanted the dancers to explore.

Task 3

Image Translation

Like in previous tasks and projects, I asked the dancers to identify three small images from the painting during the creation process. They were then asked to embody the images as shapes within their bodies. To add more structure to the choreography, I had the dancers view their paintings as if the canvas was the dance floor and instructed them to position themselves on the floor according to where the image was located in their painting.

Figure 41 is a collage of three gestures and zoomed-in paint images the participants translated from their paintings onto their bodies, adding intricate details to the overall performance. This would serve as the starting point of the dance, and they would move throughout space as the paint traveled from one image to another. The dancers continued this process until they had embodied their final image, which positioned them in a straight line to begin the dance.



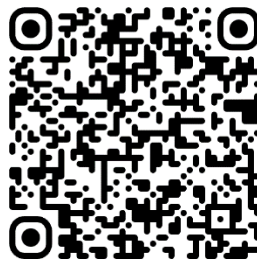
Figure 41—*Together* (project#8): gesture translation from images within the painting onto the body, 2022

Final Composition

Working alongside the dancers throughout the process, I closely examined their paintings, movement choices, and embodied imagery. This dynamic collaboration sparked a fascinating interplay of organized phrases, blending improvisation with structure. The photo in Figure 42 captures the final performance and represents the culmination of our collaborative efforts. As an observer, I aimed to engage the dancers as co-collaborators while providing guidance to stay authentic to the movement of the body in response to the painting. By allowing the process to flow and by embracing a fluid exchange of ideas, a creative happening emerged that went beyond content and fostered a continuous exploration of expressive modes. Each participant's unique experiences throughout the practice fueled creative energy throughout the artistic journey. In this comprehensive approach, including the paintings became an integral part of the final composition, contributing depth and richness to the overall artistic vision.

To view studio lab work for *Together*, use the following link:

<https://www.synergeticentialchoreography.com/studio-laboratory/together>



QR Code 17—*Together*, studio lab practice

To view the performance for *Together*, use the following link:

<https://youtu.be/oiZV9Y1I1n8?si=a2tZKgT1hh4tx244>



QR Code 18—*Together*, performance



Figure 42—*Together* (project #8): final performance filmed in John Lennon Building at Liverpool John Moores University, 2022

In each of the eight projects, I noticed the significance of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method to the field of dance as a way to access the often underutilized authentic movement responses of dancers, as opposed to a prescribed technical vocabulary. Through cross-disciplinary acts of creating visual art and performance art, dancers engaged in creative practices, influencing movement development and untapping individually crafted movement phrases.

By immersing myself and the participants in phenomenological methods, I navigated the intricate layers of personal experiences and perceptions. This exploration has deepened my understanding of engaging the sensory body in movement-making as it relates to the choreographic process achieved through a cross-disciplinary approach. My observations underscore the intimate relationship between the dancer and their own visual art, and highlight how personal narratives intertwine with broader artistic contexts. In addition, through observations I identified common challenges, like abandoning conditioned technique, and the ability to access the organic movement responses of the body.

As I transition to the next chapter, I will pivot from this introspective terrain to a more structured analysis of the creative process. There, I will dissect the elements of the dance, examining its layers, methodologies, and the symbiotic relationship between creation and perception, further enriching my understanding of how this method is significant to choreographic development and larger, the field of dance.

CHAPTER 4

The Lived Experience: Phenomenological and Agential Realism Analysis

The analysis utilizes a phenomenological reflective approach to explore the real-life experiences of dancers involved in *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, a cross-disciplinary research project. By emphasizing the participants' individual experiences, this method aims to reveal the core of their involvement in creating paintings and using visual art to design choreography. This methodological decision holds great significance for a variety of reasons.

Phenomenology prioritizes the subjective, lived experiences of individuals. In this context, it allows for a deep exploration of how dancers perceive and internalize their interactions with visual art and how they are active agents in the choreographic process. This method involves immersing in the participants' narratives, reflections, and emotional responses to understand their experiences better. Reflective practice, integral to phenomenology, considers one's actions and experiences. For dancers, this means contemplating their creative processes, challenges, and insights they gain. By reflecting on their engagement with their paintings as a stimulus for choreography, dancers can articulate how this cross-disciplinary approach impacts their artistic expression and professional growth.

Central to this analysis is agential realism, which posits that entities (human and non-human) do not exist independently but emerge through their interactions. In the context of this research, dancers and their visual artworks are seen as co-creators in the creative process. The paintings are not passive objects but active agents that influence and shape the dancers' movements and choreographic decisions. Agential realism highlights the mutual influence between human and non-human agents. The dancers' movements are informed by the visual

characteristics of their paintings—colors, textures, and forms—which in turn are affected by the dancers' interpretations and physical engagement with the artwork. This dynamic interaction underscores the co-creative nature of the artistic process, where both human and non-human agents contribute to the emergence of new creative expressions.

The research emphasizes a relational ontology by framing the analysis within agential realism. This perspective suggests that the identities and properties of entities (dancers and artworks) are not intrinsic but are constituted through their relationships and inter-actions. In the projects, the dancers' identities as artists are continuously reshaped through their engagement with the paintings, and the paintings gain new meanings and significance through their role in the choreographic process.

The phenomenological reflective methodology facilitates the emergence of new insights by allowing participants to articulate their experiences in their own words. This narrative richness provides a deeper understanding of how integrating visual art and dance can lead to novel choreographic practices and a heightened sense of artistic agency among dancers. Combining phenomenology with agential realism offers a comprehensive framework to understand the intricate interplay between dancers and visual art. It acknowledges the complexity of artistic creation as a process that transcends individual disciplines, recognizing the significance of human creativity and artworks' material agency.

Using a phenomenological reflective methodology enriched by agential realism provides a nuanced and profound understanding of the lived experiences of dancers in cross-disciplinary research projects. It highlights the co-creative processes between human and non-human agents, emphasizing artistic expression's dynamic, relational nature and the continuous emergence of new artistic identities and practices. This integrated approach captures the essence of dancers'

experiences and underscores the transformative potential of cross-disciplinary artistic practices, revealing the profound interconnectedness of all agents in the creative process and sparking excitement about the endless possibilities of artistic research and practice.

Outline of the Elements

In this chapter, I immerse myself in the qualitative analysis of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* through a thematic analysis. This research began with observing and engaging with 28 dancers, ranging from first-time students to seasoned professionals, as they navigated a new choreographic method. My reflections were captured in personal journals, supplemented by participant questionnaires and written statements, and visual documentation through photographs and videos.

The dancers I worked with varied in group size, from soloists to ensembles of eight, each bringing a unique dynamic to the process. Initially, I aimed to work with the same dancers throughout the study, hoping for a consistent thread of experience. However, it soon became clear that a broader spectrum of participants, diverse in education, experience, training, and age, would enrich the study. This realization led me to embrace a comparative analysis, examining the differences and similarities in the dancers' reflections and movement responses. Working with dancers of varied technical proficiency inspired the transformative potential of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. Novice dancers, still mastering codified practices, were prompted to explore inhabitual movements, breaking free from their learned constraints. Conversely, experienced dancers, for whom technique had become second nature, discovered new layers of movement through this method, highlighting the transformative potential of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*.

Organizing the data thematically allowed patterns to emerge naturally. The chapter begins

with a brief introduction to the sample, followed by a detailed description of the data analysis procedures. Through the thematic coding steps, I used open and axial coding to dissect the data and provide examples to illustrate the analytical process. The results are presented through a thematic narrative enriched with direct quotes and examples that bring the dancers' experiences to life.

As I navigated through this reflective process, it became evident that the synergy between dancers and paintings fostered a profound dialogue. This dynamic connection, viewed through phenomenology and agential realism, revealed the intricate relationships and interactions that shaped the dancers' creative journeys. Each dancer's experience was a testament to the transformative power of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, highlighting the ever-evolving nature of artistic expression and the boundless possibilities that arise from cross-disciplinary collaboration.

In this practice-led research project, qualitative data was collected through three primary methods: questionnaires, written reflections by dancers, and personal observation notes (See Appendix). Every one of the 28 participating dancers completed the questionnaires, contributing a rich tapestry of insights and perspectives. After participating, dancers were invited to reflect on their experiences using the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method. While all dancers were asked to document their experiences, only three chose to submit their reflections via email, preferring the freedom to express themselves beyond the standard prompts of the questionnaire.

The questionnaires, shaped by my personal observations throughout the project, included closed- and open-ended questions as well as multiple-choice options. This design allowed dancers to engage at their preferred level of reflection. Some dancers favored the simplicity of multiple-choice questions, while others were more comfortable crafting narratives about their

experiences.

Through this multi-faceted approach to data collection, I was able to capture a comprehensive view of the dancers' experiences. Their reflections and responses, woven together with my observations, revealed the profound impact of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. This methodology not only fostered a deeper understanding of movement but also highlighted the intricate interplay between human agency and artistic expression. By embracing these diverse voices and experiences, the study highlights the transformative potential of cross-disciplinary collaboration, inspiring the endless possibilities of artistic research and practice.

Discovering Patterns in the Data

Following participation in their projects, each participant was sent an online questionnaire, which contained a number of closed- and open-ended questions. All participants completed the questionnaire, and responses were collated. Next, a single document was created for each respondent to streamline the analysis process. The second form of data consisted of my own reflective observation notes. I took observation notes onsite during participant engagement in the project, and reflection notes were taken as I reviewed video data from the sessions. The third form of data was a written reflection provided by three participants based on their willingness and confidence to divulge more of their experience in written reflection. The questionnaires and observation data underwent thematic analysis using NVivo, following the six-phase procedure developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach involves familiarizing oneself with the data, creating codes, developing themes, scrutinizing themes, identifying and labeling themes, and identifying exemplars.

The first step of the analysis consisted of a thorough review of all qualitative data. This immersion process allowed me to become familiar with the data and identify possible codes. Following this review of the data, the process of open coding commenced. Receptive coding consisted of a line-by-line review of all data, allowing me to identify the data's repetition and patterns. Finding these repeated words, ideas, phrases, sentiments, or attitudes assisted in identifying codes. When a code was determined, I created a code name in Nvivo and assigned the code to its corresponding passage.

As each file was coded, the code book expanded. After all the data had been coded once, I performed a second pass to ensure the codes were recognized and assigned. The final codebook consisted of 38 codes. As illustrated in the Code Frequency Table (Appendix D), the most commonly occurring codes included *individual choice and creativity* ($f = 36$), *collaborated with other dancers* ($f = 27$), *encouraged to develop new movements* ($f = 25$), *felt connection – attachment to my art* ($f = 22$), *trusting the process – let go* ($f = 17$), and *helped with developing my own choreography* ($f = 16$). Less frequent codes, with three occurrences each, included *proud*, *shared ideas*, *therapeutic*, *anxious*, and *want to paint again*. The codes of *developing relationships* and *made friends* each occurred twice. The open coding process allowed me to assign code names to passages, sentences and phrases, which was essential in identifying themes and patterns. Samples of the open coding process are provided in a table in Appendix E. The table provides a snapshot of codes assigned to select passages.

After open coding was finished, I began making sense of the codes through axial coding. This is the second step of coding, involving examining the codes for similarities and relationships and grouping them accordingly. Codes were arranged and rearranged several times until themes began to emerge. Axial coding resulted in the following six themes: (a) *dancers had*

positive experiences with the projects, (b) as a choreographical tool, the projects fostered individual expression and creativity, (c) many dancers were open to experience, (d) dancers were challenged to let go of codified technique, (e) dancers valued social connections, and (f) participation provided dancers with a new sense of artistry.

Through the research design and data collection matrix, as observed in the table on page 25 in Appendix (F), themes have emerged, highlighting supporting codes. The discovery of the nature of lived experience has led to a well-grounded understanding. A clear description has emerged through phenomenological reflection and participant experience. The matrix developed a combination of text and structural descriptions to express the overall significance of the data.

The combination of phenomenology and agential realism adds significant depth to understanding the collected data. Phenomenology, emphasizing lived experience, allowed me to thoroughly investigate participants' core engagement with the projects. Agential realism broadened this analysis by considering the material-discursive practices that shape and are shaped by the participants. It highlights the interaction among dancers, their environment, and the choreographic processes, indicating that the study. This dual perspective not only validates the participants' voices and reflections but also places their experiences within a broader ontological and epistemological framework, providing a comprehensive interpretation of the research findings. The thematic analysis goes beyond mere categorization, becoming a dynamic interplay of human and material agencies that collaborate to create meaningful choreographic and experiential outcomes.

Phenomenon of Interest

Several individuals in the study shared common experiences, including gaining a new choreographic understanding and expressing emotional states. Through thematic analysis, themes emerge around significant statements quoted by the participants describing what they experienced. A description of each theme is provided below. Themes are illustrated using direct quotes and examples from participant questionnaires, reflections, and my observations. This presentation of the results provides rich details of each theme, demonstrating how the research data strongly supports the findings.

Dancers Had Positive Experiences with the Projects

The first theme that emerged was that *dancers had positive experiences with the projects*. Many expressed positive emotions when reflecting on their participation. The project atmosphere was frequently described as “positive and encouraging,” bringing a “sense of joy” to those involved. These sentiments highlight the lived experiences of the dancers, capturing their engagement and emotional resonance with the projects. Words like “fantastic” and “awesome” were commonly used to describe the projects, indicating a profound connection to the creative process.

Participation made the dancers feel “happy and motivated,” and working on the projects was often referred to as “a joy,” reflecting how the environment and interactions fostered a supportive experience.

From the data gathered, participants frequently expressed feelings of excitement, amazement, enjoyment, and inspiration. They described the process as “exciting” and working with other dancers as “thrilling.” These reactions reveal the dynamic synergy between the dancers and the material-discursive practices within the projects. The collaborative environment not only enhanced their creative expression but also amplified their emotional states. My

observations confirmed this, as I noted the projects were “full of surprises” and how visibly excited the participants were. This underscores the material agency of the projects themselves in shaping the dancers' experiences.

The dancers often described their experiences watching the choreography unfold as “amazing” and were “in awe of the work they produced.” This awe reflects a deeper phenomenological engagement, where the dancers' perceptions and interpretations of their art were transformed through the choreographic process. I observed that most dancers had fun and genuinely enjoyed themselves during the projects. Creating art to guide choreography was seen as “enjoyable and fruitful,” further illustrating how the materiality of the art-making process intertwined with the dancers' emotional and cognitive experiences.

One dancer expressed their pleasure by stating, “YES!!! From the minute I dropped the paint on the canvas, I was hooked. Actually, when I found out we were making a painting, I was hooked.” This vivid description highlights the immediate and immersive engagement of the dancer with the artistic process, showcasing the powerful agency of the materials and the act of creation itself. Reflecting on the projects, I noted how much fun the dancers had while creating their paintings. The engagement and tactile experience of the paint on canvas elicited joyous responses, as captured in Figure 43 in *Carousel*, project #7. The dancers have lively expressions while they create their paintings. They were often seen content or even smiling during the creative process, illustrating the profound positive impact of these projects.



Figure 43—*Carousel* (project #7): dancers making paintings in first rehearsal together in the studio, 2022

The dancers also expressed positive feelings and experiences when reflecting on the outcomes of the projects, both in terms of the art they created and the choreography they produced. They were pleased by the process and how their artworks turned out. One dancer was “happy to bring home my painting at the end of the project,” while another exclaimed, “I love my painting!” The dancers were surprised that this improvisational flow painting technique could create such beautiful pieces of artwork. Several participants expressed a sense of wonder about the art they produced as if the project had helped them tap into creativity and artistry previously unknown to them. One dancer shared, “Like wow, that is cool. I can’t believe I made that.”

Another shared a similar sentiment, “Amazed that I created this beautiful artwork!” These reflections emphasize the transformative nature of the creative process, where the material-discursive practices enabled the dancers to discover and express new dimensions of their artistic selves.

Figure 44 is a photograph taken after the performance of *The Impetus*, project #4. Simultaneously, during the performance, a video of the dancers making their paintings was displayed on an overhead projector while dancing on stage. One of the audience members found me in the lobby after the show and exclaimed that it felt like watching a story within a story as the dancers made the paintings and then used those paintings to create the dance. All the dancers looking forward to bringing their artwork home are displayed in the photograph



Figure 44—*The Impetus*, (project #4): dancers posing for a picture with their paintings after live performance, 2021

In addition to the fun, enjoyment, and surprise that manifested from participating in the projects, both as painters and choreographers, dancers also described deeper, more moving experiences. Creating the art made them feel inspired. One dancer reflected on their painting, noting they became “inspired by looking at the details.” The collaborative process with fellow dancers also sparked inspiration, with one dancer saying, “I also found it fun to be inspired and learn about the movement that the other dancers came up with.” This sense of collective creativity emphasizes the interwoven human and material agencies, enriching the dancers' experiences.

