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Master's Degree Thesis

Practicing wellbeing through dance. Creative communities, empathetic relationships and healing processes

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“Dance is the art that humanizes us the most, which brings us into a human context”.
Monica Gillette

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INTRODUCTION

On April 2, 2021, in response to a letter from a reader, Massimo Gramellini wrote in *7*, the weekly magazine of Corriere della Sera: "When I was a young boy I had a friend who wanted to become a Formula 1 driver. He destroyed many karts before giving up: driving was his passion, but not the reason why he came into the world. He was, and is, an extraordinary builder of human relationships. He knows how to put his interlocutors at ease, facilitate relationships, find points of contact between very different people". When I read this sentence, I pinned it in my notebook.

Why should I start this thesis with this quote?

Now, I did not want to be a Formula 1 driver. Maybe I wanted to become a dancer. But then I studied other things, I opened my mind, I became - perhaps - less selfish, and I started to think that what I really wanted to do was to build relationships and make people feel good with the tools and skills that I had. Unluckily, I did not, and still do not, have many means at my disposal. I do not have medical skills, nor psychological ones. It took some time, but then I finally understood that art in general, and dance in particular, can be a way to do it.

The desire of deepening the functioning of human relationships was probably already existing inside me. But this thought became increasingly persistent after the outbreak of Covid-19. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic: for months, everyone lived isolated and distant from other people, even the closest ones. The psychological damage deriving from this situation has impacted most of the world's population, with anxiety, stress and depression being recognised as one of the causes of a series of adverse consequences. Besides the impact on the physical and mental conditions, social distancing has also had an effect on interpersonal relations, leading to an increased use of technology that has impacted our everyday communication and relationships, faster than what it could have been imagined. All this has had a strong effect on individuals and communities' health. We have suddenly lost track of our "inner world", and also of the outer one.

In 1948 the same WHO defined health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO Constitution, 1948). Health and wellbeing of individuals are thus found to be firmly

rooted in society and culture (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). In this context, it could be recognised the fundamental role of the arts in stimulating not only physical and cognitive processes, but also creative ones, thus promoting the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Starting from this assumption, this thesis aims to investigate how dance can fulfill this role. Indeed, "[...] dance [...] is a [...] form of collaborative creativity, quintessentially social and inextricably linked to families, cultures and educational systems. It is therefore an excellent medium to study in terms of its health and wellbeing benefits" (MacDonald, 2017, p. XIV).

Through an overview of the state of the art, the first chapter of the research will address the concept of wellbeing and how this can be understood as a multifaceted concept, comprising both a physical and psychological, as well as a social dimension. Its link with the social aspect, made it necessary to introduce the concept of social capital, which comprises the norms, networks and resources shared by people living in the same community and contributing to shaping the relationships among them. Wellbeing and social capital converge in the notion of welfare, which will be observed from a cultural perspective. From Cultural Welfare to the relationships between wellbeing and the arts: here, the attention will be turned to dance and its psychological, physical and social benefits. These also include improved physical fitness and cognitive skills, greater group cohesion and an increased willingness to help others.

Through an empirical-qualitative methodology by means of interviews and the analysis of three case studies, the research aims at bringing an original contribution to the existing literature.

The first case will look closely at how the Centro per la Scena Contemporanea CSC, a Dancehouse located in Bassano del Grappa and supported by the Municipality itself, is able to originate a constant dialogue with the territory and its inhabitants, while at the same time remaining a point of reference on the international scene. In fact, the CSC sees the collaboration of artists dedicated to the research and diffusion of innovative artistic languages, while establishing a dialogue with external realities committed to the analysis of the effects of dance on the lives of individuals. In this context, it will be made reference to the new curatorial practices of the performing arts and to how, in the Bassano system, wellbeing plays a fundamental role.

In the second chapter, the relationship between an individual artist and the audience will be addressed with the performance *Practicing Empathy* by the Israeli choreographer Yasmeen Godder, in which the theme of empathy as a means of understanding and communicating the other's moods, emotions and feelings will play a central role.

Moving instead to a non-European context, the last chapter will refer to some cases addressed in 2009 by the dance/movement therapist and teacher Maralia Reca. These are about people who survived tortures during the military dictatorship in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. Deprived of family or community support, they were subjected to anxiety and, sometimes, disappearances. Their bodies, which had become the main object of torture, had in fact been exposed to a trauma derived from a socio-political context. Here, dance/movement therapy promoted recovery from severe shock.

