

A Conversation between Katie and Albert

Katie Vickers and Albert Quesada

Understanding is an unending activity
by which, in constant change and variation,
we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality,
that is, try to be at home in the world.

Hannah Arendt, *Understanding and Politics* (1954)

This text is a self-interview between Albert Quesada (Spain) and Katie Vickers (USA). As life partners and artists, they work together through teaching and directing dance/theater festivals between Europe and the USA. As dancers and makers, their work and lives are intertwined with a constant dialogue about practices (for technique, for choreography, for performance). This interview is a reflection that looks into the artists' current interests, their approaches to ways of working with the body, and their relationship to theory and choreography. This interview took place at their home in Brussels, Belgium.

Creative Tools

Katie: How do you begin making choreography? Did you already choreograph before you went to P.A.R.T.S. in 2004 and do you see a difference between then and now?

Albert: If we put aside my very first choreography, where I decided to set a small movement sequence, I have been choreographing the same way since I started my dance education. Most of the times, I choose which music or type of music the performance will have. The search for this music is often the result of an experience where the music was present, such as noticing the sound of a musical piece in a scene of a movie, or a feeling aroused during a concert. Other times, the music is selected within the frame of a topic (such as flamenco music, or opera overtures). Then, I improvise to that music again and again, until some way of moving starts to become familiar or I feel an interest to pursue. That way of moving and its relationship to the music becomes the subject to explore.

K: Are there typical aspects to this way of choreographing for you? What tools or strategies do you use during the creative process?

A: For each performance, I develop, together with my collaborators (amongst them Federica Porello, Zoltán Vakulya, Mireia de Querol, Marcus Baldemar), a training for the body in order to tackle the issue we have at stake for that creation. Once we have chosen the topic, we start with what I call a “physical practice,” which is geared toward producing “physical tools” that ultimately enable us to bring that abstract topic to an audience through movement (be it the movement of the body or the movement of the set, lights, props, etc.). My understanding of these notions is quite specific, so perhaps I should say a bit more about the sense in which I use them.

By “physical practice,” I mean a set of instructions, exercises, and actions written for a body (or a group of bodies) that over time get refined. For example, an instruction such as “move to listen” asks the dancer to move in order to listen better to the music. This instruction does not tell you how to move, but what to pay attention to while moving: to notice your rhythm, qualities, timing, speed, etc. Over time, you are able to refine this practice, refine the listening-moving-sensing process and make it a useful tool for future dances. What I call “physical tools,” then, derive from this refined practice, as they comprise a set of more or less clearly defined parameters. A tool is used as a way to improvise movement, and sometimes to execute a particular set of movements. In the past few years, me and my co-dancers have been experimenting with different issues, such as how to move in a way that allows you to listen to the pulse of a song, how to represent a sound cloud through movement, or how to create the illusion of a movement being done backward (as in video editing). Or the use of simultaneous and isolated impulses in the body, as well as the connection between different bodies and the balanced use of space. During these experiments with rhythm, dynamic, and the order of steps, we created new patterns to improvise with. A third key part of the creative process is what I describe as “acoustic explorations.” This involves searching for different ways of listening to a piece of music through simple actions, such as closing the eyes, seeing somebody walk/run/jump to the beat of the music, moving a prop (a curtain, a speaker) to the rhythm of a voice, and so on. These last examples refer to a project I co-choreographed with Vera Tussing.

K: When you work with your collaborators, do you come to certain kinds of agreements in terms of verbalization, a kind of collective language perhaps to describe the qualities or sensations of the movement? Or is it all very open to each individual's experience? I know from my own experience that, when choreographing a piece collectively with other dancers, we can have three different definitions of one word depending on the discourse or the context around it. So we find ourselves constantly re-evaluating and re-defining all the words we are using to describe the core of what we are trying to reach, since this core is always something unknown. I think verbalizing the aims or the issues as exactly as possible is the hardest part of collaboration because we hold each other so accountable for our words, even if we don't know yet precisely what we are trying to say because it might be coming from a gut feeling. And before we have the exact words to describe all of this, we might be rambling on for a while. To deal with these possible confusions, me and my other collaborators ask each other lots of questions during the process, just to make sure we know what we are talking about and are on the same page. Do you experience that as well?