A sense of personal confidence and trust was another positive outcome expressed by the dancers. The projects helped improve their confidence levels significantly. One dancer shared, “I gained all of my confidence in my improv from this study, and I value and carry that throughout all my current dance training.” Another noted that the project helped them learn to trust not only others but also their own choices in choreography. They stated, “to trust myself and the movement that comes from my body.” This development of self-trust was echoed by others, who found that the projects allowed them to feel “good and confident during the creative process because the medium I was using was my main work tool: my body.” In my observations during *Adaptation*, I noted how the dancers became more comfortable in their skin and their newfound movements with each subsequent rehearsal. Unlike processes that rely heavily on technical execution, one dancer reflected that what was particularly exciting about the project was that “it allowed me to get out of my own head.”

The therapeutic effects of participation in the project were also highlighted by several dancers. One dancer summarized this by sharing, “It is a kind of art therapy to express its inside

feeling.” Overall, the participants had an experience that was affirming to their artistic nature, supportive, and left them feeling confident from their involvement.

Through this phenomenological and agential realist lens, it becomes evident that the dancers' experiences were profoundly shaped by both their internal emotional landscapes and the external material-discursive contexts. The projects fostered a rich, experiential environment where the dancers could explore and expand their artistry. This led to a deeper appreciation of their creative potential and the dynamic interplay between human and material agencies in producing meaningful and impactful outcomes.

As a Choreographic Tool, the Projects Fostered Individual Expression and Creativity among Dancers

The second emerging theme emphasized the project's function *as a choreographic tool to foster individual expression and creativity*. Analysis of participant reflections and questionnaires revealed how effective dancers perceived the projects to be for sparking their own creative expression. Overwhelmingly, dancers described ways participation helped foster individual choice and creativity. The excerpts supporting this notion were so prevalent that they had been organized into a Table shared in Appendix G.

The dancers described how participation in the projects encouraged them to develop new and unfamiliar movements. One dancer described this creative process as organic, while another shared that the guided project helped them develop “unexpected movement.” The process of exploration and movement development through participation was highlighted as particularly rewarding. One dancer shared:

I really like exploring, because when I got ‘turn,’ which is something I really don’t like doing...then I got ‘suspension’ and ‘turn’ which is my biggest problem. I think life is really cool, and I love having those two words so it was

interesting to explore where 'turn' would be organic instead of thinking about it, and that is something in my own evolution in dance that I just started to accept, so I think it is just wonderful that I got the opportunity to do it right now, here while I am coming to these sessions, so thank you.

This reflection stresses the transformative potential of the improvisational tasks. The dancer's experience with the words "turn" and "suspension," which they initially found challenging, evolved into an opportunity for growth and acceptance. The chance methods employed in the projects did not impose preconceived images of movement, allowing both the dancer and myself, as the researcher, to witness the spontaneous and authentic development of movement.

The absence of a predetermined movement outcome provided a liberating framework for the dancers. It encouraged them to engage within their own movement vocabularies and explore the boundaries of their physical expression. This approach aligns with phenomenological perspectives, emphasizing the dancers' lived experiences and their embodied engagement with the creative process. The dancers' movements were not solely the product of individual creativity but were also shaped by the material-discursive context of the projects. The chance methods and the guided nature of the tasks acted as agents that influenced the dancers' creative trajectories, leading to the emergence of unexpected movement patterns.

Reflecting on the dancers' experiences with the painting process as part of the choreographic projects reveals significant insights into the transformative nature of cross-disciplinary activities. One dancer noted how the painting process "encouraged me to develop unfamiliar and somewhat uncomfortable movement choices." This reflection highlights the initial discomfort often encountered when venturing into new creative territories. As both the instructor and observer, I observed that this discomfort was most pronounced during the early stages of movement exploration.

The flow of each dancer's personal movement language gradually unfolded through the cross-disciplinary activity, diverging from the familiar shapes and patterns ingrained through years of training in codified techniques. This divergence marks a critical shift from habitual movements to the exploration of new, organic ways of moving. Another dancer emphasized that the project helped them develop "new organic ways to move and dance," reinforcing the idea that the studies approach fosters authentic and innovative movement creation. This sense of discovery was evident and exciting.

One of the most striking aspects of this process was the way in which the projects facilitated the discovery of organic movement. Another dancer noted that working within this framework to create choreography helped generate more natural movement. During rehearsal sessions, many dancers expressed that this organic movement felt like the body's natural ability to move. This sense of empowerment was evident, as one dancer profoundly articulated this sentiment by stating it was their "God-given right."

From a phenomenological perspective, these reflections accentuate the dancers' embodied experience as they navigated the unfamiliar terrain of new movement possibilities. The initial discomfort and subsequent unfolding of personal movement language illustrate the lived experience of transitioning from the known to the unknown. This transition is not merely a physical shift but a deeply embodied process that engages the dancers' entire being.

From an agential realist viewpoint, the synergy between the dancers and the painting process exemplifies the dynamic co-creation of movement. As a material-discursive practice, the painting process acted as an agent influencing the dancers' movement choices. It provided a framework that disrupted habitual patterns and prompted the emergence of new, authentic movements. The dancers' interactions with the painting materials and the improvisational tasks

co-constituted their creative expressions, highlighting the entanglement of human agency and material influences.

The project has been a catalyst for a profound transformation in the dancers' approach to creativity and their understanding of movement. One dancer's poignant remark, "I was encouraged to move how my body was, in abstract ways, just like the painting," encapsulates the project's transformative potential. This statement underscores the dancers' deep engagement with their bodies, echoing the abstract nature of their paintings. It suggests a profound, embodied connection between visual art and physical movement, a connection that has the potential to inspire and intrigue.

Another dancer shared that the project "helped me find new ways to move," highlighting the project's pivotal role in fostering creative exploration. This exploration led dancers to discover movements they originally wouldn't have considered within their dancerly bodies. The process of using paintings as inspiration for new, authentic forms of movement was described as a journey of enlightenment by several participants. One dancer admitted that her painting "really dictated what was going to happen, and it was sort of out of my control." This reflection illustrates the powerful agency of the artwork itself, guiding the dancer's movements in unexpected and unplanned directions.

The notion that inspiration for dance can come from objects and artwork rather than just music was a revelation for many. One dancer expressed this by sharing, "You can find inspiration to dance not just from music, but from objects and artwork and to be open to all types of movement exploration to help your dancing." Similarly, another dancer learned "that you can find inspiration for movement anywhere," highlighting the expansive potential for creative

sources. This perspective was echoed by another dancer who explained, “I feel by doing this it opens up more opportunity to discover movements that I originally wouldn't have thought of.”

Participation in the project helped fifteen dancers identify conventions to create their own choreography, liberating them from the constraints of codified movement and prescriptive choreography. This sense of liberation was palpable. One dancer shared, “I love tasks like this because it is the opposite of kind of how we go about our stuff.” Another noted that the project created “an environment free of execution expectation,” allowing for a more open and exploratory approach to dance. Another dancer remarked that participation “really helped me look outside the box,” underscoring the project's effectiveness in encouraging innovative thinking and movement.

As an observer and researcher, these reflections provide profound insights into the transformative potential of integrating visual art with dance. The paintings acted as agents that influenced and shaped the dancers' movements, demonstrating the entangled relationship between materiality and human agency. The project's ability to foster new movement vocabularies and liberate dancers from traditional constraints highlights the importance of cross-disciplinary approaches in dance education and practice.

The collage of photographs in Figure 45, taken during an improv session during *Patchwork*, project #2, visually captures the dynamic and liberated energy of the dancer. These images serve as a testament to the project's success in creating an environment where dancers could freely explore and express their unique movement identities.



Figures 45—*Patchwork* (project #2): photographs captured during an improvisation session, 2021

Many Dancers were Open to Experience

Theme three, *Many Dancers were Open to Experience*, highlights the openness to experience expressed by many of the participants. Generally, there seemed to be a willingness to engage with an unfamiliar process, even though that unfamiliarity sometimes generated feelings of

anxiety or hesitation. Among the dancers, there was a willingness to experiment, to trust the creative process, and to open themselves to new ideas. One of the most common observations I recorded pertained to dancers' openness to the experience. Often, I observed shifts that occurred when dancers moved from hesitation and anxiety over unfamiliar and unknown movements to visibly embracing the experiences of art and creation. In my reflection notes from *The Impetus*, project #4, I explained how I urged dancers to let their own creativity move and inspire them: "I tell them to trust the process and allow the painting to guide their body." I urged them to have faith in the process and to allow themselves to let movement evolve from their paintings. I recorded how I encouraged dancers to let go and trust the creative process:

You cannot control what will become of the painting or how it will turn out. Gravity and the velocity of the paint medium will decide what the final piece will look like. It is out of your control. Your paint may splash on your neighbor's canvas, just as your energy and movement choice influence others when you dance with them.

In *Adaptation*, project #6, I specifically mentioned observing the shift among dancers as they moved from hesitation and questioning themselves to a marked comfort in their bodies and the movement they were producing. After the 2nd rehearsal, I reflected that "There was a shift, and this form of composition started to feel like a dance. It was beautiful and messy and scary."

During rehearsal day 1 for *Carousel*, project #7, I also noted this beautiful shift among the dancers:

Once the participants started on their own, there was no holds bar. It became a time for experimentation, a time for play, a time where no rules or structure almost existed. It was as if the directions went out the window, and their creative intuition took over. They started to paint each other, sitting in the paint that was poured off the canvases as they became canvases themselves.

Observing the dancers' creative evolution as they embraced something new and foreign was inspiring and beautiful. On the fourth day of working on the *Carousel*, project #7, I wrote in my

notes, “Watching the dancers, I could have let this improvisation go on forever. The dancers were completely immersed in the moment of their movement; to me, this movement was breathtaking.” The participants communicated the same attitude.

Perspectives regarding trusting the process and letting go were echoed in dancers’ completed questionnaires. One dancer described putting “my all into the practice and diving into whatever catalyst was creating our movement.” Another shared, “trusting the process of letting things just fall into place,” while another noted, “that anything can be dance and to trust in the process.” Participating in the painting and choreography projects helped many dancers learn to trust their artistry. One participant said the experience “taught me to say yes and just go with it.” In my observation notes for *Together*, I wrote, “While working through the tasks, I noticed two dancers jump in without hesitation. They took to the prompts and started moving, not questioning their physical response.” The dancers were truly open to new ideas.

It was this openness that helped them let go and trust the creative process. Reflecting on what they learned from the projects, one dancer shared, “That even if you feel like something is strange at first, to go with the flow, and it might turn out to be really cool like this project.” Another noted that the projects helped “open my mind to the possibilities of choreography.” One dancer learned, “To not say no to an idea because you might think it’s silly or it ‘doesn’t look like dance.’” Another stated, “The most valuable information I learned was that it’s important to be open-minded to new ideas.”

In my observations, I recorded participants’ openness to experience, reflecting that dancers “arrived open-minded to the first rehearsal, prepared to explore and collaborate creatively.” I also recorded the personal inspiration I had in watching dancers immerse

themselves in the projects: “Their movement quality was varied and dynamic. It was truly an inspiration to watch the dancers embracing this first task.”

Observing the hesitation among some dancers, I urged them to embrace mistakes and be open to doing things in ways they had previously learned were incorrect if that was how their own creativity moved them. In my reflective notes, I recorded that not all methods are effective and worth repeating, and that sometimes we just move on. In *The Impetus*, project #4 observations, I shared,

...the dancers may have tried to pour the paint on the blank canvas carefully, but it would inevitably splatter on the others. From the beginning of the process, I wanted the dancers to accept the unpredictable possibilities of artistic practice through its process.

As the facilitator, I played a pivotal role in fostering openness and creative engagement. My repeated urging for the dancers to embrace unknowns, mistakes, and raw creativity was not just a suggestion, but a key factor in their learning. This was best reflected in one dancer's insightful comment: “Own your mistakes because it just might be the best choreography you will create.” Figure 46, from the first day of creating paintings for *The Impetus*, shows dancers working on individual paintings. However, the paint inevitably spreads to other canvases, paralleling the experience of creating dance collectively, where the creativity of others influences us.



Figure 46—*The Impetus* (project #4): dancers working collaboratively on flip cup paintings, 2021

Dancers Were Challenged to ‘Let Go’ of Codified Technique

Theme four is linked to the primary barrier dancers faced in allowing their own creativity to emerge during the projects, which was related to *difficulties in ‘letting go’ of their previous training of codified technique*. Dancers often contended with years of training that taught them proper form and movement; encouraging them to abandon that training in favor of their own creative inspiration was difficult for many of the participants. Throughout the different projects, I observed this tendency to revert to codified technique, which revealed how hardwired technique had become for many dancers. In my notes for Day 1 of *The Impetus*, project #4, I recorded the following:

I wanted the dancers to explore movement with their bodies as if they were the paint traveling on the canvas. The dance floor becomes this space for them. I noticed a few dancers grasping at technique and known choreography when developing movement material with their bodies. I expressed to them I wanted

them to flesh out codified techniques in order to find new movements held within the body's capacity.

One participant in *Adaptation*, project #6, had no formal training or exposure to codified techniques. I observed that the individual who had not been exposed to the codified technique was producing the most organic movement. I made a similar observation on Day 2 of *The Impetus*, project #4, noting, "It was interesting to observe as the tasks were investigated how the individuals without formal training explored movement organically while those disciplined in the codified dance vocabulary continued to return to the structured language." I made additional observations along the same lines in project #2:

After working through the tasks, I understand why sometimes the dancers have difficulty with the actions their bodies have produced when they turn around to watch themselves in the mirror. The movement is not the typical aesthetics of choreography produced in a dance studio. The participants are young dancers competing in state and national dance competitions. Unless this movement were refined with music and timing, it would not be satisfactory for that stage...but this is not the study's goal.

It is evident to me that years of training and technique had caused many of the dancers to struggle with their own creative expression. They often approached tasks with uncertainty, obviously second-guessing their own decisions and movements. During the *roll of the dice* task in project #2, I observed the dancers having difficulty with this task as the challenge was held within the rhythmic counting. We discussed if the movement had been choreographed and taught in unfamiliar counting patterns and if the task would be easier to remember. The dancers felt it would be easier if instructed by a choreographer.

Some dancers were aware of their tendency to revert to codified techniques. One dancer admitted, "I had to be coached to read the score without the tendency to fall back on familiar movement." In *Canvas*, I observed, "This is not the typical codified movement they are learning in their dance studios. It is not a style they are familiar with, yet it was produced from the

creative power held within their voice.” Another dancer shared that the project forced them to move “outside of the comfort of my technique and aesthetic.” Others expressed similar struggles, with one dancer noting, “I am so used to and comfortable with studio training and the competition dance style.” Another dancer hesitated to use art to inspire choreography, saying, “I have an established way of working in group choreography but would consider this method.”

The challenge was not just the influence of years of training but also the reliance on other dancers' choreography. Many dancers found it difficult to engage with the projects because they were accustomed to following prescribed choreography. Reflecting on the final day of *Canvas*, project #1, I noted, “This process has not been a conventional way of creating or learning choreography for these young dancers.” One dancer admitted struggling with “not being attached to choreography” provided by others. Another shared, “As a professional dancer, I often feel the need to abandon individuality and adopt the aesthetic of my director or choreographer.” This reliance on prescribed choreography created barriers for dancers during the projects, as they were used to dancing to other people’s choreography rather than their creative impulses.

Moving away from reliance on established techniques created hesitation, anxiety, and unfamiliarity for many dancers. For example, P13 described feeling “apprehensive,” while P7 said parts of the creative aspects of the project were “nerve-racking.” In their personal reflection, P1 shared, “This extremely challenging process took me out of my comfort zone.” P1 said the unfamiliar and unknown aspects of the projects made them “somewhat uncomfortable,” admitting to being “pushed outside of the comfort zone.” P13 said they were “apprehensive at first,” and P15 explained that participation “helped me to get out of my comfort zone.” A striking example of attempted avoidance of the unknown and uncomfortable was recorded in my

observation notes when one dancer in *Together*; project #8, attempted to avoid future participation based on the inability to secure transportation to the rehearsal space.

Moving away from established techniques created hesitation, anxiety, and unfamiliarity for many dancers. One dancer described feeling “apprehensive,” while another said parts of the creative aspects of the project were “nerve-racking.” In their reflection, one dancer shared, “This extremely challenging process took me out of my comfort zone.” The unfamiliar and unknown aspects of the projects made them feel “somewhat uncomfortable,” admitting to being “pushed outside of the comfort zone.” Another dancer explained that participation “helped me to get out of my comfort zone.”

