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Choreography as a practice of listening, relation, and eruption

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A coreografia como prática de escuta, relação e erupção
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ABSTRACT

In the interview conducted by Juliana Moraes, English choreographer Jonathan Burrows discusses his career trajectory, his collaboration with Matteo Fargion, and his conception of dance creation. He presents choreography as a space for questioning, rejecting rigid methodologies. He reflects on his relationship with music, rhythm, and dramaturgy, highlighting the balance between structure and improvisation. He also comments on his academic involvement at Coventry University and his perspective on dance research. The conversation reveals an artist committed to experimentation and critical thinking about choreographic practice.

KEYWORDS: Interview; Jonathan Burrows; Dance; Choreography; Practice as Research.

RESUMO

Na entrevista conduzida por Juliana Moraes, o coreógrafo inglês Jonathan Burrows discute sua trajetória como coreógrafo, sua colaboração com Matteo Fargion e sua concepção de criação em dança. Ele apresenta a coreografia como um espaço de questionamento, recusando metodologias rígidas. Reflete sobre sua relação com a música, o ritmo e a dramaturgia, destacando o equilíbrio entre estrutura e improvisação. Também comenta seu envolvimento acadêmico na Universidade de Coventry e sua perspectiva sobre pesquisa em dança. A conversa revela um artista comprometido com a experimentação e o pensamento crítico sobre a prática coreográfica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Entrevista; Jonathan Burrows; Dança; Coreografia; Prática como Pesquisa

Jonathan Burrows: choreography as a practice of listening, relation, and eruption
Juliana Moraes entrevista Jonathan Burrows

Juliana Moraes[1]

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Introduction

Jonathan Burrows is an influential English choreographer whose work explores musical form, rhythm, collaboration and open approaches to performance and audience[2]. A former dancer with the Royal Ballet, he transitioned into contemporary choreography, developing a unique artistic language through his long-standing partnership with composer Matteo Fargion[3]. Their duet-based works, including *Both Sitting Duet* (2002), *The Quiet Dance* (2005), *Speaking Dance* (2006), *Cheap Lecture* (2009), T*he Cow Piece* (2009), *Body Not Fit For Purpose* (2014) and *Rewriting* (2021), blend scored precision with an attitude that engages audiences through rhythm, humor and intellectual rigor. His widely read book A *Choreographer's Handbook* (Routledge 2010, 2nd edition 2024) reflects his approach to dance as a space for questioning rather than dictating methods.

Burrows is a founder visiting member of faculty at P.A.R.T.S[4], in Brussels. He collaborates regularly with Jonzi D[5] on the *Back To The Lab* hip hop mentoring project at Sadler's Wells London and is currently an Associate Professor at Coventry University's Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE). Deeply influenced by process-driven work and English folk traditions, he values the fluidity of creative exchange over rigid methodologies, emphasizing dance as a means of connection rather than a singular aesthetic pursuit.

I had the opportunity to interview Jonathan on October 7, 2024, at his home in Lewes, Southeast England. Sitting at the very table where he develops much of his choreographic work, we spoke

[2] The works of the duo Burrows and Fargion can be found on the website https://www.burrowsfargion.com/. Accessed on February 24, 2024.

[3] Matteo Fargion (Milan, 1961-) is a musician and performer, a frequent collaborator of choreographer Jonathan Burrows. His approach integrates music and choreography in rigorous and minimalist structures.

[4] P.A.R.T.S. (Performing Arts Research and Training Studios, Brussels, 1995-) is a contemporary dance school founded by choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker in partnership with the Rosas company and La Monnaie Theatre.

[5] Jonzi D (London, 1970-) is a performer, choreographer, and hip hop activist. Creator of the Breakin' Convention festival, he is one of the pioneers in legitimizing hip hop dance within the theatrical context.

for an hour about his artistic journey, his recent academic job, his passion for English folk music, and his evolving role as a university professor supervising PhDs in artistic practice. His ability to communicate complex ideas with clarity and generosity made our conversation both intellectually rich and deeply engaging.