A: That depends on whether an agreement on words is necessary or not. When working on interpretations or different roles, the agreement on the terms or their definition is not so necessary. The same instructions will produce different executions. As these instructions can be quite practical, such as "move the air" or "avoid doing movements that feel very familiar," it is obvious that each dancer will execute them in very singular ways. And, unless two people need to look exactly the same, the differences enrich the creation. I like to work on small variations and divergences. I rarely use unison dancing, since I prefer the unity of differences. I find it to be stronger, richer, and closer to life.

K: That reminds me of the first time I heard William Forsythe speak. I remember him talking about the beauty of working with so many people from various countries and backgrounds and that the best moments would happen when misunderstandings emerge, which seems to be what you mean by this idea of "unity of differences." I am interested to know more about those practical instructions you mentioned and which would allow for variations to occur. Do these instructions include difference in themselves? In other words, do they develop over time? Is there something in these guiding rules that evolves?

A: There are relationships that have evolved and grown through time. Relationships between movement and thought, movement and sound, movement

and vision, as well as thought and the perception of one's own movement (or what is called proprioception). The exploration of these relationships shapes many of my dances.

Back in 2005, when I was choreographing my piece *Solo on Bach & Glenn*, the relationships between actions and sound were at first distant and simple. An instruction such as “jump,” for example, would be associated with a particular section of the music. Yet later during the process, that simple score developed into “jump to the rhythm of these notes recorded in 1952, but with the quality of the recording of 1981.” This kind of qualitative changes provoke a very different thought process for the performer. Scores that were previously connected to primarily spatial trajectories, such as “move in a big circle clockwise,” differ from more recent scores I created, which rather script more layered instructions like: “your movement in space is the echo of another dancer's movement and should support that other dancer's movement.”

But the issue of verbalization you raised makes me wonder how you think about the relationship between choreography and writing. Do you actually write while creating? Is the language of and on choreography something that is important to you?

K: Absolutely, I always write, mostly fictional, abstract poetry, and it is definitely an important part of my artistic practice. It is a way for me to understand it better. I guess for one because I am interested in language and movement, in the question of how to re-appropriate meaning within the two forms. And two, writing enables me to explore weird imagery, bizarre rhythm structures and to find a certain sense of playfulness. It provides me with a kind of freedom that opens up my dancing. In the last creation I did with Inga Hákonardóttir and Rebecka Stillman, *We Will Have Had Darker Futures* (WVHHDF, 2017), I remember we had a writing score that was keeping the syntax of a sentence but constantly switching the words. This not only caused lots of fun, but it also led to the creation of continuously changing microworlds. When we did that score dancing, the constant shifts of thinking about different environments, landscapes, or places also shifted my dancing. In this creation, we did a lot of daydreaming, turning writing practices into dance forms and dance forms into writing practices. These practices evolved throughout the creative process, becoming more defined in structure, content, and rhythm.



Figure 8.1. Katie Vickers, Inga Hákonardóttir, and Rebecka Stillman in *We Will Have Had Darker Futures* (2017). © Sofie Jaspers

Thinking Dancing

A: When did you first encounter dance theory during your education?

K: During my senior year at the Department of Dance at The Ohio State University, we were assigned to write a paper and I was interested in what was going on in Europe and my professor pointed me to André Lepecki's *Exhausting Dance*. I had a look at it and was like "what the hell is this?". I felt like I couldn't get through the first chapter. There was a certain style of language and discourse in his way of theorizing dance that felt foreign to me. I was kind of dumbfounded for a while about that. It opened up another world to me and made me really ask myself what my field is and how I, as a dancer, had been shaped by what I had seen or been exposed to during my education thus far. When I went to P.A.R.T.S., I was thrown into many theoretical classes on dance, visual art, and other subjects that gave tools to understand different ways of thinking about dance, talking about dance, seeing dance, and really verbalizing it in a variety of ways that allowed me to understand certain kinds of theoretical texts and how to place these within my own field. But it was a struggle. When I arrived at P.A.R.T.S., I remember I felt that I was missing a huge chunk of my education.