The discomfort associated with the unfamiliar made it important to provide some level of guidance. Without guidance, the anxiety created by embracing foreign, unstructured, uncodified dancing might have been too overwhelming. One dancer said, “We needed some sort of structure in these dances so that it wasn’t total chaos.” Another noted the value of working under my guidance through the project. I observed dancers adhering rigidly to the guidance I provided, while others, who had strayed from directions in a previous exercise, followed guidelines with exactitude in subsequent tasks. One dancer shared she “really enjoyed guided improvisation,” indicating that guidance helped her feel more comfortable with the unknowns of the creative process and allowed her to engage more fully with the projects. Another dancer remarked, “I would not have been able to surrender familiar movement habits without guidance.” Another dancer said that if she could change anything about participation in the projects, “I would've liked more direction and organization when putting the pieces together.” Figure 47 is from a rehearsal where I worked with dancers to piece together their choreography. In the projects working with dancers with less dance experience, I provided them with more guidance. These

groups were not fully engaged with the movement prompts and looking for direction. Once I would give an example, the dancers were more likely to explore movement. On the other hand, some dancers were eager to take the lead in compositional choices and would jump right into the exploration process.

From a phenomenological perspective, these reflections illustrate the embodied tension between comfort in the known and the challenge of embracing the unknown. The dancers' experiences reveal the deeply rooted habits formed through years of training, which can act as both a foundation and a barrier to creative innovation. The process of moving beyond these ingrained techniques requires a conscious effort to trust in their own creative instincts and the unstructured nature of the tasks presented.

From an agential realist outlook, the connection between the dancers and the project methodologies demonstrates the co-constitution of agency and materiality. The projects acted as agents, challenging the dancers to engage with new forms of expression and pushing them to transcend their habitual movements. This dynamic interaction between the dancers and the creative tasks facilitated the emergence of new movement vocabularies and personal artistic growth.

The dancers' reflections on their struggles to let go of codified techniques emphasize the complexity of the creative process. The projects provided a crucial platform for dancers to confront and navigate the boundaries of their training, fostering an environment where personal expression and innovative movement could flourish. By integrating phenomenological and agential realist perspectives, we gain a deeper understanding of the dancers' experiences and the transformative potential of embracing new creative methodologies. This reflective process not

only enriched their movement vocabularies but also empowered them to explore the full extent of their artistic potential.



Figure 47—*Together* (project #8): researcher reviewing choreography with dancers after improvisational investigations, 2022

Dancers Valued Social Connections

The fifth theme highlighted the *significance participants placed on social connections* they experienced and established through the projects. Collaboration, involvement, and a sense of inclusion were highly valued and seemed to enhance participation for many dancers. Several participants mentioned the friendships and relationships they established through the projects.

One dancer said, “I made lifelong friends in the process,” while another shared, “I made some amazing friends that I am now very close to.” When asked what they most enjoyed about participation, many expressed that creating relationships with people was a highlight, with some participants feeling a sense of love for the people they met and worked with.

The social aspect of these projects profoundly influenced the dancers, allowing them to learn from one another and share ideas through collaborative processes. Reflecting on their experiences, one dancer remarked, “We were able to explore different ideas together in order to make our own unique project.” This collaborative spirit was echoed by another who noted how the dancers “came together to share our ideas.” Such interactions highlight the significance of social connectivity in enhancing the creative process. When asked if the project helped them make personal choices in their choreography, a dancer replied, “Yes, because we would work together on setting our phrases and were asked what we feel comfortable with.” This collaborative approach empowered participants, enabling them to share their opinions and contribute meaningfully to the creative practice.

Dancers emphasized the value of learning from one another. Through collaboration, they observed how others created movement and integrated these observations into their own practice. One dancer found value in understanding how others perceived and interpreted their paintings, while another shared, “I learned new ways to think about dance for myself and with a community of people.” This sentiment was reinforced by another dancer who stated, “Working with the other dancers helped me to learn from people with different backgrounds and experiences.” Having varying levels of experience among the dancers allowed for diverse perspectives on improvisational movement tasks. One dancer noted it was “fun to be inspired and learn about the movement that the other dancers came up with.” In my observations of

Patchwork, project #2, I noted that each dancer learned one another's gestures. In the process of teaching each other, dancers fortified their connectivity to the painting by explicitly detailing their inspiration from color, texture, and movement of the paint. The retelling provoked subsequent conversations about the influence of the paint on canvas to motivate movement choices.

The social atmosphere also fostered a sense of involvement and inclusion that helped dancers embrace the creative process. Many participants mentioned that they felt validated by contributing movement to the group dance. One dancer explained, "I felt like I could use my voice, and opinion, ask questions, and trust everyone in the group." Another shared a related idea, explaining, "I would use these methods with a group because I think it helps to give individuals ownership of their work." Dancers expressed that the collaborative environment helped them feel more "invested" and "included," with one dancer describing the group setting as "really welcoming and friendly." When asked if the project helped them express their personal choices, another dancer responded, "Yes, because we used everyone's movement at least once, so it didn't feel like one person had a part." In conversations with participants after each project, all dancers felt they had a voice in the practice.

The collaborative setting of the project was mentioned many times throughout the data, further supporting the creative benefits of collaboration. Reflecting on the group choreography, dancers expressed that even when a particular movement came from another dancer, they still felt connected to the original shared experience. For one dancer, this was the first opportunity they had to create choreography with others, stating, "This is the first time I collaborated with other dancers in this capacity to share choreography together." Participants highlighted the value of exploring different ideas together, emphasizing the "community" aspect of the projects. One

dancer explained that all dancers were involved in the creative process, “Everyone in my group contributed to the project.” Reflecting on their experience, another dancer recalled, “It was nice to have the opportunity to work with dancers I have known in a new, creative way.” Another dancer said collaboration was a particularly positive aspect of the projects. In my reflections for *Together*, project #8, I observed the value of the collaborative setting, stating,

I asked one person to lead, and then, as a group, we decided whose movement would feed into the next. One by one, we pieced together a dance. I played various music with different timing to see if the dancers would speed up the pace or slow down, but they did not. They were aware of one another in the space and worked together as their movement led the way.

These were the collaborative interactions that emerged from the improvised activity and collaboration. As the leader of the projects, I noted how my goal was to invite the dancers as co-collaborators while providing aesthetic orientations. In my observations of project #6, I recorded, “As the dancers and I both needed to adapt to new forms of choreography as a product to be performed on stage, it was fitting the piece was titled *Adaptation*.”

Like the effects of cross-disciplinary participation with canvas, paint, and movement, collaboration among the participants fostered an expanded view of choreographic possibilities. Figure 48, a photograph taken during the final performance of *Canvas*, captures this essence. The young dancers truly resembled new beginnings as they danced during dawn, showcasing an understanding and knowledge of their bodies and how they could move within a dance. This growth in newfound movement emerged through their collaborative and social interactions.

It has become evident that the social interactions and collaborative efforts significantly shaped the dancers' creative processes. The mutual influence among dancers, facilitated by shared experiences and diverse perspectives, enhanced their ability to generate innovative movements and foster a sense of community. This dynamic interaction between individual

expression and collective creation highlights the importance of social connections in the development of choreographic work. The projects not only allowed dancers to build meaningful relationships but also enriched their artistic growth through collaboration and shared exploration.



Figure 48—*CANVAS* (project #1): dancers displaying newfound gestures during a sunrise performance, 2021

Participation Provided Dancers with a New Sense of Artistry

The final theme to emerge was an observation of a new sense of artistry that was available to dancers through *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. Dancers described how their art became extensions of their bodies and how participation led them to discover unknown artistry within themselves. One dancer shared, “Actually, pouring the paint and putting it on our bodies and costumes in the film might have been my favorite part of the experience.” This experience created a profound connection between art and the physical body, merging the two in a seamless expression of creativity. Another dancer remarked that the strokes of their paint created a map they could translate onto their physical body: “Following the paint strokes on canvas, I outlined movement by creating a visual map, attending to the journey of my eyes on the painting, and embodying the journey in my pelvis, then the rib cage, then legs, and finally the port de bras.” This reflection highlights the process of embodying visual art, turning it into a kinetic expression. Similarly, another dancer said, “I had the feeling that my entire body was moving inside the canvas, generating colors and harmony.” This sentiment underscores the deep integration of their physicality with their artistic expression.

In my observation notes, I recorded this merging of art and body: “They were looking and listening for the movement on the canvas to transfer to their body, not just diffracting the image but applying it comfortably in their skin.” Working with a professional dancer on one project #3, I noted the following:

The participant moved with grace and ease. They displayed no ego or question about the movement. Nor did they think to look in the mirror (usually, I had participants face away from it because they tend to look at the shape their body is making). It truly was an embodiment of the practice.

This synergy between their bodies and their art also manifested in the emotional connections dancers felt with their paintings. For many, these connections were profound, akin to forming a

new relationship. One dancer shared, “I fell in love with my painting.” Another described getting to know their painting as one might become acquainted with an important person: “I looked deeper into the painting, all the nooks and crannies and space in between. It is as if you are in a relationship with someone, looking into their personality and characteristics.” This deep engagement with the painting highlights the dancers' ability to form a meaningful relationship with their art. Reflecting on the connection with their painting, another dancer explained,

I feel I almost got too invested in some of my paintings. The paintings are usually so busy that you step back and tend to look at the whole thing, but as a dancer I found myself noticing every little splatter, cell, and detail that culminated into my finished painting.

I observed that the dancers developed a relationship with the non-human object and this connection grew stronger with each new task. I observed that the dancers developed a relationship with the non-human object, which grew stronger with each task. One dancer shared, “At certain points, I did realize I was developing a relationship with my painting during the creation process.” Another dancer almost seemed to assign human traits to their painting, looking for it to direct and speak to them: “I did find myself leaning into the painting to speak to me and tell me what to do when it came to creating movement.” Participants began to describe the creative process during the project as a collaboration with their painting. One dancer said, “It was mine, and we (the painting and I) were creating it together.” Another dancer noted, “The more I painted, the more I established a strong relationship with the painting.” Furthermore, two dancers in *Together* mentioned they missed their paintings when they left and looked forward to seeing them again when returning to rehearsal.

Seven participants discovered unexpected artistic talents within themselves through their participation in the projects. Many of these dancers had not previously considered themselves particularly artistic. However, by creating their paintings and generating choreography from

them, they began to see new artistic and creative talents. One dancer expressed their delight, saying, “I was delighted to learn that it didn’t require too much artistic talent since I don’t consider myself the next Picasso.” Before starting the project, many dancers told me they were not artists. One dancer reflected, “I was really excited because I didn’t know I could make a painting like that.” Another learned that painting was not as hard as they imagined it would be. Through the projects, another explained, “I learned how to create a painting I otherwise wouldn’t have been able to create.” Speaking of their art, one dancer reflected, “I had never painted in such a simple yet stunning way. I was glad I didn’t have to have a ton of visual art experience to make something that looked really cool!” Many participants acknowledged they could not have generated the choreography had it not been for their painting.

Five participants explained how the project helped them feel creative and artistic. One dancer said the project provided them with a lot of creative freedom. Another said the project made them feel “like I was an artist.” Similarly, another dancer remarked, “The project definitely expanded my creativity.” Three participants enjoyed the creativity and artistry so much that they expressed a strong interest in painting again in the near future.

Figure 49 is a photograph taken during *Together*; project #8. The image illustrates participants painting and sharing their work with others. The dancers were amazed by what they were creating and became fascinated by their newfound sense of artistry through their creations.

The data reveals the dancers' deeply embodied experiences as they engaged with their paintings. The process of integrating visual art with physical movement allowed them to explore new dimensions of their creativity, fostering a profound connection between their bodies and their artistic expressions. This experience not only expanded their artistic horizons but also nurtured a sense of personal and emotional investment in their work. The interactions between

dancers and their paintings exemplify the dynamic co-creation of movement and art. The paintings, acting as agents, influenced and guided the dancers' creative processes. This dynamic intra-action between human and material agencies facilitated the emergence of new artistic expressions and deepened the dancers' connection to their work.

The *Synergetic Agential Choreography* projects empowered dancers to explore and embrace their creative potential by integrating visual art with dance. This fusion led to meaningful and innovative artistic expressions, shaping the dancers' creative journeys. Viewing these experiences deepens our understanding of the profound connection between dancers and their work, highlighting the transformative potential of embracing new artistic methodologies.



Figure 49—*Together* (project #8): dancers in the process of creating fluid acrylic pour painting, 2022

Reflection and Summary of the Analysis

Synergetic Agential Choreography aims to use a cross-disciplinary approach to use paintings to inspire dancer's movement. Twenty-eight participants used *Synergetic Agential Choreography* across eight projects, with three forms of qualitative data collection taking place to evaluate its approach, including questionnaires, written dancer reflections, and personal observation notes. Data was coded and thematically analyzed following the steps described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Axial coding resulted in the following six themes: (a) *dancers had positive experiences with the projects*, (b) *as a choreographic tool, the projects fostered individual expression and creativity*, (c) *many dancers were open to experience*, (d) *dancers were challenged to let go of codified technique*, (e) *dancers valued social connections*, and (f) *participation provided dancers with a new sense of artistry*.

Findings from thematic analysis highlighted the value of new approaches to creating choreography. Dancers expressed high levels of pleasure and enjoyment while working on the projects, but more importantly, they detailed how the projects helped them discover and unleash their creativity. While many of the dancers, at least in the beginning, demonstrated some struggles with letting go of traditional choreographic styles that had become engrained through their training, this project helped them become more confident and aware of their creative abilities. The dancers were exposed to new ways of expressing themselves, which also required them to radiate what they wanted to express in the first place.

Rather than rely on choreography prescribed by someone else, dancers were freed to tap into self-expression, which is not often permitted during the study of codified technique. Despite initial discomfort and insecurity, I watched the dancers flourish as they worked individually and collaboratively. It was clear that the social interaction and collaboration created a sense of

support among the dancers, allowing them to feel more comfortable and free in their self-expression. As described in the final theme, dancers moved into a new sense of personal artistry through this practice-led research of developing choreography from their own paintings. This chapter provided details of the analysis and findings. An evaluation and reflection on these results and their application are provided in the following chapter.

This study emphasized the dancers' firsthand experiences and physical involvement in the creative process from a phenomenological perspective. The projects enabled dancers to explore the intersections of their inner emotional landscapes with the external stimuli of the paintings, fostering a profound connection between their physical movements and artistic expressions. The dancers' reflections indicated a deepened sense of self-awareness and personal growth as they navigated the unfamiliar terrain of improvisational movement inspired by visual art.

The philosophy of agential realism sheds light on the interactive relationship between the dancers and the material-discursive practices woven into the projects. The paintings acted as agents, actively shaping the dancers' movements and creative decisions. This co-constitution of human and non-human agencies highlighted the fluid boundaries between the dancers' bodies and the artistic medium, revealing how each influenced and transformed the other. The projects demonstrated how artistic practices could serve as catalysts for reconfiguring dancers' habitual movements, opening up new avenues for choreographic innovation.

Instead of relying on predetermined choreography, the dancers were able to express themselves freely. Although initially uncomfortable and insecure, I witnessed the dancers thrive as they worked both independently and together. It was evident that the social interaction and collaboration fostered a supportive environment, enabling the dancers to feel more at ease and uninhibited in their self-expression. This sense of community and mutual influence played a vital

role in empowering the dancers to move beyond their established techniques and explore new creative possibilities.

As described in the final theme, dancers moved into a new sense of personal artistry through this practice-led research of developing choreography from their paintings. The process of integrating visual art into dance not only expanded their choreographic possibilities but also instilled a renewed sense of confidence and artistic identity. This chapter provided details of the analysis and findings. An evaluation and reflection on these results and their application are provided in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Unraveling the Tapestry

In this practice-led research project, we investigated ways to create new movement possibilities for dancers by using painted visual art images as a choreographic score to guide improvisational movement. Through analysis and reflection, we aimed to gain new insights and understanding. The result of this research is a method called *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, which employs cross-disciplinary practices to inform the creation of movements.

Chapter 5 illuminates the intersections of practice, research, and discovery. The evaluation delves into the depths of the creative process by examining the strengths and limitations and critically assessing the effectiveness and relevance of the creative methods employed and the results generated. This chapter is structured into seven distinct sections. The first section reflects upon the creative contribution to knowledge. Section two focuses on an in-depth look into the practice-led research method to evaluate the creative process, the project's theoretical underpinnings, including phenomenology's influence, and the artistic work's unfolding. The third section offers insights discovered during the studio practice. Drawing upon the work of trailblazers in dance, art, and academia, the fourth section connects this research project to other works and practices that have influenced the development of the method. The fifth section offers the implications of the findings to the broader field of dance, identifying ways in which current choreographers and companies can employ the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method to emerge from this project. The sixth section addresses potential biases, confounding factors, and limitations. Section seven investigates the method framework and its

potential adaptations to other artistic disciplines. It offers a synthesis of reflections and insights acquired from the evaluation, contributing to the thesis' overarching narrative.