Interview

JM: Juliana Moraes
JB: Jonathan Burrows

JM: A lot of dance students and academics in Brazil probably already know your artwork and might have read your book, A *Choreographer's Handbook*, but for those who haven't had the chance to read it or watch your performances, could you share a little bit about yourself and your journey in dance?

JB: Yes, so perhaps because you mentioned *A Choreographer's Handbook* first, I'll say a little bit about what that is and then I can introduce my own creative work afterwards. *A Choreographer's Handbook*, essentially, is a set of questions about what choreography might be and when it could be useful or not. The important thing to say about it is that the book does reflect my opinions in some way, but when I wrote it I also tried to bring in many different perspectives. I'd been following what a multiplicity of people in different workshops were saying over a period of years and writing down ideas that perhaps contradicted what I thought. And the other thing to say about the book is that I wrote it in a time when I was able to be quite open and in a way naive. It was published in 2010 and I'd been working on it for, I think, three or four years, which was a period of great confidence in contemporary dance and choreography within Europe. It was a moment when I think many artists were asking these questions and exploring them through their own work and through workshops, and the book reflects this much larger thinking and doing that was happening around me at that time, and which gave me the courage to try and catch things I was hearing and try to write them down. My hope for it is that it doesn't become some kind of a "Bible" that you would

have to follow, but rather that it provokes ongoing thinking in other people, other artists who are making their own work. What I say in it shouldn't contradict what other people feel intuitively.

In terms of my own performances, I make a very specific kind of work by accident of meeting and beginning to collaborate with a composer many years ago, whose name is Matteo Fargion, and we've been making and performing things together for more than 35 years, mostly a series of duet works. We've created many pieces, but the qualities they share in common are that we focus very strongly on rhythmic qualities of dance performance, so that we would tend to call what we do music, certainly as much as we would call it dance. Another quality it has is that there's a kind of intellectual underpinning of the work that we make, but it's borrowed from contemporary classical music as much as it's borrowed from contemporary dance. And the third thing is that by accident of our personalities, but also the combination of the way we use rhythm and an open attitude towards performance, there is an element of humour in what we do. It's not stand up comedy, so it's not something that we chase, but it's definitely always been there and still is to some degree, which means that the intellectuality is balanced by something that's accessible to different audiences. We've performed in every context imaginable in different places in the world, and we've found that people can respond to the work, otherwise we wouldn't do it. But I'd just add that I don't recommend anybody works the way that Matteo and I work, I would hate to be an influence on anybody in those terms. *A Choreographer's Handbook* is something quite different, it's not selling what we do. I do mention it in there, but the book is something else.

JM: It's not a manual, right?

JB: It's certainly not a manual about the way that Matteo and I work. We work one way, other people work in different ways. I think the period of time when everybody had to agree about how to work is finished. I think now we can all enjoy somebody else's work that is nothing like the work that we make, whereas in the past I have a feeling that within contemporary dance we looked for the work that was most like ours. That's very limiting. It doesn't have to be like

that. Things can be diverse creatively without contradicting our own set of experiences, desires and beliefs.

JM: You started as a dancer performing in other choreographer's pieces, and then you transitioned into creating your own work, both as a performer and a choreographer. How did that shift happen for you?

JB: Well, I danced in other people's work as a ballet dancer, but that was part of the job. Then by a lucky accident I met the choreographer Rosemary Butcher[6] in a play park where she was taking her son, who was the same age as my daughter, and we would often end up there together and we started talking. A bit later on I saw her work for the first time and she invited me to be part of it, and I ended up dancing with her for many years. Her work really was very far from the work that I was trying to make and continue to make now—that wasn't the point—but I had huge respect for her, the integrity of how she approached being a dance artist and the way she focused on process. I think that experience of process was what I inherited most strongly from working with Rosemary Butcher.