It finally has to be said that Good Health and Wellbeing are among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 United Nations Agenda. “To ensure healthy lives and well-being for all, we all have to take action” (https://www.globalgoals.org/3-good-health-and-well-being). This is what this thesis wishes to accomplish.

Chapter 1

WELLBEING, SOCIAL CAPITAL, CULTURAL WELFARE AND THE ARTS

1.1 Wellbeing

"Since the studies of the economist Tibor Scitovsky, dating back to 1976, the paradox of well-being acquires a central importance: in contemporary society, despite constant economic growth, the world population is increasingly unhappy". (Pagliarino, 2015, p. 148)

1.1.1 The evolution of the concept

In the western world, the concept of wellbeing has been subjected to various changes across the last two centuries. Still, finding a proper definition of the term seems to be quite challenging.

Many fields of study have been working around the idea of wellbeing for several years: among them there are, to cite a few, public policy, psychology, psychiatry, physical and mental health. In particular, contemporary debates around wellbeing have strongly influenced the policy discourse. Its importance is underlined by the presence of the term in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, in which Good Health and Wellbeing appear as the third out of 17 global goals.

But what is it meant with *wellbeing*? The Oxford English Dictionary defines wellbeing as "The state of being or doing well in life; happy, healthy, or prosperous condition; moral or physical welfare (of a person or community)" (OED, 1989). Sharon Chaiklin (2017) in the foreword to *Dance and Wellbeing*, states that wellbeing "is generally described as satisfaction with life as long as basic needs are met economically, if one has health and strong personal relationships and there is a sense of purpose and accomplishment that sustains one in daily life" (p. XVII). Following the definition given by Dodge et al. in 2012, wellbeing can also be described as the point of balance between an individual's resources and the challenges faced.

Despite the differences already existing in these three definitions, it can be said that wellbeing is undoubtedly strictly related to health. This comprises physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual components (Rendell & Teghe, 2005). In the WHO Constitution of 1948, health had been defined as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of infirmity" (p. 1), thus linking the concepts of health and wellbeing. However, health has usually been addressed in biomedical contexts, while wellbeing has been seen as closer to the emotional and psychological fields. Because of its support in policy formulation, health has in turn started to be perceived as both an individual and subjective condition and as a social outcome deriving from environment, relationships, practices, lifestyles and behaviors (Cicerchia, 2017). Besides the possibility to deduce that good health is strictly associated with wellbeing and that both health and wellbeing are highly dependent on physical and mental conditions, the social aspect became therefore central as well. In fact, even if many research still confirm the correlation between health-related quality of life and wellbeing, others highlight the presence of further determinants responsible for wellbeing, which is without any doubt a manifold concept.

Because of the complexity and subjectivity of the term, debates about wellbeing measurement with economic and social indicators have also started to develop (La Placa et al., 2013). On the other hand, precisely because of its being seen as a highly subjective concept, wellbeing has been interpreted by others in a more emotional and psychological way (Felce & Perry, 1995).

Going back to past discourses around wellbeing, the term opened up to a series of aspects that went beyond the individual, thus encompassing family, community, society, environmental, socio-economic and political factors, all correlated the one with the other. In sum, wellbeing can be considered a multidimensional construct (Daly et al., 2018).

In an essay from 2005, Teghe and Rendell cited the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which highlighted the key elements which can be considered determinant for wellbeing. In essence, it emerged that throughout everyone's life, individuals relate with the natural and the human made environments, social networks and human sensibility, and that wellbeing depends on all these aspects combined together. To determine one's own wellbeing, it therefore means to consider all of these factors in

the specific social and cultural context of each individual, bearing in mind that they all have the possibility to affect individuals' quality of life and society cohesion (ABS, 2001, cited in Rendell & Teghe, 2005). Talking about the numerous facets of wellbeing, several researchers have highlighted three different dimensions of it, namely the material, the relational and the subjective one (White, 2010). In the material, economic aspects are central: still, diverse scholars have found out how economic aspects such as income do not impact much on wellbeing, while others have highlighted how unequal income can have a huge impact on people's lives (Rendell & Teghe, 2005). The relational dimension comprises the social and human spheres, while the subjective one is constituted by both people's perception of their material, social and human positions, and their cultural values, ideologies and beliefs (White, 2010).

In conclusion, wellbeing should be intended as the outcome of the interplay between many factors.