By exploring the landscapes of creative practice-led research and evaluating the associated processes and outcomes, this chapter enhances an understanding of the relationship between artistic expression and academic inquiry, offering valuable insights for future creative scholars in dance.

Contribution to Knowledge: *Synergetic Agential Choreography*

This project devised and explored concepts developed to foster new and creative methods for generating choreography. The method that emerged, titled *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, can be adapted or adopted in many ways to meet the needs of choreographers. The concept of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* provides a shift in how we perceive the creation and execution of dance choreography. Introducing and investigating the merging of visual art methods and practices with performance art methods and practices reframes one's understanding and appreciation of dance and movement, offering an enriched, flexible method for creating dance works.

At its core, *Synergetic Agential Choreography* integrates the principles of synergy and agency. The term synergy refers to the combined power of a group of things when they are working together that is greater than the total power of each working part. American architect, systems theorist, and author R. Buckminster Fuller says, “Synergy is the only word in our language that means behavior of whole systems unpredicted by the separately observed behaviors of any of the system’s separate parts or any subassembly of the system’s parts.” (Buckminster, 1969: 96). This cross-disciplinary study demonstrates that synergy emphasizes the collaborative power and energy generated when dancers work together creatively and the

synergistic relationship that emerges between dancers and painting. On the other hand, agency refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own free choices. It underscores the importance of individual expression and personal creativity in the dance-making process.

The development of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* was driven by Karen Barad's theory of agential realism, which offers insights into the materialization of bodies through the intra-active, cause-and-effect relationships that collectively emerge within an environment. The theory of agential realism proposes that the world is made up of human and nonhuman materials that can act and influence the world around them. In this practice-led project, which incorporated dancer-created paintings and used those images to develop choreography, agential realism assumed the dancers' agency in creating the paintings, as well as the agency paintings, had in inspiring the movement and choreography created by the dancers. This theory was used to explore the intera-action between dancers and their paintings and how these interactions affected the choreographic outcomes. Physicist Karen Barad stated, "In an agential realist account, apparatuses are specific material configurations, or rather, dynamic (re)configurings of the world through which bodies are intra-actively materialized" (Barad, 2007: 169). In this way, choreography developed by this method is an example of agential realism in that it requires dancers to intera-act with their environments to create movement and meaning.

Instead of viewing choreography as a fixed set of movements to be replicated, *Synergetic Agential Choreography* acknowledges the choreographic process as a dynamic, evolving interaction between dancers, their environment, and their creativity. Similar to *The Underscore* method by Nancy Stark Smith (<https://nancystarksmith.com/underscore/>), which is a long practice of improvisational tasks to create ease in choreographic development, *Synergetic*

Agential Choreography fosters a new understanding of choreography, breaking away from traditional approaches to dance creation. Parallel to the practice of reading the canvas as a score, Stark Smith has described *The Underscore* as a framework for practicing and researching dance improvisation developed to guide dancers through a score from solo through group interactions and back to reflection. (Koteen & Stark Smith, 2008: 91) In both methods, *The Underscore* and *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, the intersubjective environment, whether dancer to their personal space, dancer to dancer, dancer to canvas, or any combination of the aforementioned intersubjective relationships, provides a permissible framework for individual movement discovery.

The complex interplay between humans and their environments prompts the exploration of the concept of emergence. Emergence occurs when material has characteristics or properties that its contributing parts do not have on their own and occurs only through the interaction of each of its parts. As scientist and mathematician Gordon Monro described, “Emergence is the idea that in some sense more comes out of a system than was put in” (Monro, 2009: 476). The merging of visual art within and through the choreographic process provided elements open to interpretation while creating new ways of creating movement.

Synergetic Agential Choreography advocates for the exploration of cross-disciplinary creative practice. For example, it encourages the use of visual art as a stimuli for dance-performance improvisation, a tool for generating movement material and values. It promotes a culture of experimentation, where dancers are encouraged to take risks, try new things, and step outside their comfort zones. Additionally, *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is characterized by its adaptability and flexibility. It does not dictate a specific way of creating but instead offers a flexible framework that can be adapted to suit the needs of individual dancers

and choreographers. Whether a choreographer prefers a structured approach or a more fluid, spontaneous process, the method can be tailored to fit their creative style and preferences.

In essence, *Synergetic Agential Choreography* expands our perspectives on dance and movement, demonstrating that choreography is not just about creating steps but about facilitating a creative, collaborative process that values and nurtures individual expression and collective synergy. This approach can transform how we create, perform, and experience dance, paving the way for a more adaptable and exciting era of choreography.

Synergetic Agential Choreography is a seven-step process that includes: (1) environment and introductions, (2) explanation of the process, (3) providing tools, (4) facilitating freedom of expression, (5) interpreting, (6) performing, and (7) revisiting. This is illustrated in Figure 50.

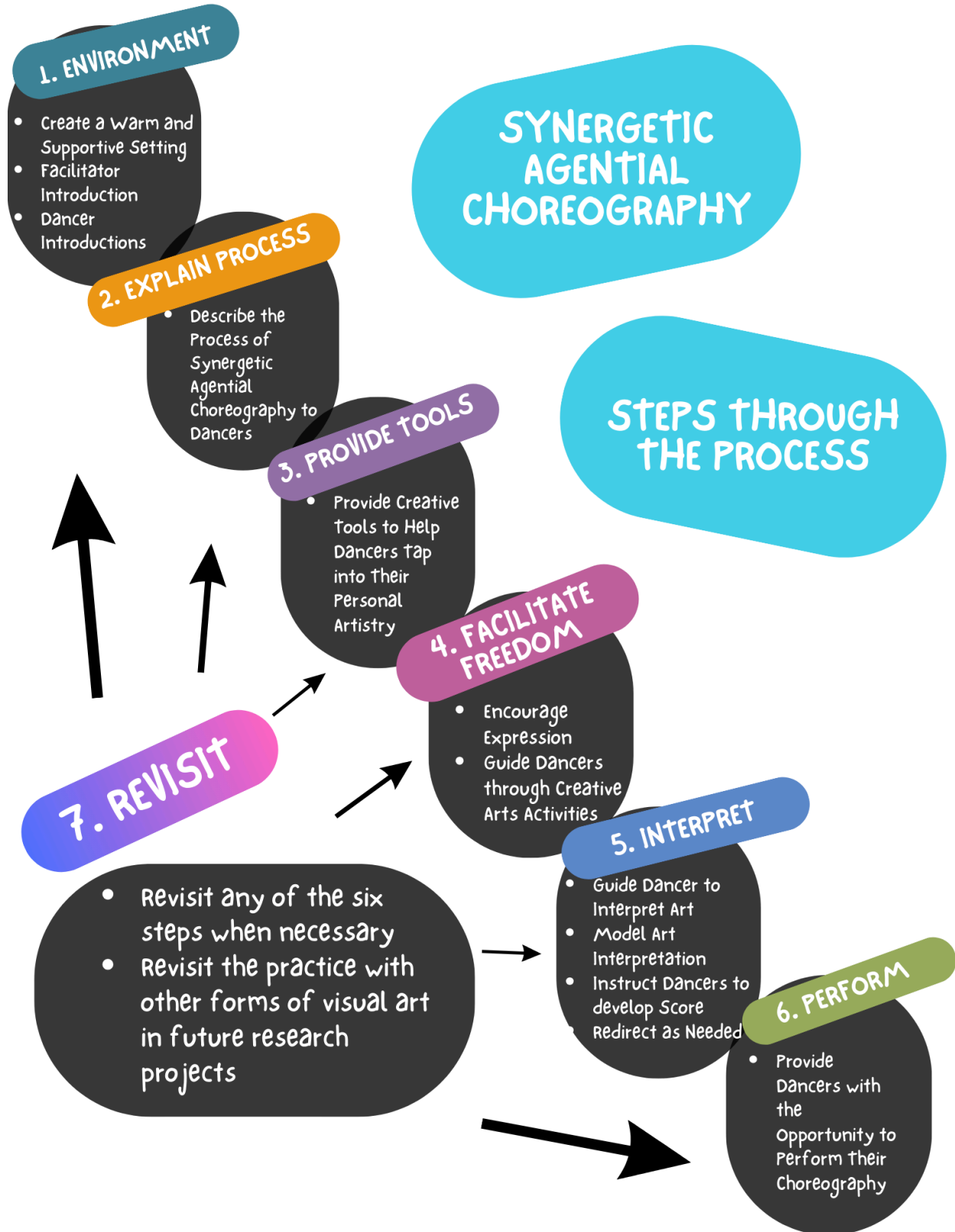


Figure 50—Steps of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*

Step 1: Environment and Introductions

The first step in the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method involves creating warm, friendly, and inclusive environments. In order for dancers to feel comfortable tapping into their creative energies, it is essential for them to be in a welcoming and safe setting. A relaxed environment may be fostered by allowing dancers and the facilitator to engage with one another. A brief 10-15 minute window should be allotted to allow time for introductions and icebreaker activities. When dancers are not already acquainted with one another, this period of introductions is particularly crucial to successfully applying the model. Facilitators may have all dancers gather in a circle and take a few moments to introduce themselves, talk about their personal interests, and elaborate on their backgrounds and experiences in dance. The facilitator should choose a physical location accessible to all participants and adjust environmental factors (such as adjusting the lighting or playing music) to facilitate a social and supportive environment. Ultimately, this first step aims to create a sense of support and camaraderie that may facilitate creative risk-taking and expression in the later steps.

For example, when I conducted a movement masterclass at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), where I employed the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method, at the beginning of the session, I gathered the group of dancers together, where I took the time to introduce myself and talk about my personal history, which led me to bring the dancers to this workshop (shown in Figure 51). I asked the group what types of interpretive movement exploration they have experimented with in the past and allowed time for them to share their experiences. Additionally, I informed the dancers that I would be there to lead them through the entire process and encouraged them to ask any questions they may have without hesitation.



Figure 51—Introducing myself as the researcher and instructor at the beginning of the masterclass before facilitating the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method workshop at Virginia Commonwealth University, 2022

Step 2: Explanation of the Process

The next step of the method involves providing participants with an understanding of what *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is. During this step, the facilitator must explain how the creation of visual art will be used to inspire new, creative movements in the form of original choreography. The importance of artistic freedom and personal expression must be emphasized during this phase, and the facilitator should urge participants to ‘let go’ of their previous knowledge of codified techniques. Dancers should understand that the goal of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is not to replicate existing and traditional notions of visual art and dance

but to allow themselves to become inspired to create in uninhibited ways. Dancers should also understand that there is no right or wrong way to perform these activities so long as they endeavor to let their own creative instincts guide them. The facilitator should explain that the entire process will involve (a) creating visual art, (b) interpreting it, (c) developing choreography from the art, and (d) performing the choreography (See Figure 52). The facilitator should provide time for participants to ask questions and interact during this step, as it may foster a greater sense of social support and camaraderie, which will facilitate creative expression.



Figure 52—Explaining the process of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*

In Figure 53, I am seen engaging with dancers in the VCU masterclass, providing a comprehensive explanation about the materials they will use and the purpose and process involved in their utilization within the creative practice. I asked whether the dancers had prior experience in visual art or fluid pour painting. It was essential to assure them that no definitive right or wrong approach existed in their artistic endeavors. To ensure a smooth transition, I elaborated on the steps outlined in Figure 52, encompassing the creative process. With everyone on the same page, we advanced to the subsequent step, ready to embark on the next phase of our collaborative journey.



Figure 53—I explain the process of employing materials for the creative practice, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2022

Step 3: Provide Tools

Step three of the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method involves introducing dancers to the art tools, materials, and methods they will use to create their original art pieces. Depending on the type of art being created, dancers may require introductions to the mediums and tools, such as types of paint, canvases, brushes, etc. Before moving beyond this step, all dancers should feel comfortable using the provided tools, and the facilitator should reiterate that dancers are free to use these tools to express themselves creatively as they desire.

Figure 54 captures a pivotal moment in the VCU masterclass when I actively demonstrated the intricate process of creating a fluid acrylic art painting. Considering most of the dancers I collaborated with either lacked experience or only witnessed this technique through social media platforms, offering them a visual example to follow was imperative, allowing them to grasp the method more effectively.

During the demonstration, I experienced a moment of dissatisfaction with the outcome of my painting. In response, I confidently swept the paint off the canvas and began anew, exemplifying that there is no correct approach to the creative process. This act was a powerful reminder that one could always restart and explore alternatives if the initial results proved unsatisfactory. It encouraged the dancers to embrace experimentation and view setbacks as opportunities for growth and discovery.

Furthermore, I reiterated to the dancers the importance of maintaining an open line of communication throughout their painting journey. They were reminded and encouraged to seek guidance and clarification freely if they encountered any questions or uncertainties during the process. This emphasized an open dialogue and fostered a supportive and collaborative environment where the dancers could confidently navigate their artistic expressions while benefiting from the collective knowledge and shared experiences leading to Step 4.



Figure 54—I demonstrate fluid art technique to the dancers creating a sample painting, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2022

Step 4: Facilitate Freedom of Expression and Guide the Development of Visual Art

The fourth step of the method involves encouraging dancers to ‘let go’ of preconceived notions of art and expression as they begin creating their visual art pieces. Dancers may work individually or in small groups to develop their artwork. Figure 55 is a collage of images that chronicle the visual art-making process with the VCU dancers. Within this diverse-making process, the lower left image of Figure 55 proudly displays the magnificent culmination of their collective efforts—a completed series of paintings that stands as a testament to their creativity and collaboration.

Each image within the collage in Figure 55 conveys a unique narrative, representing the dancers' process as they create their visual art. Every piece of art the dancers create manifests their distinctive style, perspective, interpretation, skill, and technique. The artwork becomes a vibrant tapestry, interwoven with the richness of their experiences and exposure to the world of visual art.

From observations in the VCU masterclass, it can be discerned that the diverse artistic expressions that emerged from this collaborative endeavor are a representation of each participating dancer's distinctive voice. Each completed painting reflected personal narratives and creative choices. Moreover, the varied perspectives encapsulated within the collage highlight the breadth of interpretations and creative approaches embraced by the dancers. During their time in the masterclass, the dancers' exposure to visual art shaped their artistic sensibilities and creative contributions.

Figure 55 also shows a moment in the dancers' artistic evolution, from the initial stages of experimentation and exploration to the culmination of their efforts in the completed artwork. It is a visual testament to their dedication, courage, and willingness to step outside their comfort zones. The collage celebrates the dancers' collective journey, showcasing the power of collaboration and the transformative nature of artistic exploration that differentiated their experiences.

As the researcher and facilitator, I may use different prompts to help dancers explore their emotions and experiences to produce art. For example, I often could say, "Try to release your past training in dance and let your own creative inspiration emerge," or "There is no right or wrong way to do this, so long as you are connected to your own, unique creative process." Again, dancers' creative freedom must be provided and encouraged, as the aim is to inspire

dancers to connect with their inner creative muses. Depending on the type of artwork being created, the facilitator may allow this step to last anywhere from 30 minutes to a couple of hours. By the end of the fourth step, each dancer should have a piece of original visual art that they either produced alone or in a small group and be ready to move on to Step 5, the interpretation of the visual art.



Figure 55—Dancers creating fluid art paintings, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2022

Step 5: Interpretation of Visual Art

The fifth step of the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* process begins the next phase of creative practice. While dancers create artwork during step four, the fifth step directs them to interpret their artwork. Dancers are encouraged to view their painting as a score, evaluating elements such as color, shape, texture, layers, and direction to inspire movement exploration. This approach allows their visual art to function as a score, offering an alternative to the codified movement patterns typically learned through years of technical training. In order to assist in untapping the movement language of the individual through the use of painting as a score, the facilitator may use a number of prompts during this phase to encourage creative thinking. Depending on the time allotted for each project and the dancer's experience level, improvisational prompts to employ will vary and could include instructions to:

- Focus on a specific body part to initiate movement
- Focus on a particular color in the painting to map the movement
- Incorporate chance method into the above tasks to determine which body part or color will be focused on to prompt movement (see Chapter 3)
- Finding a shape within the painting and embodying the image
- Find a shape within the painting and embody the image as the body turns, leaps, or jumps
- Incorporate chance method to determine the number of times the body will repeat an embodied image, shape, or movement
- Incorporate chance method to determine the timing for movement patterns
- Identify multiple pathways in the painting and transfer the movement to the body traveling through space on the dance floor
- Dancers connect movement material produced to create partner phrases
- Add dynamics to the produced material to evolve the dancer's creative movement
- Touch the texture within dry paintings and embody the translation into the moving body

- Recall the painting that was made and embody the paint as it was manipulated on the canvas: drops, drips, splatters, glides, flows, tilts, pauses, pushes, cells developing/growing through colors on the canvas

Considering that step 5 will most likely force many participants into a space of creativity with which they are not familiar, it may be helpful for the facilitator to kinesthetically or verbally walk dancers through the facilitator's interpretation of their own artwork, and demonstrate how they interpret their painting as a score. The facilitator should move around the room as dancers develop their choreography, providing encouraging feedback. When observing dancers who revert to codified techniques, the facilitator should gently encourage dancers to temporarily suspend notions of traditional dance and allow their bodies to interpret the art they have created.