Since then I've become very interested in the idea that we could invite each other more often into each other's worlds, which doesn't mean we have to agree with each other, it doesn't mean we have to compromise our own vision, but it's such a delight and such a learning curve to be invited. “Well, this is what I do, would you like to come and join me?” And that's very different from the conventional view of collaboration, where you're exactly required or encouraged to sacrifice your perspective and find some idealized meeting point. That's fine, it can work sometimes, but an invitation also offers a wonderful opportunity to say, “Well, okay, I'm in your hands, I'm going to trust that you will look after me and I'm going to enter into your world, this different world.” That thought goes hand in hand with the ways in which we've moved on now in terms of knowing what a dancer's work is, and particularly in relation to

[6] Rosemary Butcher (1947–2016) was an important English choreographer who worked with conceptual elements in dance. Her works were strongly influenced by the visual arts. Butcher directed her own company and taught for many years at the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance, now Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, in London.

Chrysa Parkinson's[7] concept of the dancer as the agent of their own work. The idea of the dancer an artist in their own right wherever they work, in whoever's piece and in whatever context. I think that concept reflects this idea that you can be invited and join without losing agency.

JM: Daniela Perazzo Domm[8] has studied your work in depth, and she says that many critics wrongly label your work as abstract or conceptual. She believes that your art is actually much more connected to life than people think. Would you agree with her and why?

JB: Well I think it perhaps raises a more interesting and profound question about abstraction within contemporary dance. We're living through an era of decolonization where we must look again at what modernism was and how it excluded other forms, and abstraction is part of that critique. At the same time there are aspects of dance which are by definition abstract, as much as there are aspects which are by definition culturally or personally specific, and the two things overlap. In terms of the work that Matteo and I make, there are absolutely abstract elements which come from working with musical ideas, but they're always in negotiation with who we are, and with dramaturgical thinking and more conversational approaches to performing. We work with rhythm and a rhythmic device is essentially abstract, but rhythm used in the right way in relation to the right dramaturgy becomes very powerful. I did make deliberately abstract dance pieces at one point and I occasionally have a desire to return to that and see what would happen, but at the same time I've become fascinated by what dramaturgy is and can do, and how meanings or senses overlap and accumulate towards coherence and feeling in a dance performance in ways I love, that I don't find happens in quite the same way in other art forms. The other thing I'm aware of in terms

[7] Chrysa Parkinson is an American dancer and a professor at the University of Stockholm, known for her research on artistic practice and performative experience.

[8] Daniela Perazzo Domm published a book entirely dedicated to the work of Jonathan Burrows: DOMM, D. P. *Jonathan Burrows: Towards a Minor Dance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 245 page

of abstraction and dramaturgy is that musicians or composers are rarely asked that question, so they have no problem moving fluidly between potentially abstract agreements like pulse, rhythm, harmony and so forth, and the affect or feeling of the music itself.

JM: But in dance you have a body.

JB: Yes, but a musician has a body too, and those more formal agreements are often about how you connect physically and in time with the other musicians, which in itself produces a strong affect. But on the other hand you're right, the dancer is working directly with the body and so abstract elements are negotiated through very direct subjective physical experiences, which changes the balance between formality and affect.

JM: Kelina Gotman[9] talks about choreography navigating between order and disorder. How do you approach these ideas of order and disorder in your work?

JB: Oh, that's interesting. I met somebody last week in Croatia who said something that I really loved in relation to this. She's a Croatian dramaturge called Nina Gojić[10], and she didn't use the words 'order and disorder', she used two different words: 'control and eruption'. This is much better than the way that we normally see it, because it suggests a flow of interrelated possibilities and necessities, rather than a binary. Eruption then becomes an integral part of the ways in which we navigate our relationship to other people, things, contexts and experiences, and I like that. I've been thinking about it a lot since Nina said it and I've found it a helpful image.

JM: Would you mind telling me about your partnership with Matteo Fargion, and how do you keep a partnership like that for so many years?