1.1.2 The importance of psychological wellbeing

In 1969 Norman Bradburn carried out one of the first attempts to define psychological wellbeing, to which he referred to in terms of happiness (Bradburn, 1969, cited in Daly et al., 2018). Following Deaton et al. (2015), psychological wellbeing can be divided into "evaluative wellbeing (or life satisfaction), hedonic wellbeing (feelings of happiness, sadness, etc), and eudaimonic wellbeing, (sense of purpose and meaning in life)" (p. 640). Psychological wellbeing is strictly associated with health; it has in fact been demonstrated that physical illness can also derive from a harmed psychological wellbeing. Therefore, stress and depression negatively impact an individual's wellbeing, sometimes causing premature mortality and heart disease, as well as diabetes and chronic illness (Deaton et al., 2015).

The term "stress" is rather new. It was first called "shell shock" during WWI, then "combat fatigue" and "concentration camp syndrome" in WWII, and finally "post traumatic stress disorder" after the Vietnam War (Brewin, 2003, cited in Hanna, 2017, p. 101). Nowadays, stress is related to anxiety, depression or traumatic experiences.

During stressful periods or situations, the brain's limbic system, which controls emotions, memory and learning features, generates an alarm reaction. The brain's amygdala, also involved in emotional situations, responds stimulating the hypothalamus - responsible, among the other things, for heart rate, blood pressure, sleep, and hormone regulation - which sends a message to the adrenal glands that release stress hormones in the body. The hormones activate what is called the fight-or-flight response, leading to an intensification of body inflammation through adrenaline and cortisol, and ending up in higher heart rate speed, increased blood pressure, lower pain sensitivity, enhanced attention and several other symptoms. The body then activates a system which is able to cope with the stressful situation and to generate an anti-inflammatory response. However, if this happens constantly, the body's ability to answer could be nullified, therefore bringing to perpetual physical and mental problems. As Hanna (2017) underlines:

> [...] stressful experiences can change the physical structure and function of the brain, affecting wiring and thus cognitive performance, making a person feel unmotivated and mentally exhausted. Formation of new neural connections in the hippocampus becomes blocked, hindering memory and the mental flexibility needed to find alternative solutions. Long-term and short-term stress, even a mere few hours, can reduce cellular connections in the hippocampus (Hanna, 2017, pp. 101-102).

Emotional states are also related to stress. Feelings of anger, anxiety, panic, guilt, shame, sadness, envy, jealousy and disgust can all arise from a stressful situation.
On the contrary, neuroscientific studies have confirmed that positive life evaluation and happiness are predictors of lower mortality and morbidity probability.

1.1.3 From subjective to social wellbeing

Especially in the last years, the concept of wellbeing has become central in research and in the policy debate, with subjective wellbeing being increasingly measured among several populations. As previously stated, wellbeing can be considered as a more extended notion than health, including both subjective feelings and social experiences (Daykin et al., 2021).

Wellbeing has, first of all, been investigated from the individual's point of view, giving birth to what has been defined as *subjective wellbeing.* In this case, wellbeing is intended as "something that happens'' to the single subject (Carruthers & Hood, 2004). One of the fundamentals of wellbeing is, in fact, its focus on the person, with his/her preferences and attitudes. Wellbeing is thus certainly related to the individuals' own experiences. On the other hand, as underlined before, it also takes into consideration other external factors, which are often referred to as "objective", since they are intended as objective measures of, for example, income or life expectancy.

Many people have probably seen in the Covid-19 pandemic a threat to their subjective wellbeing. Drawing from Headey and Wearing's (1991) research, subjective wellbeing should be for most people and most of their lives stable and in equilibrium. Other research have highlighted how changes in external forces can have a strong influence on this equilibrium and consequently on the wellbeing of the individuals (Daly et al., 2018). Covid-19 pandemic has surely broken this equilibrium, both linked to the alteration of the everyday routine and to a lack of social contact. In fact, as previous research pointed out, increased wellbeing is also related to social network ties, social support, network structure and participation in social activities (Cornwell & Lauman, 2015).

Therefore, wellbeing can be more appropriately considered from a social perspective, overcoming the individual subjectivity.