Figure 56 shows a moment frozen in time during the VCU masterclass, showing the dancers engrossed in improvisational movement tasks. The photograph serves as a testament to the dancers' commitment and engagement during this workshop, as they wholeheartedly embraced the opportunity to explore and express themselves through movement. Given the workshop's time constraints, three of the above prompts were explored. Although limited in number, the significance lies in the depth and quality of the exploration within these prompts. Each dancer dedicated themselves to delving into the essence of the task, pushing their boundaries, and immersing themselves in the realm of movement possibilities. The photograph encapsulates the raw energy, creativity, and vulnerability that permeated the space as the dancers embarked on their individual movement journeys.

As the individual movement explorations drew to a close, the dancers were seamlessly guided into the next phase of the workshop. They were organized into groups and tasked with connecting their respective movements to co-create a choreographic composition. The dancers

began intertwining their movements, forging connections weaving a tapestry of collective expression.

In this phase of group collaboration, the dancers brought together their distinct movement vocabularies, artistic sensibilities, and personal interpretations. Figure 57 illustrates the synergy and connection that emanated from a day of creative exchange. The dancer's improvisational investigations demonstrate their ability to listen, respond, and build upon the interpretation of visual art. Within these collaborative moments, the dancers discovered the beauty of collective creativity, fostering a sense of unity and shared ownership over the choreographic process.

This part of step 5 may last 30 to 60 minutes. After dancers have solidified their choreography, the facilitator should allow time for them to rehearse. This step may require an additional 30 to 60 minutes and can include additional documentation like recording movement development on their personal mobile devices. Additional time and rehearsal may be allocated for the choreography to be taught and composed with an ensemble of dancers. This prepares the dancers to present their work to an audience in a performance.



Figure 56—Dancers engaged in improvisational movement tasks, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2022

Step 6: Perform

Synergetic Agential Choreography's sixth step is a pivotal phase where dancers can bring their choreographic creations to life through performance. This step serves as a culmination of their artistic exploration, providing a platform for the dancers to share their work with others. Whether performing for their fellow dancers, in front of a live audience, or as a filmed piece, this performance component holds immense significance in the creative process.

Figures 58 and 59 present moments from a performance showcasing the composition crafted during the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* workshop at VCU. The photographs show the dancers' energy as they embody their choreography, infusing it with their unique artistic sensibilities and creative interpretations. As the dancers take center stage, their movements reflect the depth of their engagement, dedication, and growth throughout the workshop. Moving

into the performance realm, their choreographic composition reveals the intricate interplay of bodies, space, time, and dynamics. Figures 57 and 58 serve as a visual portal, inviting viewers to witness the transformative power of dance and the culmination of the dancers' creative journey.

Whether the performance is witnessed by their peers, an eager audience, or captured on film, the act of sharing their choreography elevates its impact and resonance. It offers a moment of connection as the dancers communicate their artistic intentions and invites viewers to experience their creative vision. Figures 57 and 58 serve as a testament to the power of performance as a means of expression, communication, and storytelling, showcasing the tapestry of the performance and capturing the essence of the choreographic composition that emerged from the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* workshop. Through figures 57 and 58, we observe the culmination of the dancers' efforts, the audience celebrating their artistic growth, technical prowess, and ability to convey visual art through movement.



Figure 57—Dancers observing their peers performing movement composition developed from the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* workshop at Virginia Commonwealth University, 2022



Figure 58—Dancers performing movement composition developed with partners during *Synergetic Agential Choreography* workshop at Virginia Commonwealth University, 2022

Step 7: Revisit

The *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method is a guiding framework for choreographers embarking on a creative process through a cross-disciplinary approach. Figure 51 is a diagram that acts as a map that choreographers can refer back to, offering a sense of grounding and guidance in their artistic endeavors. To ensure the sustained inspiration and creativity of the participants, the facilitator should revisit the steps periodically throughout the artistic process. By revisiting the steps, the facilitator rekindles the dancers' connection to its principles and encourages them to dive deeper into their exploration. The facilitator should periodically revisit steps to reinforce the core concepts and principles underpinning *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. This act serves as a reminder of the foundational elements and invites the dancers to continually seek inspiration and expand their creative horizons.

While the initial application of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* may have focused on using painting to generate choreography, it is essential to recognize the method's potential for adaptation using various other forms of visual art. To enrich the understanding and application of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, future researchers could utilize a range of different artistic practices, like sculpture, textile making, and writing, all of which have the potential to replace painting as the generator of artworks and enable participants to respond through dance, embracing and benefiting from the principles of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. Facilitators should encourage dancers and artists from different creative disciplines to explore and adapt the method to their practices. Expanding the scope beyond dance could also allow new insights and possibilities to emerge, further opening doors to cross-disciplinary collaborations and innovative artistic expressions.

Contribution to Dance Education

Synergetic Agential Choreography offers an innovative approach to dance education that emphasizes collaboration and individual creativity. By engaging dancers in a process where each participant contributes to the creation of a cohesive performance, *Synergetic Agential Choreography* fosters a dynamic learning environment that reflects both collective and individual expressions. As a pedagogical tool, *Synergetic Agential Choreography* provides dance educators with a structured yet flexible framework that enhances teaching methodologies and enriches students' educational experiences.

The foundation of the choreographic method lies in creating a warm and inclusive environment. This initial step is crucial for establishing trust and camaraderie among students. When dancers feel safe and valued, they are more likely to take creative risks and fully engage in the learning process. Dance educators can facilitate this by organizing introductory sessions where students and teachers interact, share their backgrounds, and set a supportive tone for the course. This environment not only fosters creativity but also builds a sense of community, which is essential for collaborative artistic endeavors.

One of the core principles of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is to promote artistic freedom and personal expression. By encouraging students to let go of traditional codified techniques and explore new forms of movement, *Synergetic Agential Choreography* helps students discover their unique creative voices. Educators can guide this process by emphasizing that there is no right or wrong way to create art when creating both painting and choreography, thereby reducing performance anxiety and fostering a more open and experimental mindset. This approach allows students to develop their individual styles and express their personal narratives through dance.

A distinctive feature of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is the integration of visual art to inspire dance movements. Educators can bridge the gap between different artistic disciplines by having students create visual art pieces and then interpret these artworks as scores for choreography. This method enhances students' ability to think critically and translate visual elements into physical expression. It also encourages improvisation and spontaneous creativity as students learn to respond to the visual stimuli in innovative ways. This cross-disciplinary approach not only enriches students' artistic experiences but also broadens their understanding of how different art forms can intersect and influence one another.

Synergetic Agential Choreography places a strong emphasis on the interpretation of visual art to generate movement. This process requires students to analyze elements such as color, shape, texture, and direction in their artworks and use these observations to inspire their choreography. By engaging in this analytical process, students develop critical thinking skills that are essential for artistic creation. Educators can support this development by providing prompts and guiding questions that encourage deeper exploration and interpretation. This method helps students build a robust movement vocabulary and enhances their ability to create meaningful and innovative dance works.

Performance is a vital component of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, providing students with the opportunity to bring their choreographic creations to life. This step is essential for building confidence and stage presence. By performing their work, students learn to present their ideas to an audience, receive feedback, and reflect on their creative process. Educators can create a supportive performance environment by encouraging positive feedback and constructive critique. This not only helps students improve their work but also reinforces the value of sharing and collaboration in the artistic process.

A unique aspect of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is the emphasis on revisiting and refining the creative process. By periodically revisiting the steps of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, educators can reinforce core concepts and encourage students to investigate deeper into their artistic exploration. This iterative approach promotes lifelong learning and helps students understand that the creative process is ongoing. Additionally, the flexibility allows educators to adapt the method to various forms of visual art, fostering cross-disciplinary exploration and innovation. This adaptability ensures that *Synergetic Agential Choreography* remains a dynamic and evolving pedagogical tool that can become a transformative journey in dance education that celebrates individuality, collaboration, and the boundless possibilities of creative expression.

Through the Lens of Phenomenology

This practice-led research project viewed participation as a lived experience that emerged through interactions between dancers and their environments. Using phenomenology as a research methodology enabled me to focus on observing participants' engagement in movement-making, gaining insights into how the embodiment of visual and tactile stimulation was intertwined with the art-making process. Through phenomenological inquiry, an understanding was gained of how dancers experienced the activity's physical and emotional aspects and uncovered the artwork's impact and meaning on each individual's experience, observed by the dancer's organic embodiment of the visual stimulation. Phenomenological approaches allow researchers to obtain a rich understanding of individuals' perceptions and experiences of phenomena, and this approach encouraged me to understand the artwork from the viewer's perspective. It allowed for a deeper examination of the meaning attributed by each individual rather than a simple, surface-level analysis through journaling, video recording,

questionnaires, and dancer narratives. Furthermore, this allowed me to explore how dancers perceived their artwork to influence their emotions, beliefs, and behaviors.

The creative process of developing paintings and using them to guide the design of choreography was a subjective experience that harnessed participants' personal experiences. The act of painting leveraged dancers' senses, emotions, and imaginations (documented in Appendix F, *Themes and Codes*). The choreography that was subsequently created was not just a sequence of movements but an expression of participants' thoughts, feelings, experiences, personal perspectives, perceptions, and interpretations, as documented in Appendix G, *Excerpts Supporting the Notion of Individual Choice and Creativity*. Reflecting on their experience in *Canvas*, project #1, one of the dancers stated:

This method is unique because there was no regard for my existing technical vocabulary. Instead, the process required honesty and trust in my own movement choices based on the visual stimulation of the painting. It values the individual voice and validates individual choices.

Synergetic Agential Choreography allowed participants to express themselves in unique and personal ways. The paintings were not just art objects but reflections of the participants' inner worlds. By exploring participants' subjective experiences and the interactions between their paintings and choreography, one can better understand the creative process and how it impacted those involved.

The choreography created was not just a product but a process that involved dancers' personal, embodied experiences as they engaged with each other in their environments, similar to the choreography uncovered by Nancy Stark Smith using *The Underscore* method. Figure 59 is a photograph taken in MDI Dance Studio in Liverpool, England while working on project #8 called *Together*. I was intensely focused on observing the participant's reactions to a task given to them after being asked to review movement material filmed on their phones. I recognized

curiosity and concentration in their interaction, expressions, and body language, diffracting the image of their painting. I observed a physical representation of Barad’s diffraction phenomenon and shared materiality during this process. Figure 59 captures the essence of phenomenological research, emphasizing the importance of the human experience. This approach affected the design of the questionnaires by influencing the crafted questions to garner information about the dancer’s embodied experience, their sensorial reaction to tactile stimulation, and physical reactivity at the moment of connection between canvas, paint, and body.



Figure 59—*Together* (project #8): the researcher takes notes while the participants review movement tasks filmed on mobile devices, 2022

The Catalyst for Expression

To generate ideas for choreography, one needs to generate inspiration or motivation for the work; in this project, visual art was the provocation. The first step in this method involved having the

dancers create their paintings. Various mediums were employed, including acrylic paint, glue, water, pour mediums, silicone oil, and canvases. The paintings were created without preconceived notions of what they would look like or how they would be used to generate the choreography.

The next step involves an analysis of the painting, the movement qualities of the paint, and the colors, texture, and shape of the art. The dancers examined how the colors interacted, the silicone cells' weight and flow, and the painting's overall composition. In line with analyzing the image, the movement exploration began with improvisational tasks. Next, the movement qualities of the painting were translated into movement phases as each dancer was guided to a specific section of the painting to explore. After establishing their phase work, dancers collaborated with other project members to broaden a movement lexicon that embodied the attributes of their paintings, including fluidity and vigor.

The movement phases were then woven into a choreographic sequence, with the dancers using the movement vocabulary they created to develop the final dance piece. The choreographic development involved experimentation, refinement, and collaboration between the dancers, their paintings, and the facilitator. Finally, the completed choreographic work could be performed in front of an audience. Ultimately, the dance could be performed on stage or filmed for a screendance.

Figure 60 is a powerful snapshot from *The Impetus*. This project was an exceptional experience that beautifully merged film and live dance performance, pushing the boundaries of performing arts for these young dancers and presenting the audience with a compelling experience. This medium amalgamates choreographed dance sequences with the artistic flair of

cinematic techniques, capturing the beauty of movement in a dynamic yet controlled environment.



Figure 60—*The Impetus* (project #4): photograph from live performance, 2021

Connecting Threads

American artist Jackson Pollock influenced the visual art style used in this practice-led project. Historically, his work was different from anything that preceded it; the paintings were chaotic and dynamic, featuring an array of paint drips, splatters, and swirls. Although his technique was seen as random, Pollock's paintings were still very intentional and carefully composed. He used the drips and splatters to create a sense of movement and energy unlike anything else at the time.

Art critic Harold Rosenberg described Pollock's work by saying, "What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event" (Rosenberg, 1994: 25). His painting style was viewed as a revolutionary bridge between abstract expressionism and pop art, and I chose to model the artwork developed by participants after Pollock's work because of how well his style seemed to reflect dance; the drips and splatters can be read like a sheet of music, communicating so much without ever saying a word.

Arguably, the process of creating a choreography inspired by one's personal painting possesses considerably more meaning than simply responding to another artist's painting. That is why it was so important for dancers to create and read their own art rather than seek inspiration from something made by someone else. Through this method, dancers explore their creativity and uniquely express themselves. Their paintings were a medium for them to investigate and generate choreographic material rather than remaining limited to strict codes of steps and movements provided by a choreographer or learned and replicated from codified techniques. Choreography constructed using the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method exists outside the confines of known movements and habitual technical patterns. The method encourages dancers to peel back the layers of assumed technique to reveal the uniquely individual movement language of the self. This creative process also allows dancers to collaborate and learn from one another. An important benefit of the eight projects outlined in Chapter 2 was the confidence it fostered among participants. Participation in the projects permitted dancers to tap into their cross-disciplinary creativity and develop a new skill set. The experiences shared by participants were encouraging as the findings revealed that the dancers had positive experiences with the projects.

This practice-led research project explored the entangled intra-action between painting and choreography, demonstrating how combining visual and performing arts can expand creative and expressive possibilities. It emphasized the value of cross-disciplinary collaboration in the arts, as highlighted by Nancy Yunhwa Rao and Liggett. Rao noted that working across disciplines helps individuals move beyond conventional boundaries, while Liggett stressed the importance of placing artistic research within a broader academic context (Liggett, 2020; Rao, 2023). The project focused on painting as a two-dimensional art form and dance as a three-dimensional performance art, uncovering the unique expressive potential of choreographic aesthetics. By interweaving dance and visual art, the research expanded the possibilities for artistic innovation and deepened our understanding of how art reflects and shapes the choreographic experience, practice, and knowledge.

This project allowed dancers to explore their artwork, acting as both mover and visual artists. The analysis revealed that as a choreographic tool, this project fostered individual expression and creativity. Participation allowed dancers to practice problem-solving and develop their critical thinking skills. Internationally acclaimed choreographer and dancer Jonathan Burrows argued that a dance score should be treated as a creative document. According to Burrows, the choreographer should be open to making changes and adjustments to the score as the creative process develops. For Burrows, the score is not the end goal of the creative process but rather the beginning of a journey of exploration (Burrows, 2000). The same can be inferred from the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method. The act of painting creates the score, which is used to develop movement, reverting back to the score as needed to decipher more information to create deeply rooted and well-developed movements. In his text, *A Choreographer's Handbook*, Burrows exclaimed, “Accepting what comes easily means trusting that everything

changed by what it stands next to and that this is something I have to discover but cannot necessarily control” (Burrows, 2010: 6). Burrows considered the score as a collaboration between the choreographer and the dancers, whereas *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is a cross-disciplinary method and the score is a collaboration between dancer, paint, and canvas and is a cross-disciplinary approach to movement making.

The *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method encourages a partnership that enables the participants to learn and engage with their paintings and to collaborate with other dancers. The painting developed, using chance methods, is the score and serves as a guide to choreographic creation. By following guided improvisation tasks, dancers are stimulated to create their own interpretations of the painting, using it as a score that provides movement, shape, and spatial patterns. Contribution to choreographic development can create a sense of ownership and investment in the process, leading to a strengthened partnership between the choreographer and the dancers.