[9] Kelina Gotman is a Canadian professor and researcher at King's College London, specializing in performance history, dance, and cultural theory. Her research explores the relationships between movement, theatre, and knowledge.

[10] Nina Gojić (Croatia) is a contemporary dramaturg known for her work with expanded dramaturgy, intersections between theatre and performance, and her collaborations with experimental artists across Europe.

JB: Well, there's a simple answer to that which is that we try on the whole not to have too many meetings. Whenever anybody asks us if we have any advice, we always say, "Don't have too many meetings". In a way it's connected to a slightly classical anarchist perspective, that meetings tend towards looking for consensus, and consensus always silences one voice or the other voice, and so we prefer to find ways of working that allow each of us to get on with what we want to do, need to do, and are good at doing, and then only share and discuss at a moment when something is already happening and there's something to discuss.

JM: We can see that your pieces are super well structured. But at the same time, there is a sense of play. Is this part of your work?

JB: Yes, I think it is something we're aware of in the work. However, Matteo doesn't like the word ‘play’ so we tend not to use it. I think perhaps that's because it becomes easily confused with a very self conscious approach to a lightness of touch or humor that can be deadly, but there is a different kind of play where it's not an enforced position, it's just something that happens or doesn't happen, depending on the mood. So for me, both in rehearsal and in performance, what I noticed a long time ago was that I liked it if what was happening modelled actual human conversation.

You and I have been speaking about the serious business of choreographing, but we've both been laughing. That's what human beings do in communication (maybe other animals do it too, there seems to be some evidence), and yet we tend to create situations in contemporary performance where it's not as fluid as that. It comes down to whether it's a serious piece or a funny piece, but that's not what happens in a conversation. A conversation is both serious and fluidly humorous, even at a funeral, in fact especially at a funeral. So I think when Matteo and I work together there's an element of that going on and we're serious, but we do laugh a lot.

We were rehearsing these two weeks and it's the first time we'd been together rehearsing for six months or something, and it was a pleasure.

But just to say something about structure: in my collaboration with Matteo I tend to be the disruptor somehow, because I come from the spontaneities of dance, whereas Matteo comes from the more disciplined formalities of classical music, so he's good at insisting on rigour when we need it. These roles are never discussed and they're not written in stone, but when it works it can be fruitful and much of the work then is about when to keep doing what we're doing, or when to change. He often likes to keep things going and I argue for change.

For me the really interesting choreographic decisions happen much, much later on in a process, and decisions about structure and continuity are just a way to get to the point when those interesting choices can happen. So to give you an example, last week we showed what we're working on to a colleague, and immediately when we'd finished he repeated a bit of text that we'd sung and said that he particularly liked it. And the thing he repeated was something that, although we've been working for two years on the piece, I had added only the day before and I hadn't thought it was very important. I was just trying to replace a text that I didn't like. But as soon as our attention was drawn towards this new image, I realized it was a typical late decision that had stronger dramaturgical impact than I'd imagined. So for me choreography is about creating enough of a continuity between doing and ideas such that you arrive unexpectedly at that kind of spontaneous decision, which suddenly focuses everything.

JM: And if you don't?

JB: Good question. Well, if a process doesn't arrive at something that starts to feel coherent then Matteo and I will tend to start again. *The Unison Piece*[11] grew out of a performance of almost 20 minutes which we made and then completely abandoned, and then we started again and the best aspects of the lost piece came forwards with us by accident. I would say that for every performance

[11] *The Unison Piece* (Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion, 2018) is a choreography that investigates the notion of unison in dance, exploring repetitions, variations, and rhythmic relationships between movement and sound.

we show, there are two pieces that we make and don't show anybody, which is why we've never asked for or received any kind of ongoing permanent funding, because we found we couldn't make promises about what the outcomes of a process might be.

JM: Because otherwise it would have to deal with deadlines?