But what kind of relationship do you have with theoretical discourse? You said that music is central to your dance practice, but I also see you reading different kinds of theoretical books for your choreographies, and not only dance theory. You read books like *On Listening* by Angus Carlyle and Cathy Lane, or *This is Your Brain on Music* by Daniel J. Levitin; writings that highlight certain topics such as listening, perception, and time. Do these texts inspire you in your choreographic work?

A: Yes and no. "How audiences perceive our dances" is one of my "go to" subjects and these books talk about the mechanisms of perception. They reflect and inspire the thought of my practices. I guess theoretical discourse is a means of inspiration towards what I described earlier as a physical practice and towards the understanding of the display of physical tools, acoustic explorations, set designs, etc. But I am not trying to translate theory into dance. I rather try to stay self-referential in what I do, to only point towards what is happening on stage, as in a reflection about what is going on. I never refer to a subject, person, or thing that is not present in the actual performance. The movements we do are abstract and can rarely be associated with everyday actions, but we try to invite the audience to associate the movements with a way of listening to the music we use. The simplest

way of putting this would be: we are watching somebody listening to music while moving.

K: So, theory about perception does inspire your choreographic work to some degree but you don't start from a theoretical base?

A: Correct. It happens rarely but consistently over the years that I feel something so strongly that I have the need (or the wish) to share this experience. That can be as simple as listening to a piece of music in the background of a film and finding it so wonderful, so mesmerizing that it gives me chills. That moment is then stored in my memory and becomes the starting point of a project. During the creation of *Slow Sports* (2012), for example, we used to do our warm-up dancing to music. I remember playing some overtures from operas (such as *The Magic Flute*, *Rigoletto*, *La Cenerentola*, or *Candide*) and noticing how the energy in the room seemed to rise, the air seemed to thicken. I had recently been part of a staging of *The Magic Flute* and understood the immense potential that is contained in these overtures, where three minutes of music try to hint at three hours of storytelling, emotions, and characters. I somehow decided then that opera music was going to be part of a future creation, which ended up being the overture of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in the performance *Wagner & Ligeti* (2014).

I do like finding theory that backs up this experience I want to share, that can help me understand it through words. Sometimes understanding an experience on a theoretical level gives me keys or clues towards other possible steps, towards making decisions to recreate this experience and make it reach an audience. When working on the piece *Wagner & Ligeti*, I was interested in how listening to music works. I indeed came across *This is Your Brain on Music: Understanding a Human Obsession*, in which Daniel J. Levitin explains how satisfaction in listening comes from the anticipation of which note (or series of notes) will follow the present section of the music. And depending on how accurate or different the notes are from what we might have imagined, we feel surprise, satisfaction, or dissatisfaction. In this group piece, we extrapolated these ideas into our abstract movements and tried to play with creating concrete expectations, which would make the audience feel satisfaction when the movements they imagined appear, or surprised when little variations would occur.

K: I recognize what you just said about the role theoretical writings can play in your work. I often start with an interest, find theory that supports or expands that interest, so that it can allow me to see it from a different perspective. In my work with Inga Hákonardóttir, we always started from texts, such as Jean-François Lyotard's "The Sublime and the Avant-garde," Brian Massumi's "Fear (The Spectrum Said)," or Kathi Weeks' *The Problem of Work*, to name a few. All of these writers talk at some point about various kinds of temporalities, other than the chronological time we are habituated to. Instead, they develop exciting alternatives, such as the sense of stretching time beyond the present moment, forward and backward time, futurity, suspension, looming time, or anticipation. I am really interested in offering spectators other ways of experiencing time, collectively and individually, and in how that experience can re-shape how we see something.