The eight projects in this practice-led research project provided dancers with opportunities for personal expression, a chance to develop their ideas, and a platform for self-discovery. During the qualitative analysis, it became clear that many dancers were open to this cross-disciplinary method. They trusted the process of creating both their paintings and related movements. *Synergetic Agential Choreography* allowed them to express themselves without having any expectations or boundaries imposed upon them by conventional instruction. This freedom allowed them to develop an advanced movement vocabulary by exploring and experimenting with new techniques.

The participants appreciated a sense of social support and connection during the projects they took part in, as revealed in the fourth theme during the thematic analysis ‘Dancers were

challenged to let go of the codified technique'. While reviewing the data, it became clear that dancers valued feeling supported and listened to during the research. This provided dancers with opportunities for shared knowledge exchange, where each person's experience brought something unique and meaningful into their collective effort towards completing tasks in developing and composing choreography. In addition, social connections helped dancers better understand what they were asked to do and why they were being asked to perform those tasks, which could be incredibly valuable as they worked through their challenges while engaging with a new project. This support system was beneficial during the visual art-making, choreographic process, and performance.

Rudolf Laban developed a method of analyzing human motion that has been used to study dance. This method involves examining the qualities, elements, and principles behind movement and aligns with the development of improvisational tasks in the research. Laban's approach to dance was based on the idea that movement should be derived from "sense impressions," or physical stimuli perceived by dancers' bodies (Newlove & Dalby, 2004). This supports the notion that dancers should use their senses to determine how their bodies move rather than relying on the external directions of an instructor. This concept significantly impacted my approach and is supported by the observations that dancers struggled to 'let go' of codified techniques. The most prominent example of this was evident in *Throughline*, project #3, in which the technically proficient dancer was instructed to employ improvisational techniques instead of following a predetermined structure for creating movements. While investigating their paintings, the participants relied upon what they felt inside themselves as they employed sensory input to explore different possibilities with their bodies.

The paintings, which were objects within the environment, challenged dancers to release their reliance on movement from codified techniques. The work, which consisted of these material objects and tasks created by the participants and researcher, required the dancers to design their movements within an improvisational framework. Referencing the painting as the sole stimulation for movement development pushed the dancers beyond traditional ideas about dance structure to create new forms of dance that were not bound by codified techniques.

In developing *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, I was also influenced by William Forsythe's *Choreographic Objects*, which encourages bodies to explore different ways of moving through space without relying solely on what they have done before. Forsythe's *Choreographic Objects*, such as chairs or ropes suspended from above, emphasize invention rather than adherence to pre-developed steps (Forsythe, 2020). Forsythe's technique allows performers greater liberty when exploring how they interact with the environments around them. Adopting Forsythe's principles to the painting exercise in *Synergetic Agential Choreography* encouraged dancers physically and mentally, inspiring creative ideas about what shapes their bodies could make within space.

In considering how the participants interacted socially, Henri Lefebvre's analysis of the production of space was applied to my approach in several ways. First, as the researcher, it provided me an understanding of how the dancers' physical environments affected their movement potentials and constraints. By observing the different spatial configurations of paint on canvas and its impact on movement possibilities, I gained insights into how participants could use the entirety of rehearsal space more effectively within a given improvisational task; the movement, shape, layers, and texture of paint on canvas as a pivotal influence on the spatial exploration of the personal kinesthetic sphere as well as the rehearsal environment. Furthermore,

examining the social dimensions associated with particular spaces allowed dancers to consider questions about how best to replicate the visual stimulation of the paint on canvas to a broader scale.

Lefebvre's theories offer an invaluable opportunity for critical reflection on embodied experiences within various environments through an awareness of what we do and why we do it in specific locations or situations. As Lefebvre explained, space is socially constructed (Lefebvre, 1991). In the context of the current research project, space has the potential to impact dancers in many ways. The notion of social space and how its physical characteristics are represented and experienced is of particular salience to this research project. For example, canvases placed near one another in the studio space absorbed paint from their contributing artist and the artists nearby, influencing future actions in both the act of painting and movement creation. The social context of this project promoted a sense of support, collaboration, and creative freedom as participants experienced the space, both in terms of the studio environment and as a space for creative expression. The interaction of space's natural and social elements was vital to fostering creative expression and a break from the codified technique.

The findings of my research project also revealed that participation provided dancers with a new sense of artistry. Acrylic fluid art painting was a powerful tool for dancers to challenge codified techniques while opening new possibilities in their dancing. As an expressive and improvisational form of painting, the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method allowed participants to explore movement, shape, texture, and color without being bound by traditional rules or techniques. By examining how these elements interacted, dancers were encouraged to explore new ways of moving and physically responding with their bodies rather than relying on predetermined steps or patterns. A great deal of creativity came into play, incorporating chance

methods in making paintings and choreography. This allowed for a more open and spontaneous approach to creating, which helped to compose unpredictable visual art and choreography.

One of the main advantages of using the chance method was that it permitted greater flexibility in terms of how choreography could be structured. Additionally, because each performance was unique due to how random events occurred during the creation process, there was also something inherently intriguing and unpredictable when incorporating chance tasks into the research. I was mainly influenced by how John Cage and Trisha Brown integrated such methods into their work. Trisha Brown's work revolved around improvisation, as she always encouraged her dancers to experiment with movements and find new ways to express themselves (Rosenberg, 2017). This approach is very similar to that of John Cage, who was renowned for his insistence that all music be improvised or chance-based (Cage, 1987). The artistic contributions of predecessors like Brown and Cage instrumentally influenced the development of *Synergetic Agential Choreography*.

The concept of chance in choreography and the cross-disciplinary approach are depicted in Figure 61 from *Together*, project #8, which demonstrates the dancers merging visual and performing arts to create an entirely unique and captivating experience. Although the physical paintings are not in the photograph, the dancers carry their essence effectively. Their visual artwork's colors, textures, shapes, and emotional tones influence the movements and forms they execute. They bring a kinetic echo of their painting experience, transforming static visual art into dynamic physical expression. Their bodies serve as living canvases on which the impressions of their paintings are traced and reimagined in the form of dance.

Figure 59, on page 218, provides additional context by documenting the dancers in the studio while developing choreography for *Together*, project #8. That image illustrates the

dancers engaged with their paintings, immersing themselves in the choreographic process. Dancers examine the shapes and lines of their artwork, finding parallels in their bodies and movements and experimenting with ways to materialize their visual art through dance. Figure 61 is a still photograph of the same dancers performing their final piece. This approach encourages people to view art through a multifaceted filter and demonstrates how a deep, personal engagement with art-making can breathe new life into a performance.

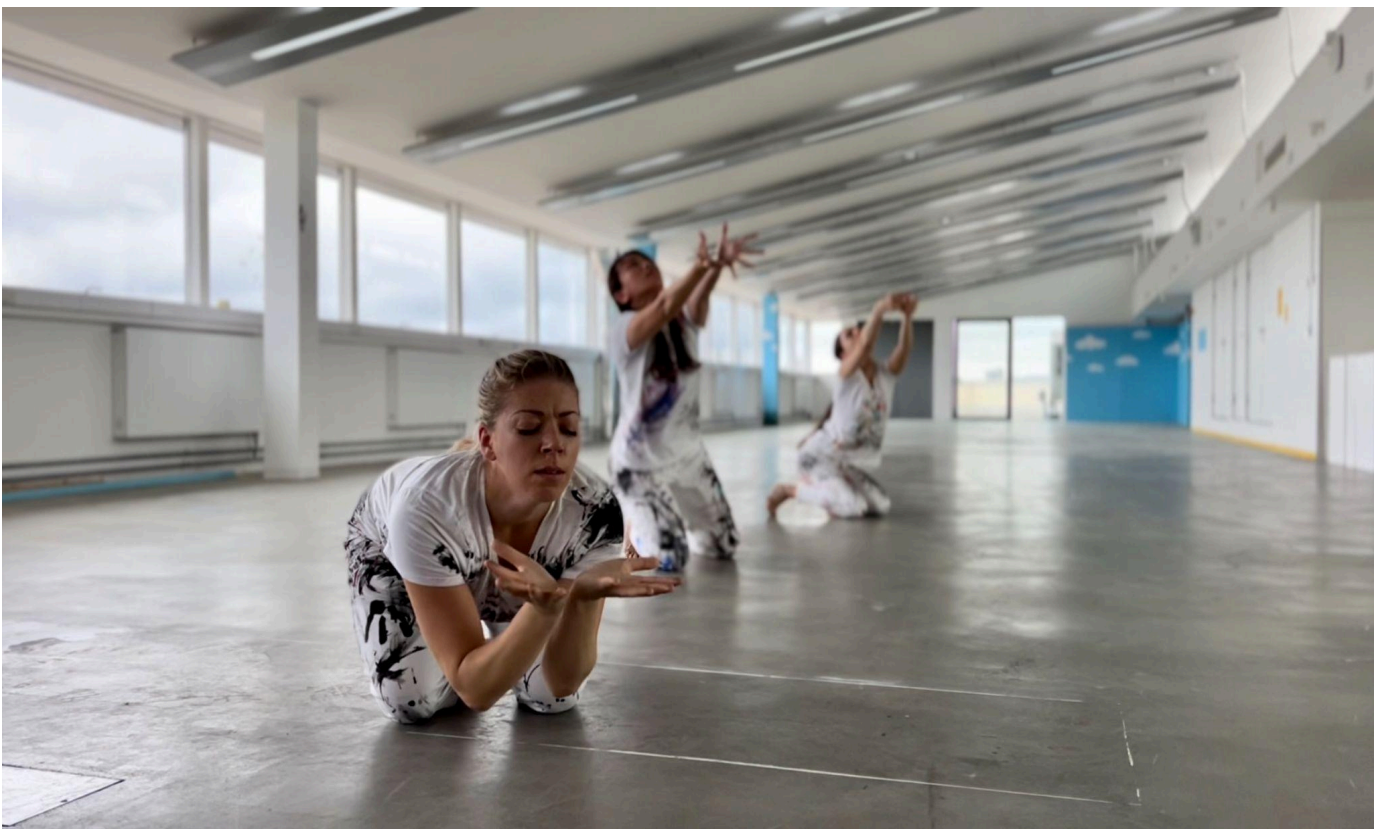


Figure 61—*Together* (project #8): still photo from performance in Liverpool, England, 2022

Implications for Practitioners

In the world of professional dance, choreographic methodologies are a necessary tool for creating new works. A professional dance company can expand its repertoire, explore new

movement concepts, and create innovative works by introducing the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method. By studying how different types of dancers use specific choreographic devices, choreographers can use *Synergetic Agential Choreography* as a cross-disciplinary dance tool that effectively creates more complex movements, intricate patterns, and greater collaboration between the dancers. Introducing a new choreographic methodology centered around the dancers making paintings and then using those paintings to develop choreography would undoubtedly be a compelling addition to a company's repertoire.

Incorporating the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method to include the creation of visual art in the creative process can provide new ways of thinking about movement and choreography. Painting involves a different set of skills and techniques than dance, and by engaging in this process, the dancers in each of the eight projects were forced to approach their choreography from a different perspective. This process led to new ideas and creative insights that may not have been possible without the act of painting. Like in projects like *Throughline*, project #3 and *Tunneling*, project #5, the professional dancers were discomfited by the abandonment of habitual technically-rooted movement, and with a commitment to the method, their choreographic creations were proclaimed "unexpected and uncomfortable" said P8, Day 2 of the rehearsal process for *Throughline*.

Employing paintings as a source of creative inspiration is nothing new, as dancers have long used other artwork to inspire choreography. However, using paintings that the dancers made themselves to influence choreography is a new concept in the dance and choreographic field. The notion of dancers crafting their own paintings to inspire dance, rather than relying on choreographers or other artists to generate the visual elements of a performance, presents new and intriguing possibilities. The paintings serve as a source of inspiration for the dancers, who

would use them to develop movement material. This approach empowers dancers to express themselves innovatively and creatively. Further, such a method increases the potential for collaboration between dancers and choreographers. Dancers could provide choreographers with input and ideas, which could be leveraged in the composition process.

The act of creating paintings can also provide dancers with a new level of personal investment and ownership in the choreographic process. By making paintings to generate their own movements, dancers may become more invested in the creative process, thus fostering deeper connections to the artistic work. The result of these deeper connections may be more meaningful and impactful performances.

Incorporating visual art promotes diverse ideas and creativity in the choreographic process. Allowing each dancer to create their artwork can make the choreography more personalized and reflective of the individual dancers, their individual ideas, choices, and their movement preferences. This can help promote diversity in the company's repertoire and ensure that the choreography includes a range of perspectives and experiences. Observed in the evolution of the Western art movement, art reflects the social climate, representing and expressing a wide range of human experiences. Integrating dancers into this creative process and then allowing that process to foster the development of their own choreography speaks to and honors each dancer's unique perspectives and experiences. By embracing this creative approach to choreographic development, dance companies could continue stimulating their audience and providing works ahead of the curve.

In dance, the traditional hierarchical structure has always emphasized the authority of a principal choreographer or artistic director. However, the concept of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* does not displace this power dynamic but rather encourages a dialogue between

authority and experimentation. While *Synergetic Agential Choreography* may seem like an irregular deviation from the norm for experienced dance professionals, it enriches their artistic spectrum and expands their cultural impact. *Synergetic Agential Choreography* transcends the traditional canvas of dance to create a network of exploration. Focusing on the dancers' intentions does not diminish the leadership role but invigorates it by making it more empathetic and pluralistic. The connection between the choreographer and the dancers creates a sense of community and resilience; the resulting conversations bring life to an artistic vision.

Choreographers could use the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method to explore the relationships between performers and their audiences. By having the dancers make the paintings and then use them to develop the choreography, the audience could experience the creative process involved in the production. Through video documentation, a screendance, or a gallery of the paintings in the performance space, the audience could gain a deeper understanding of the creative process and provide a new level of personal investment and ownership in the choreographic process for the dancers.

Figure 62 is a photograph taken during an exploratory exercise during *Adaptation*, project #6. This experimentation involved a seamless integration of movement practice and painting, captured on video and titled *Staining the Score*. In this process, a canvas was laid out on the ground, becoming the literal and figurative foundation for creating a unique piece of visual art. Rather than using traditional tools like brushes or palette knives, the dancers used their own bodies and costumes as the primary implements. Their movements became the strokes that shaped the emerging artwork. The contours, pressures, and textures imparted by their bodies and costumes were directly imprinted onto the canvas, creating a tangible representation of their dance.



Figure 62—Image of an experimental painting of a large canvas on the ground creating *Staining the Score*, 2022

This approach echoes the work of French performance and visual artist, Yves Klein, who employed nude female artists, called ‘human paintbrushes’ to imprint the body onto canvas in his series to study the measurements of the body. (Rehberg, 2007) In *Anthropometries (1960)*, Klein uses the physical body and the monochrome color ‘International Klein Blue’ to capture the imprint of the human body on vertically hung white canvases. Both in stagnation and in apparent movement, the silhouettes are often singular, but in some paintings, multiple silhouettes are imprinted adjacent to one another, implying intersubjectivity among the ‘human paintbrushes.’

According to Hande, Aydingüler, and Boyraz,

Y. Klein gave the models a chance to move freely on the surface in the works he produced with performances. The place has been completely guided. However, he is essentially an artist who coordinates performance and guides the body (model) during this coordination to create an artistic work.

(Hande, Aydingüler, and Boyraz, 2023: 2268)

The *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method includes processes that are in alignment with the method of Yves Klein. The dancers' agency was strongly emphasized throughout this process. Instead of following prescriptive instructions, they were encouraged to respond to prompts that informed their movements. This provided a flexible framework that allowed for personal interpretation and individual expression, thus fostering a greater sense of ownership and personal connection with their dance and the resulting artwork. Such an approach has wide-ranging implications for other practitioners, particularly those interested in expanding the boundaries of dance-making and exploring new modes of artistic expression. By integrating visual art creation with movement practice, this method offers a means to capture the essence of dance in a static medium. It allows dancers to explore their movements from a different perspective, to see the physical imprints of their performance, and to engage with their craft in a more tactile, immediate way.

Moreover, the emphasis on dancer agency encourages performers to explore their individuality within the framework of their practice. It enables them to shape their performance based on personal interpretation of prompts rather than prescribed steps. This leads to a more authentic, individualized expression of art which offers an alternative to the sometimes homogeneous representation of dancers often observed in codified presentations of dance.

Practitioners interested in adopting this approach may begin with simple exercises combining movement and painting. They could start by experimenting with different materials, like costumes or body parts, and see how these influence the visual outcome. The use of prompts can guide their movements and encourage individual interpretation. Through this process, they can begin to see the impact of their movement on visual art creation, leading to a richer understanding and experience within their own practice.