JB: Yes, we'd have to say what we were doing and then we'd get confused. Also if it wasn't getting anywhere we wouldn't have the courage to abandon it. Now, I'm aware this is a slightly privileged position. We've been two older white men working in a time when there was more money around to support the work and in reality it's not so easy for some, and anyway it's getting more difficult for everyone now. But for better or worse we still more or less work this way. We tend to wait until we get to a point where we think a piece is emerging and only then we try and apply for some very small amount of money, just to pay for me going up and down on the train to London and so forth. Mostly we work in our own houses. We very rarely rent a studio because we can't afford it. I sit here in the mornings when I'm working. This is the studio, this table here. And the great thing is I bought the table off the improvisor and choreographer Martin Kilvady[12], so I have the feeling it's imbued with his spirit, which I've always imagined might help me be more spontaneous.

JM: That's so beautiful.

JB: I hope it works.

JM: There's something about your work that is so structured, but I think it is also so spontaneous at the same time. How do you pull that off?

JB: The pieces are very complex rhythmically so find we usually need to read a score, but we tend to practice and perform them until other instinctive layers become also possible. The score is just there as part of the process, to focus us and mediate between

[12] Martin Kilvady (1974-) is a Slovenian dancer. Co-founder of the Les SlovaKs Collective, he is a teacher at P.A.R.T.S. (Performing Arts Research and Training Studios) in Brussels.

us and the audience. I would argue anyway that by the time we perform a piece, it already contains strong elements of improvisation. We certainly have the principle that once it's embodied then anybody can change anything at any moment in the performance, physically or in time or space, volume, dynamics and so forth, so long as there's a strong enough signal to the other person that that's what's happening, and that you're not going to leave the other person behind. It just keeps things interesting.

JM: I read your book, A *Choreographer's Handbook*, a long time ago, and then I reread parts of it for this interview, and some of the things that are written in the book are coming back to me listening to you, for instance: “Choreography is something that you do so that the dancer is free to dance.”

JB: Obviously there are people who function best in a mode of instant improvised decision making, but I'm not particularly one of them. I struggle with that. In a situation of not knowing what I'm doing I feel self conscious and burdened. My particular personality doesn't rise to that possibility. However, I can reach that place of spontaneity if I have enough of a starting point to support and facilitate my particular skills and desires and feelings. In the typical argument between improvisation and choreography you would hear people say, “Why don't you improvise? Improvisation is more free. Improvisation is more authentic.” and so forth. But this position doesn't always take into account the specificity of different kinds of people, and how their own neurodiverse situation functions best. It takes all sorts and not everyone has the same route.

JM: That is quite a dualistic idea, right? Improvisation versus choreography.

JB: It can become very binary yes, but I think there is a shift happening now that I find interesting. There's a younger generation of artists who I meet in workshops and they have no problem moving fluidly between copied or learned material and improvised material. You see it very strongly amongst hip hop artists also. For instance I

worked recently with a South London Krumping[13] crew called Gully Block South. It's a large collective, but there were four guys who came along to the project I do with Jonzi D, and I was astonished by the speed at which they could transition between highly articulate shared choreographic decisions and what in Krump would be called breakout moments. I think the binary might belong to an older generation. It became binary because of the fight against codified forms like ballet and the big modern dance techniques like Limón and Graham and so forth, but we're not in that fight anymore. We don't have to worry.

JM: I'm going to quote another interview that you gave in 2023 to Aušra Kaminskaitė[14]. You said: "The important thing is that all the skills you learn by dancing and choreographing are useful in all aspects of your life, and I wish dance schools could talk more about that, rather than being preoccupied with a limited notion of success."

JB: Yes I think this is something that still matters in relation to dance training insititutions.

JM: Coming from Brazil, where success is very hard, I think it would be very important to understand what you mean by that.