1.1.4 Current debates

The South-Korean philosopher Byung-chul Han, in La società senza dolore, or *The palliative society* (2021), stresses how today western societies aspire to live free from pain and negativity, and that everything is done in order to reduce adverse aspects of life. The book makes the reader reflect on whether, in such a condition, it is still possible to feel real happiness, since actual pain is avoided. Initiator of this school of thought is positive psychology, which promotes wellbeing, happiness and optimism, while it encourages fleeing from pain and negative conditions of life, which are nowadays considered as indicators of weakness.

Referring as well to the contrast between ill-being and wellbeing and the need to remove adversities in contemporary society, also Sarah White (2010) moves some critiques to the wellbeing approach, especially in its usage in the politics context. From her point of view, wellbeing is often seen as something for people who are already privileged with respect to others and "who can afford to fret about the quality of their over-full lives" (p. 166). This suggests the need to rethink the concept of wellbeing itself, extending it to the whole society. Is it possible to talk about wellbeing to everyone? Is it possible to address this concept to every individual? Social exclusion or inclusion thus also become a central issue.

Another consideration that she does is about the "poor but happy" argument. Is support in the form of aid programmes or welfare enough to replace the material and economic aid from a State? Finally, she moves another critique to the individualistic aspect of psychological wellbeing, strongly rooted in the Western society (White, 2010).

A further problematic that could be identified in wellbeing, is the lack of a universally agreed measure.

For the purpose of this research, wellbeing will be intended, as "a positive condition of existence characterized by health and satisfaction, in which individuals and communities feel that their needs are being met and they have the necessary resources to pursue their own definition of happiness and achieve their own definitions of success" (Ascolani et al., 2020, p. 6).

1.2 Social capital and cultural welfare

1.2.1 Social wellbeing and the notion of social capital

Following the previous premise, it could thus be stated that wellbeing is a subjective term referring to a state of being for individuals or groups, which is generally assessed within social ideals, therefore demonstrating that wellbeing itself is socially determined. In the literature it is also possible to find a tendency to interpret wellbeing as the result of only one dimension of social life (the economic or the political or the health-related one). But still, as stressed by some researchers,

economic wealth and security are not the only determinants of wellbeing (Rendell & Teghe, 2005).

Nowadays, an increased number of discussions about the relevance of wellbeing, highlight how wellbeing should be pursued in the collectivity: the community, rather than the individual person, may be the right place in which to seek wellbeing. For some, wellbeing is much more about the "good society", rather than just personal achievements and happiness (White, 2010). In fact, people are an essential part of the society, embedded in it, and cannot therefore deviate from it (Edmondson, 2003).

Keyes (1998) has been one of the first to advocate for the social aspect of wellbeing, highlighting how *social wellbeing* comprises a broader assessment of life functioning, and identifying five social dimensions of wellbeing, summarized with:

- social acceptance
- social actualisation
- social contribution
- social coherence
- social integration

The literature stressing the relationship between social support and physical and mental health, indicates that what has been defined as *social capital* may indeed be more crucial to human wellbeing than material belongings.

1.2.2 Social capital

In 2002 Putnam wrote about how, in the beginning of the XX century, a social reformer and educator called L. Judson Hanifan, after having studied in America, went back to the barren West Virginia where he was born. Working there, he understood that, in order to answer to the social, economic and political complications of the area, the networks of social support among the inhabitants should have been enhanced (Putnam, 2002, p. 4).

He was stating this in 1916, stressing the need for an improved community engagement in social life to defend and foster democracy and development. To explain this concept, he therefore coined the term "social capital", arguing that he

was not referring to capital as usually intended (property, money, real estate), but rather to those factors who would have generated real value in human terms, meaning generosity, fellowship, affability, empathy and social intercourse between people who are part of a social unit. Since people highly depend on sociality, social capital arises from the contact between people of a community, answering to the social needs of that community and becoming possibly enough to improve its living conditions.

Hanifan then summarized the private and public benefits of social capital, saying that the individuals would have found help, sympathy and fellowship in the others, while the community would have collaborated in every field, thus leading to a general increase of community wellbeing (Hanifan, 1916, cited in Putnam, 2002).

In general, social capital can be defined as "the networks, norms and trust which together provide the resources required for individuals and communities to manage social and economic sustainability in times of change" (Rendell & Teghe, 2005, p. 7). However, during the 20th century the concept of social capital has been reworked several times.

Scholars such as Coleman and Putnam essentially considered social capital as a positive feature of society, encouraging cohesion. Around the 1980s, Coleman used the term social capital in the context of education. In 2000 Putnam defined social capital as "[...]connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, cited in del Mar Salinas-Jiménez et al. 2012), while before Bourdieu (1986) had described social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 248).