Addressing Limitations

Despite this project's many strengths, there are some limitations associated with using *Synergetic Agential Choreography*. One of the primary limitations is the difficulty of measuring and quantifying the effects and the development of new dance movements. Artistic expression is inherently subjective, which may lead to varied interpretations of the paintings, and it could be challenging to measure the impact of dance on individuals and/or groups. Therefore, individuals' interpretations of visual art will vary, leading to differences in choreographic responses. This can affect the consistency and reliability of the results because the creative contributions of the dancers are subjective based on their personal assessment. This subjectivity can lead to the potential for individual participant bias. For example, dancers who are uncomfortable with the method, like the participant from *Together*, project #8, view their contribution against an ingrained lens of codified aesthetics. Additionally, participants may have biases or expectations about participation outcomes, which can impact their responses or behaviors.

A lack of control over the variables in a dance study, like dance experience, movement capability, and comfort and confidence in participating without the crutch of codified technique, is also a limitation. Even if the same methods are presented to all participants, their responses will still vary, depending on their perceptions and experiences. This variability in interpretation can make it challenging to generalize results across participants, especially because they come from diverse backgrounds. Unlike laboratory experiments, where variables are controlled, this research project considers the subjective experiences of human participants thus, establishing distinct connections between dance and particular outcomes may be challenging. Employing the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method as a means to uncover patterns of dancer-developed creative contribution demonstrates a unique method for gathering qualitative data. However, I

recognize that other qualitative methods, like that of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, also center around movement practices that unveil the diminished movement language of the individual dancer. De Keersmaeker describes her movement development process as lacking concern with aesthetics and rather focused on the experience. She decided “not to worry about how the movement looked, but how it felt” (Bräuninger, 2014: 48). What distinguishes the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method from that of the methods of my dance predecessors is the role of cross-disciplinary influence on the creative process. Instead of gestural movement generated from an improvised task rooted in uncovering the personal movement language, dancers that engage in the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method use their painting to inspire movement choices. The inherent limitation is that the painting is the source of movement provocation, framed into choreographic phrases by chance method, as opposed to movement generated from improvised responses to spoken prompts, guided internal investigation, or a myriad of environmental stimuli. *Synergetic Agential Choreography* requires researchers to explore alternative choreographic approaches and develop a more nuanced framing of choreography, creative collaboration, and individualism to understand and better articulate the complex interplay of the collaborating factors.

Another constraint arises due to the design of the questionnaire. Although the study successfully identified dancers who had previously engaged in projects merging visual art and choreography, the questionnaire needed to inquire about the nature of their involvement in these projects. Specifically, it did not distinguish between those who participated in improvisational movement tasks related to the artwork created and those whose choreography was a direct response to existing visual art. This oversight limits the depth of understanding regarding how

dancers integrate visual art with choreography, particularly in the context of improvisation versus structured choreography.

The role of the music playing during the painting and choreography generation in the studio lab for my eight projects may have introduced a potential bias in participants' responses to the generation of the artworks and the development of choreography. Music profoundly influences movement and choreographic decisions, as dancers often synchronize their movements with the music's rhythm, tempo, and emotional cues (Toader, et al. 2023). Therefore, the choice of music can inadvertently shape the choreographic process and outcomes. The selection of music may predispose dancers and choreographers to certain movement qualities or styles that align with the mood or dynamics of the music. This can lead to a bias in the movement vocabulary developed, as choreographers may unconsciously gravitate towards movements that complement the music rather than exploring a more comprehensive range of possibilities.

Additionally, consideration of the size and diversity of the participants was paramount to crafting this research project. If the sample population were too small or homogeneous, it might not represent the broader population, making it difficult to generalize the findings to a wider audience. Similarly, if the sample population is not diverse in age, gender, technical fluency, artistic merit, and other factors, it would not accurately reflect the broader population, limiting the applicability of the findings. This could impact the generalizability and relevance of the findings. However, in this research project, I made a concerted effort to work with dancers across ages, genders, races, ethnicities, and economic demographics as well as with diverse technical abilities and movement proficiency. Addressing probable limitations while developing the

methods for this research project prompted me to pursue a multifaceted population of participants to ensure the most robust and widely applicable conclusions.

Due to logistic constraints, incorporating the creation of visual art in dance choreography may be challenging. Creating or obtaining visual art and incorporating and utilizing various materials for use in *Synergetic Agential Choreography* could be time-consuming and costly. Thus, making and translating paintings into choreography may not be ideal for tight production schedules or projects with limited resources. Moreover, using visual art may require additional resources, such as space, equipment, and personal assistance, which can impact feasibility.

Finally, while translating an individual's painting can be a useful choreographic tool, collaborating with multiple dancers who make paintings may lead to inconsistent styles or ideas, making it challenging to create coherent choreography. Paintings might not be able to convey complex choreographic ideas, such as timing, rhythm, and dynamics, as effectively as other artistic mediums like music. Therefore, using paintings as a choreographic tool might be more suited for experimental or exploratory projects rather than projects that require strict adherence to traditional dance techniques and choreographic structures. Undoubtedly, the lack of predictability can make it difficult to grasp for audiences not accustomed to viewing works that do not follow conventional structures and familiar movements.

A vividly arresting scene from *Adaptation*, project #6 is shown in Figure 63, encapsulates a moment of synergy between painting and movement and showcases an explorative journey where dance and visual art merge to forge a novel artistic expression. The entire process was documented and refined into a screendance called *Staining the Score* that was later unveiled at a spring collegiate dance event at the Nash Theater in May 2022. As the screendance unfolded in front of a live audience, it was met with varying degrees of reception.

With a discerning eye for art, one viewer appreciated the performance's layered complexities and inherent value. However, it is worth noting that based on my observation, the screendance did not appeal to all audience members. After conversing with those willing to share feedback, they could not fully connect with or appreciate the unconventional blend of dance and painting presented, indicating a potential limitation in this area of dance research.



Figure 63—*Staining the Score*, the image captured during experimental painting on a large canvas on the ground, dancer using a skirt to spread paint, 2022

The reception of *Staining the Score*'s presentation underscores a key challenge in merging disciplines like dance and visual art—audience comprehension and resonance. Dance, like any art form, has traditionally established methods of representation and interpretation, and audiences have certain expectations about what a dance performance should entail. Innovative

approaches like this one, which merges dance with non-traditional elements like painting, might not resonate with all viewers.

In the context of dance studies, this presents a limitation. The effectiveness of a dance performance is often measured by its ability to communicate with the audience, elicit emotional responses, and create a shared experience (Reason & Reynolds, 2010). If an experimental approach does not resonate with most of the audience, this might indicate that the performance's message or intention is not effectively communicated. This raises important questions for future exploration. How can integrating visual art and dance be more accessible to wider audiences? How can practitioners communicate the nuances of such a performance more effectively? How can audience members be prepared or educated to appreciate this form of blended artistry? One potential avenue for addressing these limitations might be through pre-performance workshops or discussions, where audience members could be introduced to the concepts and intentions behind the performance. Alternatively, including more familiar or traditional dance elements might serve as a bridge, easing the audience into the more experimental aspects of the performance. Ultimately, the challenge lies in balancing artistic innovation with audience comprehension and engagement in a way that does not compromise the integrity of the art form or alienate those who are watching.

Perspectives and Implications

The artistic and creative process of designing dance sequences is critical to choreography. The method developed in this research, through which choreography can materialize, led to new knowledge in the field of dance. *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is a choreographic method that offers an alternative way of thinking about and approaching dance and choreography. The act of a dancer making a painting and using visual artwork to develop a dance represents a

unique approach to dance as an art form. Dance is typically viewed as a performance art involving movement and music. However, by incorporating painting into the choreographic process, dancers expand the possibilities of what dance can be. By using this approach, dancers were able to delve into unexplored aspects of choreography and surpass the confines of conventional dance styles they learned, thereby gaining valuable insights into a new creative process. The practice led to unique forms of expression as seen in the choreographic development of each of the projects and accompanying screendances and furthermore led to a deeper understanding of how the interpretation of art can influence, inspire, and invigorate choreography.

Dance is a language, and *Synergetic Agential Choreography* can help dancers to express their personal movement languages by encouraging and validating personal choice, personal voice, and participation in the creative process. Painting involves a different set of skills and techniques than dance; by engaging in this process, the dancers in this project were encouraged to approach their choreography from new perspectives. This led to reinvigorated ideas and creative insights that would not have been possible without the act of painting. The approach represents a novel way of combining different art forms, creating a new design of expression, a unique way of thinking about the choreographic process, and the relative importance of the relationship between the body, visual art, and how they can be used to create meaning and communicate ideas.

Synergetic Agential Choreography is a method to develop choreography that encourages creativity, collaboration, and the capacity for dancers to build a more expansive movement vocabulary. This approach pushed the dancers to become more proficient and better understand how collaboration between dancers, teachers, and objects could inspire choreography. This

choreographic approach allowed dancers to hone their techniques through focused attention to distinct movements and sequences, thereby fostering the growth of their performance abilities as they investigated various movement qualities, dynamics, and expressions.

This practice-led research project explored creative approaches to developing choreographic design. The primary focus was devising new movement possibilities by fusing visual art with dance using tools like score reading and improvisational movement tasks. The project aimed to foster creativity and expansion in the realm of dance. Chapter 5 critically discussed the various findings that surfaced during the analysis. The nuances, connections, and patterns observed among the collected data were thoroughly explored, providing a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes.

One of the significant contributions of this practice-led research project was developing the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method. The attributes of this method, its concepts, and its potential applicability were examined in detail. Moreover, the chapter focused on the broader implications of the project. The potential impact of my findings on the dance field and its influence on the methods of choreographic design were assessed. However, along with the implications, the project's limitations were not overlooked. Every research study has its constraints, and acknowledging these boundaries helped to frame the results in a realistic and pragmatic context.

The following 'Conclusion' section further elaborates on the significance of this research along cross-disciplinary fields of study. It will unravel the project's potential meanings for dance as an art form and encapsulate my reflections on the work undertaken. The insights, challenges, triumphs, and learnings experienced throughout this endeavor will all find a place in the concluding discourse, offering a culmination to the project.

Conclusion: Materiality in Retrospect

This practice-led research project explored a new choreographic approach, challenging current ideas of dance, movement, and expression. I was inspired by my MFA research project at Jacksonville University, which planted a seed that pushed me to question reliance on codified techniques I learned growing up in the dance studio. I, like so many dancers before and after me, learned the same foundations of dance that are taught in schools all across the world. Deeply entrenched in the discipline of dance, established techniques have become the unquestionable starting point across styles and practices, including ballet and jazz dance. It is almost as if we, as dance educators, professionals, and choreographers, feel obligated to pay homage to those who came before us by replicating the same techniques with younger generations of dancers. The result has undoubtedly, produced some of the most beautiful and elegant displays of dance and movement.

However, I was left wondering if dance education has created self-imposed limitations through these boundaries. Are we approaching – or worse yet, have we already hit our heads upon – a glass ceiling in style and performance because of the hidden shackles of traditional technique? What would happen if we were to find new ways to let fresh creativity spring from dancers and choreographers alike? What untapped potential lies in waiting behind the rulebook of dance? Further, I wondered how we could create new ways to be inspired. What tools were available to help us tap into that unbridled creativity from which new forms of movement and art could emerge?

These questions made me wonder if visual art on canvas could be used to create choreography. They are both forms of art – one viewed by me as static in this research, and the other dynamic. Could a form of two-dimensional art inspire new forms of three-dimensional

movement art (dance)? Further, how would this creative process look if those using visual art to create choreography also created that visual art themselves?

I wanted to challenge conventional dance norms of choreography to consider how exploring alternative modes of physical thinking in dancers could be achieved through a cross-disciplinary approach that involved painting as a visual art form in conjunction with dance as a performance art. To do this, I worked with 28 dancers from various dance backgrounds to chart new territory for dance. Together, we sought internal inspiration, created visual art, and then read that art as if it were a score of music to inspire physical movement. We endeavored to leave the rulebook behind and allowed ourselves to roam freely, metaphorically dancing with our creative inspiration. Mostly, we wanted to see what was possible for dance when creativity was given free rein.

This final chapter offers a conclusion of the research project. It begins with a review of the question that guided the direction of this research. I then discuss the methods, results, and the original contribution from the findings. Opportunities for future research are described, followed by my reflections on the project.

Revisiting The Research Questions

My primary research question was: *How can alternative modes of choreography be achieved through a cross-disciplinary approach that involves painting as a medium?* The question aims to address the possible limitations of codified techniques in dance and challenge dancer training that may inhibit the production of new, creative choreography. Dancers learn to perform the physical art of dance by willing their bodies to develop habitual patterns, which then become muscle memory. Like an act of voluntary force, the habits of technique facilitate transformation within the body. When dance foundations become ingrained and habitual, codified techniques

become embedded in dancers' movements. Through years of dedicated practice, the technique usually becomes unconscious. While these patterns provide a foundation and a certain standardization of the expectations of dance – what it is, how it looks, and what makes good dance *good* – the development of these habitual patterns may limit the possibilities of dancers finding a voice within their own choreography.

To unravel the learned techniques and habits developed through years of training requires a willingness to acknowledge these ingrained movement patterns and then engage one's creative imaginings to overcome those patterns. Preparing the body for new styles and patterns of movement requires dancers to challenge their established habits directly. When dancers can no longer rely on hardwired training and technique, they must experiment with improvisation to investigate new movements. The dancer must stretch beyond preconceived knowledge without codified technique to deliver new movement possibilities. However, to engage the creative process, dancers need a new foundation – a new guide – to help them overcome habitual patterns of physical movement. They need a new springboard of creativity that could create a domino effect from which more creativity emerges. Perhaps they needed first to participate in visual art-making that was not conditioned by existing rules but based on the abandonment of preconceived perceptions of a desired outcome, as codified dance performance is. I was interested in the process of creating visual art in paintings that could serve this role. The purpose of this research was to explore the cross-disciplinary benefits and use of the medium of painting as a tool to inspire new choreographic movements.

CANVAS consisted of acrylic swipe paintings, in which participants worked individually to create canvas paintings. They then worked individually on physically mapping their paintings to materialize movement and in pairs to share and develop choreography. Next, the choreography

was composed and captured on film. *Patchwork* involved two participants, where dancers, once again, created paintings. This time, I provided them with more specific prompts to guide their improvisational tasks. I used a blend of chance methods, which involved popsicle sticks painted on the tips with various colors as well as specific body parts written on one side of the sticks to initiate movement and define dynamics. I also incorporated the use of dice to prescribe timing and repetition of choreographic movement. In *Throughline*, I worked with a professional dancer who wore a white costume and created a painting on her own body while painting her canvas. The movement during the painting on her body was then used to inspire some original choreography within this project. The solo project was replicated in *The Impetus* with a group of eight younger dancers with various training. In *Tunneling*, I conducted a combination of the earlier project tasks with another professional dancer. We meet via Zoom and once in person for a final review of her choreography and to record her composition. *Adaptation* involved ribbon pouring, using acrylic paint and silicone oil to create paintings. This paint-pouring technique was also used in *Carousel*, which I conducted in collaboration with dancers from a local dance company. *Together* was conducted outside my home country with four dancers from different home countries. The dancers employed a technique of blowing through a straw to maneuver the acrylic paint on their canvases. Following this, they adaptively moved their bodies, exploring improvisational tasks to form and develop choreography.

Findings Unveiled

I selected a qualitative method and phenomenological design for this project. Of the 28 participants, solo dancers through an ensemble of eight participated in the 8 projects. Ten participants were professional dancers, and eighteen were college students and professional trainees. The process of creating the visual art and using it to inspire choreography involved

participants' personal, embodied experiences. It was important that dancers created art themselves rather than relying on visual art produced by someone else to inspire their choreography, as the act of painting helped engage dancers' senses, emotions, and creativity. Producing visual art helped prime the dancers for creative expression; painting may have allowed them to get their *creative juices* flowing, lowering their inhibitions and reducing fears about their artistry before developing their movement patterns.

The choreography that emerged was a creative expression of participants' thoughts, feelings, experiences, personal perspectives, perceptions, and interpretations. I encouraged the dancers to be authentic and personal as they developed their movements. Because the paintings were reflections of their inner worlds, the choreography that emerged was an expression of the dancers' lived experiences and emotions. This project required an interaction between the dancers' inner and outer worlds.

Following participation in the various projects, each participant was sent an online questionnaire containing several closed- and open-ended questions. In addition, a second form of data consisted of my personal observation notes taken during the projects. Finally, a third form of data included the written reflections provided by three of the 28 participants. I uploaded all of the study data into NVivo for thematic analysis and conducted two passes of open coding, which produced a total of 38 codes. Next, I performed axial coding, which resulted in the following six themes: (1) dancers had positive experiences with the projects, (2) as a choreographic tool, the projects fostered individual expression and creativity, (3) many dancers were open to experience, (4) dancers were challenged to 'let go' of codified technique, (5) dancers valued social connections, and (6) participation provided dancers with a new sense of artistry.