JB: I've seen that sometimes people who've passed through dance training feel a kind of sadness or sense of shame at not ending up with the work, visibility or support within dance that was wished for. On the other hand I've seen people move into other kinds of work, where it's clear that, I think, there are qualities of dance practice which transfer very well. For instance the ways in which dancers work together, are able to mutually help each other, to mutually critique, to tolerate not knowing, to tolerate moments of eruption or confusion, to organize, to self-organize, to help other people to organize, to encourage creativity, to language things which are not easily languaged, and to facilitate physical confidence

[13] Krumping is a street dance style that derives from clown dancing, characterized by fast movements and facial expressions. Recently, Krumping has become a way of life, a culture with its own music and dances.

[14] Aušra Kaminskaitė (Lithuania) is a researcher interested in contemporary dramaturgy, dance, and intersections between performance and critical theory.

and understanding through deep embodied knowledge. Not everybody who studies at a dance school can support themselves financially as a dancer when they leave, so I think it's very important that the institutions put a little more attention towards "What are we sharing? What knowledge forms are present here in this building? What are we inviting people to develop within themselves and as a skill base that they can take forwards in whatever directions open up for them afterwards?" Success could be redefined from the beginning as being about flexible skills and responses that can be useful both within and beyond the dance sector.

JM: You have worked for many years as an independent choreographer, and then you found a place at university. You are currently an Associate Professor at the Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE) at Coventry University. How did that happen in your career? Do you think university is an institution capable of instigating research in the arts, and what are the tensions?

JB: Well, the first thing to say is that I'm not by any means alone in moving towards academic practice-research as a way of furthering unconventional, more experimental dance practices. All over the world dance artists have been investing in academic research as a way to go on working and sharing. My situation was that I joined the Centre for Dance Research Coventry University because the Director Sarah Whatley[15] was assembling a faculty looking at ideas of embodiment from many different perspectives: law, health, spirituality, artificial intelligence, socio-political aspects and so forth, and she felt it was important to also invite three practicing artists.

JM: Who are the artists?

JB: Myself, Rosemary Lee[16], who is very well known an artist pioneering ways of working with non-professional performers in

[15] Sarah Whatley is a professor at Coventry University, specializing in digital dance, dance accessibility, and the archiving of choreographic practices, with particular emphasis on research into the work of Siobhan Davies.

[16] Rosemary Lee (London, 1960-) is a choreographer known for intergenerational and large-scale creations for urban and rural spaces, exploring physicality and bodily memory.

relation to specific landscapes, and Siobhan Davis[17], who is a highly respected experimental choreographer.

JM: I was listening to Chrysa Parkinson talking with Mette Ingvartsen[18] in a podcast. And then she was quoting someone that she didn't remember the name, but I liked very much what she said: “Poetry disrupts literature, dance disrupts movement, and practice-research disrupts research.”

JB: That's very good. I also don't know who said it, but it's a useful image. I don't think it's necessarily easy to move into the academic situation as a practicing artist, because the idea of practice-research within academia is still developing and there's a lot of discussion as to what it is and how to assess and validate it. But on a personal level, I couldn't imagine my life without having had this experience of being gifted the possibility to be amongst a very different set of opinions, critiques and perspectives. And perhaps the greatest gift of all is that I'm now supervising PhD research, and the possibility which that offers to spend two years immersing yourself in somebody else's world, does extraordinary things to your own outlook. Perhaps that's what practicing research within academia is offering: a way to reconsider what it is we do and why we do it, and what effect and affect it can have more widely.

JM: At university, usually professors must supervise students' projects. What do you think are the differences between directing, mentoring and supervising? And how do you keep those boundaries?

JB: That's a really good question. I have a tendency with PhD students to approach it more in the way that a mentor would rather than a supervisor, probably because I'm coming from the practice side of things and other supervisors are more theoretically grounded. It works okay, but there is a difference. I don't know yet

[17] Siobhan Davies (London, 1950-) is an English choreographer and former dancer with the London Contemporary Dance Theatre. She founded the Siobhan Davies Dance Company, producing influential experimental choreographies.