When we were working on *WWHHDF*, we had read a lot of these authors' writings, but also fictional texts from Kathy Acker, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and even Tarot cards. We tried to incorporate both these theoretical and imaginative materials into the structure and dramaturgy of the work. For this performance, we were specifically interested in the temporality of fear and hope. Brian Massumi, for example, describes threat as "the future cause of a change in the present" (35). A threat is unknowable, a looming feeling that has no form or content, and solely holds its power through time. It is a form of futurity. In this way, Massumi regards threat as a sort of "time-slip" (36), an instantaneous looping between the present and futurity, where the future is holding the present hostage.

With *WWHHDF*, we didn't want to create a threat or make the audience fearful of something. Our intention was rather to create choreographic structures in which the different materials loop back into one another, with the aim of evoking the feeling of the kind of time-slip that Massumi writes about. When watching the piece, you might feel a certain sensation of being somewhere but not knowing exactly where that place is or was. As the piece proceeds, certain places, or positions too, might start to seem familiar but something about them has already changed. This generates a looming feeling that "something" is always about to happen but never quite gets there, because it is always "on the go" – literally even, "ongoing." To create this sensation, we eventually took a structure similar to the one of Christopher Nolan's film *Memento* (2000). After the audience has watched the first material, we jump back to another section in the piece. Then we go back

to the end of the beginning scene, continue “forward” and jump back to the previous scene, adding on more information, more dancing, more text, and jumping back again to where we last ended in the first part. This back-and-forth movement keeps going on until we reach the end of the piece. Something we were really interested in was stretching intensity over time. By using anticipation as a tool, we wanted to place ourselves in the temporality of fear, never reaching a specific climax, provoking instead a constant feeling of uneasiness.

Exactly this kind of translation between theory and practice is what gets me so excited about choreographing! It opens up these unthinkable possibilities for me. The theater space is just a blank canvas and the magic happens when I can create something out of abstract thinking into something practical and physical in the space. But how does this work for you? Do you feel that communicating with your collaborators gets affected by the texts you read or do you rather use movement as a form of communication?

A: I think the complex thinking that we might read about is trimmed down to simpler instructions or simpler words that we use for movement, and it's only later that this movement becomes too complex to describe it with exact words. The result is not put down in words; it is written through movement. Hence we are producing not a book, but an experience. We become a canvas for the audience to read, feel, experience.

I think the difference between thought and action might lie in the difference between the right and left side of the brain, the thinking and sensing hemispheres. Different types of input (such as words versus movement) produce different sensations. Even a seemingly simple action such as walking generates a complex set of movements that nonetheless can happen in an instant. It would take us several minutes to describe the enormous amount of small mechanisms (the way muscles execute movement) and forces (gravity, inertia) involved in a person's walk. But it will take just a second to perform a walk.

K: If there is such a big difference between thoughts and movements, to what extent do thinking and reading play a role for you in dance?

A: I don't intend to say that dance is entirely devoid of thought. On the contrary, in the work we do, we not only choreograph our movements, we also choreograph our thoughts. We choose which kind of movement we do and which

thought or question we should have while executing that movement. The thoughts can be: “notice the space behind you as you move,” “remember the sound of a different piece of music than the one you are dancing on,” or “be aware and give attention to the parts of the body you don’t see.”

K: Of course, in dancing there is so much of the thinking-body happening. For me, I don’t necessarily need to connect theory with a personal memory or experience like you do. I use it to seek for answers to things I don’t know about, to draw images of unknown worlds. And it is perhaps that very distance from a personal memory that shapes how I make dance. I think I am always trying to create new, bizarre narratives that correlate to the texts I read and that support my interests. It all gets thrown together in a freak show collage where theory, poetry, images, film (or whatever is feeding me at the time) fuels and colors the creative process.

But for me and for many of my colleagues, theory does serve to translate certain kinds of experiences into performance, as it helps us to develop our ideas about perception, time, senses, fear, hope, politics, community, while we always also question how to position the body next to that. It all comes down to asking ourselves how do we give the audience another perspective, another kind of experience in a space we all know. Personally, I enjoy giving the audience something that is hard to read, something that is asking people to redefine how they identify with things. It might feel or seem like many things at once and hard to pinpoint what the “thing” is, but that’s what I like, something unfamiliar, blurry, which forces you to take it for what it is and not for what you think you’ve ever seen before. I believe how and what we communicate to the audience is always the essence of choreography, and this changes with each piece for me. The questions I ask for each performance are different, the criteria change. And that’s the beauty of making dance, because in the end I am always trying to surprise the audience and myself.