Thematic Insights

Dancers expressed positive emotions when asked to share their thoughts and feelings regarding participation in the projects, often using words such as *excitement*, *amazement*, and *enjoyment*. In addition, the dancers said participating in creating the paintings and choreography left them feeling inspired and confident in their creative abilities. The dancers felt the projects were effective for sparking their creative expression and fostering individual choice, and they described the ways using paintings inspired new and original forms of movement. The primary barrier they faced during the projects were allowing their creativity to trump previous training and codified techniques. It was difficult for many of the participants to abandon years of training in favor of their creative inspiration. Dancers were also inhibited by past reliance on other dancers' choreography. They were so accustomed to relying on choreography provided to them by others that creating movements themselves felt completely foreign.

Overall, the dancers described a willingness to engage with an unfamiliar process, even though that unfamiliarity sometimes generated feelings of anxiety or hesitation. The participants seemed to enjoy a new sense of personal artistry through the projects, describing the ways their art became extensions of their bodies and how participation led them to discover unknown artistry within them. They were willing to experiment, trust the creative process, and open themselves to new ideas. In addition, collaboration, involvement, and a sense of inclusion were highly valued and seemed to enhance participation for many of the dancers.

Redefining Choreography

The culminating result of this project was the development of a method that generated new concepts and movements within and through a choreographic practice. The method that emerged

called, *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, can guide dance practitioners away from traditional approaches to dance creation. Rather than viewing choreography as a fixed set of codified and established movements, the method treats choreography as a dynamic interplay between dancers, materials, their environments, and their creativity and the way each influences the creation of an organic movement language. *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is a seven-step process that guides dance practitioners through various stages, comprising: *environment and introductions, explanation of the process, providing tools, facilitating freedom of expression, interpreting, performing, and revisiting*. Encouraging experimentation, improvisation, and risk-taking liberates dancers and choreographers from strict choreographic rules, offering them new routes for creative exploration and adaptation. *Synergetic Agential Choreography* encourages exploring and adapting new ways to create dance.

While the significance of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is highlighted, the original contribution extends beyond the method itself. The method challenges the established norms and perceptions of the creative process in dance and could offer scholars and practitioners a renewed perspective on the value of choreographic development through the contribution of the dancer's individual and uninhibited movement language. During the development of the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method, I was sometimes concerned about how this approach would be received. In some of the more established disciplines, such as dance, art, and music, ideas of how each is created and performed have been well established. Coloring outside the lines and pushing back against traditional techniques sometimes felt rebellious. However, changemakers throughout history have been renegades in their own right. I have never advocated for the abolition of tradition or codified technique but for ways to expand existing tools. I wanted to see

how ideas of dance and its creation could be expanded, and this project provided a testing ground for such.

This work ultimately provides a foundation for other scholars and practitioners to build upon. I hope that other creative intellects embrace the ideas forwarded in the project and put them to the test in research and practice. Change is not questioned in some disciplines, such as technology and healthcare – it is embraced. Change is considered necessary for the continued advancement and growth in these fields, but it is often scoffed at in other, more traditional disciplines. The current work paves the way for other creative ways to inspire dance and art. It challenges us to think outside the box to remove the limitations of what we previously thought was possible. This project challenges the resistance to change often encountered in more traditional disciplines.

Opportunities for Future Research

As a method of choreography, this research inquiry provoked continued investigation and innovation in dance research and the development of new approaches to documenting and communicating choreographic ideas, particularly in experimental or exploratory projects. Several opportunities for future research emerged from this project. For example, future dance researchers may examine the potential of paintings to communicate specific choreographic ideas and how they can be combined with other forms of documentation to create cohesive and meaningful work. Further investigation is also needed to explore alternative forms of documentation that may capture movement and choreographic concepts more effectively. For example, filming the processes of developing the visual art and then arranging choreography could provide new points of observation and analysis.

Another future research opportunity could involve focus groups with dancers after they participated in the projects. During this project the communication was strictly one-way because the data I collected from dancers all took the form of written responses to prompts. This precluded a back-and-forth dialogue where I could have dug deeper, asked probing questions, and developed a richer understanding of the dancers' experiences. Focus groups could provide more multidimensional data than questionnaires and written reflections. Similarly, focus groups could allow dancers to communicate with one another and discuss their experiences with the projects. Focus groups could also provide a social setting where dialogue among dancers reveals new understandings, allowing them to articulate and build upon one another's responses to prompts.

In the context of this practice-led research project, relying heavily on exploratory tasks to develop new prompts had both limitations and benefits that shaped the trajectory and outcomes. On one hand, this approach fostered dynamic and open-ended exploration, encouraging creativity and the discovery of new ideas and methods that may not have emerged through a more structured approach. On the other hand, the very openness that makes exploratory tasks advantageous also serves as a limitation, as it may lead to a lack of focus or direction, making it challenging to achieve specific research objectives or to build upon previous findings. Balancing the creative freedom of exploratory tasks with the need for structured inquiry is thus crucial in harnessing the full potential while mitigating the limitations.

Future dance researchers could also explore how traditional dance techniques and structures can be modified or adapted to accommodate more experimental approaches in which paintings are used as a choreographic tool. Research could also be conducted to integrate paintings with other forms of notation and documentation to create a complete picture of a

choreographer's vision. Investigation could be conducted into the potential of cross-disciplinary cooperation, such as collaboration with a visual artist, to create innovative and effective choreographic works.

Another future research direction could involve exploring different forms of visual art, other than paintings, as choreographic inspiration. Indeed, future researchers could adapt and explore *Synergetic Agential Choreography* in many ways. For example, in what ways could other types of art, such as sculpting or sketching, inspire physical movement? It could also be interesting to explore musical composition, allowing dancers to mix together sounds, instruments, and beats to compose their own music, and then allow that music to inspire original choreography.

With the increasing use of technology and dance, future dance researchers could also explore how technology could enhance the development of paintings as a choreographic tool. One may utilize technology to create new ways to capture and communicate dance movements and concepts. For example, by employing motion capture technology, researchers could analyze the relationship between dancers' movements and the corresponding visual elements in the paintings (or any type of visual art) to generate new insights into how visual stimuli translate into choreography. Researchers could also examine developing and implementing technology-enabled collaborative tools to facilitate communication and cross-pollinating ideas among dancers, choreographers, and visual artists. Such research could foster the co-creation of multidisciplinary performances. By exploring these and other technological innovations, it may be possible to unlock new dimensions in the relationships between visual art and choreography, ultimately broadening creative potential within the field of dance.

Dance and sociology researchers could also explore new approaches to engaging audiences with unconventional dance works and ways to enhance audience members' appreciation for experimental dance forms. For example, researchers could investigate how audiences perceive and respond to choreography created from paintings and how this method affects the experience of watching performances. Researchers could also investigate how audiences react to non-conventional movements and structures and how choreographers effectively communicate their ideas through alternative tools, such as paintings. Utilizing technology to engage audiences in interactive experiences, such as allowing them to manipulate or contribute to the paintings during live performances, may provide insights into how audience participation influences choreographic processes and outcomes.

Overall, research is needed to help expand the boundaries of what is considered *traditional dance* and new ways of creating and communicating movement. Developing new choreographic methodologies could significantly contribute to advancements in the field of dance.

How the Research Transformed Me

This research was a collaborative artistic process. From conceptualization to participant involvement to the actual creation process, the fluid movement of materials within space-time prompted spontaneous decision-making. The collaborative practice was entanglement, phenomena, physical thinking, knowing, and becoming emerged through the interwoven intra-actions of bodily production. This project manifested a choreographic process through a cross-disciplinary approach; it involved an investigation of the fullness of visual art's materiality and the moving body. The possibilities of what could be were reconfigured through a discursive

practice that employed an agential realist approach. Through this innovative process, creativity brought forth the reworking of experimentation.

The motivation for this project was my curiosity and interest in exploring a new method for developing choreography by employing the intersection of visual and performing arts. The combination of fluid art paintings with dance created unique opportunities to investigate the potential of different artistic mediums to inform and inspire each other. With its spontaneous and unpredictable nature, the focus on improvisation and experimentation via fluid art painting served as a starting point for exploring improvisational movement. This fostered a collaboration between the dancers, allowing them to learn from one another, exchange ideas, and create unique, cross-disciplinary works of paintings and dance. The process also encouraged dancers to develop choreography that was both innovative and responsive to visual stimuli. I wanted to understand how dancers could generate new movements and surrender the codification of habitual techniques ingrained in their bodies over years of training. By challenging participants to move beyond their trained movement patterns, I strived to help them discover new, innate, and individual ways of expressing themselves through dance.

Figure 64 exemplifies the collaborative creativity that developed during this practice-led research project. It features a collection of distinctive paintings, each symbolizing the imagination and craft of the participants and myself, who were actively involved in the project. These works of art, as varied as the hands that crafted them, are a vibrant manifestation of the study's mission and progress. The mignolo arts center in Metuchen, New Jersey, known for its continuous support of innovative and experimental art forms, was proud to showcase these paintings created from 2020 through 2022. The walls of the center reverberated with the unique

energy of these artworks. The display highlighted the raw talent and creativity involved and invited the center's visitors to share in the artistic journey that these paintings represented.



Figure 64—Photograph of paintings created by the participants and myself throughout the practice-led research project, 2020-2022

By integrating elements of visual arts into this research, the paintings served as a foundation for the choreographic process, offering a range of visual cues that could be translated into dance. In this way, I endeavored for the paintings to serve as a *stand-in* for the codified movements and techniques that dancers had learned to rely on throughout their years of standardized training. This work pushed the boundary of movement creation to embrace cross-disciplinary collaboration by incorporating visual art into choreographic development. Findings from the analysis also indicated participation in the project impacted more than just ideas on the ways choreography can be developed. The projects also promoted dancers' personal

growth, self-reflection, and deeper understanding of their artistic identities by challenging them to step outside their comfort zones and tap into their raw, unbridled creativity.

In each project, I watched the choreography emerge and come to life, much like a painting on a canvas. The dancers shifted grounds and found a place to diffract human and nonhuman materials. The dancers could tap into their creativity by creating the paintings, then developing movements related to research tasks, followed by expanding upon those movements and then arranging them into original pieces of solo and ensemble work. Knowledge was acquired through a practice-led research approach that led to the development of the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method. The projects represent a journey to explore how choreography could be produced in new creative ways and what those destinations could look like.

In addition to the collaborative process of painting and choreography, the creation of screendances for each project added an additional layer of visual art that enriched the overall artistic exploration. These films not only documented the creative journey but also allowed for a deeper integration of media, blending the visual and performing arts into a cohesive whole. As the researcher, my involvement in the filmmaking process provided me with a unique opportunity to participate actively in the art-making and contribute directly to the final product. The screendances became an extension of the choreographic process, capturing the ephemeral nature of movement and the evolving artistic expression that emerged from the collaboration. This multimedia approach allowed for a richer, more nuanced exploration of the themes and concepts at play, offering a new dimension of creativity that enhanced both the research and the resulting artistic works.

The transfer of knowledge from the mind to the body and from the body back to the mind is seemingly invisible, yet relatively evident when one endeavors to understand it.

Comprehension of knowledge transfer is typically linguistically expressed. However, what happens when knowledge is expressed through the body's physicality but cannot be explained in words? In Michael Polanyi's text, *The Tacit Dimensions*, he declared, "I shall reconsider human knowledge by starting from the fact that *we can know more than we can tell*" (Polyani, 1966: 4). A considerable part of our thinking is embodied in our physical bodies, as it is the central instrument through which we experience life.

In the studio lab, movement occurred as dancers read their paintings as scores of music without consciously intending for that action to happen. Einstein is said to have remarked, "My pencil and I are more clever than I" (1987). The implication was that he could achieve outcomes beyond his initial expectations by letting his pencil become the tool through which his inspiration flowed. Similarly, the body reacts to a combined effect created by conditions related to the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* framework, unaware of where it is going, how it will respond, or what it will look like, this reaction represents a state that resides somewhere between conscious and unconscious processing. One discovers new movement possibilities by violating traditional dance rules and vocabulary. In this way, the body becomes a problem-solving, knowledge-generating system of motion.

It can be challenging to put into words the act of having the capacity to visually perceive, think with the body, and internalize and process action to be transported externally. In this research, the materialization of movement occurred in conjunction with the components and conditions of artistic agency. The composition process that emerged was shared between wordless paintings and bodies that read movement patterns on a canvas. Unforeseeable shifts in landscapes were bound to be practiced and experienced. Simultaneously, shared conceptual information through collaborative dance reflected both effort and space.

Learning cannot just take place through instructions or rules of practice. Rather, learning occurs through the process of *doing* and *making* and the ability to execute that which emerges from the methods and experiences. The body must embed knowledge from its efforts as a result of collective actions. The ability to absorb, reflect, and scatter visual texture becomes tied to a specific context within the work. Once the dancer works through the process and dive into the depths of choreography, the work becomes incorporated into the body, and the dancer comes to dwell in that space with the work. Transformation occurs as new knowledge is applied. Understanding that which we once attended to is no longer something we think about; that understanding comes to reside in the body as an extension of self.

This self becomes forever changed in and through the lens by which it views and practices the artistic and creative processes. In Polyani's words, "It brings home to us that it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning" (Polyani, 1966: 18). The bodily movement now reflects the conditions of the work, affecting the context of the painting and contributing to the process that informs it. In concentrating on developing new methods to explore choreography and the process of discovering new movement potential in dancers, I began to view choreography through a new lens. I can no longer rely solely on the traditional ways I once created dance and choreography. It is not possible. My relationship with choreography has been altered, and the research has transformed the original meaning. An abyss of questions full of compositional tasks and unexpected manifestations emerged. These manifestations were revealed for me and for future eyes and bodies to explore and discover.

The study of dance transforms the perspectives of those who study it and has the power to leave a lasting impact on the dance community. As I, as the researcher, dove deeper into the

artistic process, my approach to choreography evolved, influencing the ways I create and interpret dance. By focusing on cross-disciplinary methods for exploring choreography and unlocking the potential in dancers, I gained new insights that forever changed my relationship with dance. This transformation makes it impossible to return to previous dance creation methods. The once familiar territory of choreography now becomes infused with a wealth of newfound knowledge and hidden truths. These discoveries, unearthed from a pool of questions and explorations, have implications beyond my individual experience. They open new routes for future generations of dancers and choreographers to explore, expand upon, and reinterpret in their own unique ways.

Final Thoughts

As I reflect on the journey of developing and exploring *Synergetic Agential Choreography*, I am struck by how deeply this research has transformed not only my understanding of choreography but also my approach to the creative process itself. This methodology, rooted in collaboration, improvisation, and the integration of multiple art forms, has opened new pathways for artistic expression and has challenged me to reimagine the possibilities of movement and choreography. Through the intricate interplay between visual art and dance, I have discovered a richer, more expansive creative landscape where the boundaries between disciplines dissolve, giving rise to innovative and dynamic works of art.

This research has compelled me to move beyond the conventional frameworks that once guided my practice, leading to a profound shift in how I engage with choreography. The process of intertwining visual and performing arts has revealed the power of cross-disciplinary collaboration, where the collective efforts of participants result in a tapestry of creativity that is far greater than the sum of its parts. Each step of the *Synergetic Agential Choreography* method,

whether it be the creation of paintings, the interpretation of these visual cues into movement, or the final performance, has reinforced the importance of embracing uncertainty, spontaneity, and the unique contributions of each individual involved.

As I revisited the steps of this methodology throughout the research, I found that my relationship with choreography evolved into something far more fluid and open-ended. No longer bound by traditional techniques or predefined outcomes, I learned to trust the process, allowing the work to unfold organically and letting the dancers' creative instincts guide the direction of the choreography. This shift has not only enriched my practice but also deepened my appreciation for the artistic potential that lies within each dancer's personal expression.

In my final thoughts, I recognize that the journey of *Synergetic Agential Choreography* is ongoing, with endless possibilities for further exploration and adaptation. The method's flexibility allows for continual growth, inviting future dancers, choreographers, and artists to expand upon its principles and apply them in new and innovative ways. The discoveries made during this research have laid a foundation for future work, where the fusion of visual art and dance can continue to push the boundaries of what is possible in choreography.

Ultimately, *Synergetic Agential Choreography* has not only transformed my creative practice but has also reshaped my understanding of the role of the choreographer. It has taught me that choreography is not merely about directing movement but about facilitating a space where creativity can flourish, where each participant is empowered to contribute their voice to the collective work. This journey has affirmed that the most profound artistic breakthroughs occur when we are willing to step outside our comfort zones, embrace the unknown, and allow ourselves to be guided by the creative energy that emerges in the moment. As I move forward, I

carry with me the lessons learned from this research, knowing that they will continue to influence and inspire my work and others in the years to come.

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