[18] Mette Ingvartsen (Aarhus, 1980-) is a Danish choreographer known for exploring the boundaries between dance, technology, and the politics of the body in her performances.

when or whether it's appropriate or not for those roles to blur. Strictly speaking, a supervisor wouldn't offer direct creative advice. They might shape a way of asking a question, whereas a mentor would shortcut and offer direct creative advice. So I do that, but I do it with caution, and sometimes afterwards I think: “yeah, that's not so helpful.” But it raises the larger question about mentorship within dance, because there's no doubt that a lot of funding all over the world has attached to it the idea that a small amount of the money must pay for a mentor, as a form of insurance, but there's no particular evidence that it works.

JM: Even for experienced choreographers?

JB: Even for mature choreographers. There's often the demand that you have a kind of outside eye. At one point in my life I mentored things quite a lot, and I honestly think I did more damage than good. I'm not sure it works. It was a model that I believe came initially from American creative practice. I remember the first time I was asked to do it, and suddenly people were talking about mentorship. My worry about it is that it removes that moment when, as an artist, you need to feel absolutely lost. If you're asking questions and somebody's trying to answer to your problems, I think it can block you from breaking through to where you need to be. A dramaturge is something different, within Europe the dramaturge is a kind of co-worker, who’s doing something different and perhaps healthier.

JM: But still not a supervisor?

JB: I think the difference is that a supervisor is attending to the necessity of validation and assessment within an academic process.

JM: I’m thinking of what you said about your creative process with Matteo, that you have to wait and be patient and then something erupts. As a supervisor, even though I would sometimes offer shortcuts, I think my role is more like holding and giving space for the frustration and then waiting for it to erupt. But after, let's say,

a year or two years, if nothing erupts, then I do give myself the opportunity to give some shortcuts.

JB: It's very interesting what you're saying. I agree with you. It's a useful thought.

JM: I have a little bit of training in psychoanalysis. I was training to become a psychoanalyst before I entered university to become an assistant professor, and I think there's something related to that, to holding.

JB: That's a good analogy.

JM: Because as a psychoanalyst you cannot give any shortcuts. The person has to find her or his own insights.

JB: Or not.

JM: Or not. That's difficult.

JB: Or find them and lose them again very rapidly.

JM: Exactly!

JM: You're really generous with sharing the documents of your work. You post full pieces on Vimeo—that's very rare. You add scores to your website along with your interviews, texts and everything is also very organized. When did you start making all this material available? And what drives you to do that?

JB: I've always made the material available, and my reasoning is that one of the best things about dance practice is its generosity, the way we so freely exchange and how this easy exchange means we're not so easily able to claim ownership. I find that very attractive. It appeals to the anarchist in me. And of course, the main reason is that it's very difficult for us to sell individual objects, since what we do has no large financial value.

I know there are exceptions, for instance Steve Paxton[19] sold *Satisfying Lover*[20] to the Museum of Modern Art and Simone Forti[21] sold *Huddle*[22] and so forth. Those exceptions came at the moment when galleries got interested again in performance, and dance specifically, but on the whole we're not usually in that situation. Steve Paxton and Simone Forti, for instance, have been extraordinarily generous artists in their sharing, whether or not they sold those pieces.

At the moment there seems to be a profound shift in digital culture towards shorter attention spans and algorithms which prioritize financial rather than creatively driven search results, so it's becoming harder to find things, or get things seen, which is worrying.

JM: Vimeo is really difficult to find.

JB: Yes, at the moment Matteo and I are trying to rethink how and where we try to share things, because it still seems important.

JM: It's good that people from Brazil can watch it. I mean, that's excellent.

JB: Yes and we appreciate the dialogue that it allows.

JM: Could you describe your new book, *Writing Dance*, published in 2022?

JB: The choreographer Mette Edvardsen and the Belgian dramaturge Jeroen Peeters[23] run a publishing house called *Varamo*,

[19] Steve Paxton (Phoenix, 1939 – East Charleston, 2024) was an American choreographer and dancer, a pioneer of Contact Improvisation and a member of the Judson Dance Theater, profoundly influencing contemporary dance.