A: The way you just described the role of theory as helping to translate certain experiences into performance makes me realize that there is a slippery danger in starting from a theory and then not making the connection between concepts and the body, between words and actions. Yes, dance might offer to theory what poetry might offer to a narrative. Pure movement has the handicap of lacking words, but it does have the body (or bodies), its presence, and it inhabits time. Through these elements, choreography asks to be read in a different way than a

theoretical book. The sensual asks for sensing and thinking to go together. I associate sensing with an immediate and wordless experience and thinking with the play of words. Maybe the idea of “noticing” is what unites sensing and thinking, or what provokes a thinking that is based on a physical experience.

K: Don't get me wrong, I agree that choreography is read differently and that being in touch with our emotional intelligence, as viewers and makers, is important in having and giving an experience. However, I don't feel a pressure to give a direct translation of that theory into physical movement. I give theory a place in support of my interests and allow it to influence the physical movement and the choreography, but that doesn't necessarily mean I need the audience to feel that translation or even the relationship between the piece and an inspirational source. It is more something for myself, which I use and manipulate during the creative process. And it is okay for the audience to not fully understand it, because I want them to have an experience or to walk out with some kind of feeling, even if they cannot name it.

In the end, I think we are somehow saying the same thing when you refer to the unity of sensing and thinking. What I take from theoretical texts will trickle down into the choreography in some shape or form, even if it is not explicit, and the piece will inevitably give a sense of the issue I have been researching. This can be glimpsed through the dancing, the costumes, the scenography, the lighting, the structure, or the dramaturgy. I see choreography as all those puzzle pieces fitting together to create a certain atmosphere and the theoretical component of my creative process may fit into only one of those puzzle pieces or perhaps all. Whether or not this is all clearly communicated to the audience isn't my aim. I rather want to provide an atmosphere where sensing and thinking indeed come together. However, I do believe that my work with Inga circumvents binary oppositions (such as sensing and thinking), because we aren't always clear on how the audience should position itself and this challenges spectators to reflect on how they relate to the piece. In this respect, I do think that programs and the information leading to the performance are important. If we don't always give the audience the tools to come to grips with the piece, then it's helpful and also fun to give them hints in other places. They might have to dig a little.



Figure 8.2. Katie Vickers and Inga Hákonardóttir in *Slogan for Modern Times* (2015). © Bart Grietens

Relating to the Audience

A: Speaking about the audience, I am wondering how important it is for spectators to have some knowledge of those theoretical tools that inform your creative process and which provide certain ways of looking at dance. Let's say an audience without these tools, would they miss something? Different ways of seeing might free the audience from expecting narrative or a clear-cut content, and to enjoy the sensuality of dance instead, as much as we enjoy the abstraction of music without asking for narrative. It is unfortunate that dance and theater are presented in similar places, if this makes a theatergoer usually expect the same level of concreteness which dance often escapes from.

K: I assume that an audience having those tools is an audience already seeking art for the purpose of seeing something that is unknown, seeing something that is unfamiliar, wanting to be provoked, asking questions, and being curious about what this field is. And then there are audiences that might not have that drive to really understand it and who may feel either fine with or frustrated by the lack of clear meanings or content. But that doesn't necessarily have to do with having a certain degree of theoretical knowledge or not. It is obviously hard to generalize about individual spectators, who ultimately have their own personal responses to a performance, but it seems to me that there is a difference in the ways in which professional spectators (such as dancers, critics, scholars, or programmers) engage with dance versus regular spectators who come to see dance for often very divergent reasons.

A: But do you think that not having this theoretical, intellectual, or professional background might impede one from enjoying a particular show?