[20] *Satisfying Lover* (Steve Paxton, 1967) is a minimalist choreography that features ordinary people walking on stage, exploring presence, perception, and the relationship between everyday movement and dance.

[21] Simone Forti (Florence, 1935-) is a choreographer and interdisciplinary artist, influential in the Judson Dance Theater, known for integrating dance, improvisation, and somatic practices.

[22] *Huddle* (Simone Forti, 1961) is a performance in which a group of performers forms a human sculpture, moving collectively and spontaneously.

[23] Jeroen Peeters is a dramaturg and writer, specializing in the dramaturgy of contemporary dance. He collaborates with choreographers and explores questions of perception and materiality in performance.

and they approached me asking if I would be interested in making a small book of talks or writings I'd done since A *Choreographer's Handbook* came out, and I said ok. I'd been collecting things anyway with an idea of publishing them, but as I read the stuff through I was a bit disappointed because the nature of giving talks is that each time you re-explain the context for your thinking, which meant there was a lot of repetition. So I said to Mette, "I don't think it's going to work", and she said: "Well if it's too repetitious, why not just use fragments?" And that was was very liberating.

I started again and I began to piece together a jigsaw puzzle of fragments that avoided the repetition, and it started to make sense and flow. In a sense, if A Choreographer's Handbook was a series of questions that reflect, I hope, a multitude of voices, then Writing Dance was an opportunity to share something more subjective and personal, to do with the work that I make. Perhaps more importantly, it's written and comes across as a kind of poetry. I'm very interested in how poetry and choreography share things in common, meaning they both use formal processes to condense information and produce rhythm that amplifies feeling and meaning.

JM: This is my last question, and probably a huge stretch. I apologize in advance if I totally missed out. In Brazil, the third wave of feminism is very much linked with a process that we call deconstructing the macho guy. The macho man is a very Latin American thing. When I watch you and Matteo on stage or your videos, I can't see toxic male behavior represented, very much the opposite. You just spoke now that you create on this table, and I read in your previous interviews that you were the first care of your children and him as well at the same time, and you had to create in your homes. You say that you're male, white, privileged–but it's a very different kind of male. Could you talk about that?

JB: First of all, I should say that Matteo or I haven't always been the main childcare provider in our respective families, but there have been periods of our lives where we have been, and it's had a particular impact on the way we work. We've developed our practices in relation to those needs. It's something to do with finding ways to concentrate despite what's going on, and not being too

precious about things. This connects to an attitude towards performance in our work, which came more or less from two main directions. On Matteo's side it came from noticing that classical music, even contemporary classical music, tends to have a very austere approach to performance. There's a seriousness, even a stiffness about the mode of performing, but we wanted to find a more open and relaxed relationship to the audience.

On my side it connects to a lifetime involvement in traditional folk practices in England, which I've been involved in since I was a child and which have two very noticeable aspects, which seem in a way connected to that open attitude to performing. The first is that what's being shared belongs to everybody in the room, and the second is that what's being being shared is not necessarily about the performer. So here in Lewes there lives a very famous traditional singer called Shirley Collins[24], who put it best. She says: "When I sing a traditional song, it's not about me, it's about the song." And that's something I think that was absorbed into what Matteo and I do. So softness and openess has always been important, despite the rigour of what we do.

JM: Is there anything that I haven't asked that you wished I'd asked?

JB: The questions were enjoyable, thank you. I got distracted several times and went off in other directions, but that's a testament to the quality of what you asked.

JM: This was wonderful. Thank you so much.

JB: Yes, you're very welcome.

References

BURROWS, J. **A Choreographer's Handbook**. Londres e Nova Iorque: Routledge, 2010. 240 p.

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[24] Shirley Collins (Hastings, 1935-) é uma cantora inglesa, referência no renascimento da música folk britânica, conhecida por sua abordagem autêntica e pelo resgate de baladas tradicionais.

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