K: No, not at all. For instance, in the case of the piece you created with Zoltán Vakulya, *OneTwoThreeOneTwo* (2015), there were likely several people who came to see it not having any theoretical tools or historical anchor points helping them to understand the deeper implications of your approach to the tradition of flamenco in that performance, but nonetheless enjoying it immensely because of how it made them feel. And that is completely valid, of course. I don't believe that having or not having a broader knowledge of dance makes you a better or worse audience, or that you would enjoy it more or less.



Figure 8.3. Albert Quesada and Zoltán Vakulya in *OneTwoThreeOneTwo* (2015). © Benjamin Sommabere

A: You don't think there is a relationship between knowing more or less about dance and enjoying more or less particular works? I do think that because of my education there are shows that I cannot enjoy because I demand some thought behind each choice as well as skills or a certain quality. Even though it is, of course, difficult to know whether a choice followed a thought, you can often sense it when decisions were made rather randomly. Putting aside taste, a piece can fail to convince me when it consists of a combination of factors and choices that might not be consequent with the overall line of the performance, and with the logic I might find in it.

K: Of course, as we look at the work of our colleagues from a professional point of view, we do demand those things and especially since, in our education, theory and thought were very present. But, at the same time, I am always taking into consideration all sorts of audience members: dance critics, professionals, scholars, the occasional viewer, or new viewers, and for me that shapes what I make. Asking myself, would my parents enjoy this? Or my colleagues? Those are two totally different perspectives, tastes, and even aesthetics, but I somehow want to create choreography that can reach both sides. Like I mentioned before, I am intentionally not always clear on how the audience needs to see something. This is challenging for all sides because it's hopefully something new for them. So, perhaps this shaping feeling comes from not just making work that pleases a wide spectrum of audiences, but from other criteria, such as, how can I make something that both sides have to work for?

A: Then, when do theory and knowledge become a trap for a general audience?

K: Right, like when does theory cater to a niche audience?

A: When theory overtakes experience?

K: I feel it overtakes when a work does not make me feel anything; when I see too much thought behind the choreography, or behind the body; when this emotional intelligence we carry inside us (whether you call it awareness, sensitivity, or proprioception) is not being used at hand. As a performer and maker, those things are important to me, it is why I like to use the body as a material. Yet, I understand why certain artists use theory as a primary means to push their work in a direction that is sometimes harder to grasp for an inexperienced audience member. Some artists are making work for the select few

who have a professional background in dance and who can understand or write about that aesthetic. I think our field needs that just as much as we need dances that can reach the masses, that can seduce and entice people to wanting to watch dance, that can slowly educate them into being an experienced viewer. I honestly feel that after talks or pre-show talks really make a difference. I remember when my great-aunt came to see Deborah Hay's work when I was dancing with the Cullberg Ballet. She is 90 years old and never saw dance before. She heard Deborah talk before the show and was mesmerized by the performance. She even went to talk to Deborah afterward; it was such a sweet moment...

Leaving the audience aside, I do find it imperative for dancers that theory has a place in their education. Dancers need to have the tools to ask questions; to develop the skills to observe, discuss, and write about performances; to find ways of thinking about art, life, dance, etc. This wide sense of examining dance from all angles is important for the progression of our field.

Practicing Performance

K: It might be interesting to relate what we have been talking about so far to Practicing Performance, the two-week dance festival we organized at the Ohio State University (Columbus, Ohio, USA) in August 2017. Our aim with this event was to bring together European-based and American artists and to create an environment in which we could share and exchange choreographic expertise, experiences, or techniques. As we mentioned in our artistic mission statement for the festival, with this first edition, we specifically wanted to focus on what we called “the twofold performer’s body,” acknowledging that, as dancers, we not only have “technical moving-dancing skills,” but also our “language-based performing skills.”¹ But how is it, then, that an initiative such as Practicing Performance speaks to the relationship between theory and practice? What could it mean for our field?

A: I believe that the words “practicing” and “performance,” and especially conjoining these terms in one single phrase, are key here. Going beyond the narrower understanding of performing as only moving, “practicing performance” sets a step back and points at a *thinking-moving* for somebody else who responds to it by *thinking-feeling-watching*. Thinking-moving would be different from moving with the only purpose of executing, for example, memorized steps without the interest of placing them in their context. And an audience that is

thinking-feeling-watching is an active audience, able to think (words) and sense (processing beyond words) as they watch.

We invited artists such as Eleanor Bauer, Tale Dolven, or Gabel Eiben, who explore exactly this relationship between action and thinking, and who are seeking for a particular response from an audience. Rather than focusing on “theory” as such, we researched this confluence of action, thought, and response through workshops and performances. Looking back on this first edition of the festival, it seems to me that we were primarily concerned with finding words to describe our practices and to entertain a dialogue before-during-after the dancing.

K: As I experienced it, the core aim of Practicing Performance was to create different contexts for various practices that could either be technical and physical-based, or focused on working with choreographic or other kinds of languages, or even practices related to reading. Ultimately, it could also include practices of watching performance, being an audience member and talking about that experience. I think the festival is an invitation to share all the different practices we do on a daily basis and which are also part of our artistic processes. For instance, this summer we curated two evenings of performances with great after talks with the community. The first week Tale Dolven and Gabel Eiben performed excerpts from *Assembly* and you, Albert, showed *Solo on Bach and Glenn*. The second week Andrew Robinson Champlin performed *Grand Opening* and together we did *OneTwoThreeOneTwo*. One of the highlights for me this summer was “Nobody’s Business,” a concept created by Eleanor Bauer, where artists can meet on equal ground to share practices and knowledge. This happened in the second week and every afternoon was quite different, from discussing the history of manifestos such as those by Yvonne Rainer and Marina Abramović; to authentic movement; to scores called “Dancing is,” “Funeral Parlour,” “Durational Reverence,” “Open Dance,” etc. These afternoons were filled with collecting and dispersing information, creating together webs of people and places. I look back at the notes and have a new catalogue of dance scores which is really exciting.

A: Next to curating, there is also a catering of practices towards performance, by which I mean practices that have a practical and direct use for artists while performing.

K: There are practices that are not just for performance, such as the idea for “skillperts.” Although in this first edition we didn’t get to it, “skillperts” is meant as a kind of speed dating scenario in which we exchange different skills we need in our field such as sound editing, grant writing, somatic practices, film, photography, whatever. These are all present in our daily lives as working professionals and we also give space to certain aspects of our field, which is moving, writing, talking, watching, listening, reading, etc. All of those skills help us in our performance.

We are both inspired by dancer and teacher Chrysa Parkinson who has focused extensively on what the notion of “practice” means. Her practice is performance. We haven’t spoken about this, but for sure titling the festival Practicing Performance is influenced by her and how we both feel about how she describes practice. Now that I think about it, even our choice for a self-interview as the format for the present text is in some way subliminally informed by Chrysa, since she actually unfolds her understanding of practice in a self-interview as well.² What I love about Chrysa’s definition of practice is that it doesn’t have to be a product, or process-oriented, since she wants to use it as a term for “this thing that underlies the decisions I make about training, product, process” (n.p.). She describes practice as something “volatile,” something that needs to remain “unstable.” For me, I always took that as fueling my curiosity so that I have to keep on asking questions. And the questions that you and I are interested in revolve around performance: What do we do on stage? How? What do we do off stage?

My intuition is that what we are building with Practicing Performance is something unstable in nature, a place to dip our toes in the many aspects of this field, whether it is training the body, grant writing, social skills, or basic sound editing. There is so much in our field that we have to know and we need to have so many different skills in order to be versatile and flexible. This is what I hope the festival can shed light on and provide a forum for: to literally practice all those things on a very practical level and, most importantly, to open up a space for reflection and discussion on the future of this field and where to take it to.

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¹ The artistic mission can be found on the festival's website: <https://practicingperformance.wordpress.com/about/> (Accessed 2 April 2018).

² There is an online video, titled "Self-interview on Practice," with drawings made by Parkinson and with her own voice reading the interview. See: <https://vimeo.com/26763244> (Accessed 15 November 2017). The written text is also available online: <http://sarma.be/docs/1336> (Accessed 15 November 2017).