What is common to all these interpretations of social capital, is that it generally refers to the resources that people can have access to and obtain by being part of a community or group, and which are constituted by the norms, civic participation and trust shared with others. The capital is "social" because it origins from a network of relationships (Stone, 2001). With respect to this issue, Arts and van Oorschot (2005) points out pragmatic indexes of social capital, classifying them into social networks (such as spontaneous relationships of friendship, volunteering, etc), social norms (such as the values shared among people) and social trust (of people,

institutions, etc.). All these aspects would better be taken into consideration together and not separately.

Cited in Putnam (2002), Michael Woolcock and Deepa Narayan (2000) summarize the concept of social capital in a simple way:

> [...] The basic idea of social capital is that a person's family, friends, and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called on in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and leveraged for material gain. What is true for individuals, moreover, also holds for groups. Those communities endowed with a diverse stock of social networks and civic associations are in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability, resolve disputes, and take advantage of new opportunities. (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000, cited in Putnam, 2002, p. 6)

In conclusion, the notion which underlies the social capital theory, is that social networks are of fundamental importance for communities and their wellbeing. In *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*, Putnam (2002) tried to classify the different forms of social capital previously identified by other scholars, dividing social capital in: formal versus informal, thick versus thin, inward-looking versus outward-looking and bridging versus bonding.

To briefly describe these various dimensions, formal social capital comprises for instance labor unions which are conventionally recognized and organized, while the informal one can be constituted by a group of friends meeting for an unofficial dinner together. Thick social capital is represented by groups of people who both work and go out during their free time together, thus sharing much of their lifetime with each other. The thin one is made by people who meet occasionally, even for a one time casual encounter. Inward-looking social capital favors the material, social or political concerns of the group to which one belongs, while the outward-looking is concerned with public and community preoccupation. Finally, bridging social capital refers to networks which unify diverse people for ethnicity, age, gender, social classes. On the other hand, bonding social capital puts together people from the same ethnicity, age, gender and social classes. Putnam underlined how the outcome of these unions could have likely been more positive in the first case and negative in the second one.

All of the changes that have occurred and that still occur in societies (globalization, mass media, immigration, climatic change, pandemic) have affected individuals and communities. In some cases, they have been the fuel to give rise to positive transformations, but on the other hand they have often generated harm. Some of these changes have led to trust and cooperation, while sometimes they have deteriorated them. Not all the transformations have been rationally administered, thus leading to miss the opportunity to preserve and build social capital.

The concept of social capital is applied to a wide variety of fields. Among them, it is possible to count sociology and political sciences, economics, public health, urban planification, criminology, architecture, social psychology (Putnam, 2002). Relating social capital to health and wellbeing, much of the literature underlines the positive effects of social connections and support on physical and mental health of the individuals, while others address the positive outcomes at a community and public life level. For example, it has been confirmed that crime rates in a specific neighborhood are lowered by social relatedness, meaning that social participation in the neighborhood life can lead to a beneficial effect for all the residents.

For this reason, it is usually recognized that those communities sharing a higher social capital are also more easily subjected to higher wellbeing (del Mar Salinas-Jiménez et al., 2012). In this regard, studies about the benefit of social capital for communities have come to the surface (Kawachi et al., 2017). Cohesion and trust can foster interaction and connectedness among individuals and towards places, ending up in healthy outcomes for the individuals, the community and the society at large. Clark and Lisowski (2018) summarize the relation between social capital and wellbeing in a suitable way:

> Social capital and social cohesion codify the idea that local behaviors and individual perceptions play a role in overall wellbeing. Broadly speaking, social capital captures the gains from interacting with neighbors [...], while social cohesion measures the notions of trust and feeling similar to others in the neighborhood and what you feel about the people in the neighborhood. Often these are treated as overlapping concepts. (Clark & Lisowski, 2018, p. 219)

On the other hand, what they also underline is that, in order for social capital to develop, people need to be connected within the space, with social interaction

becoming a key element of local events, and social cohesion promoting wellbeing in that place.

Drawing from the previous statements, it is therefore possible to confirm that even if social capital has individual implications, it is however based on interpersonal relations, meaning that higher social capital in the community can lead as well to individual wellbeing, which will be dependent on others' individual engagement.

Therefore, as with the concept of wellbeing, there is the need to approach and relate to social capital from both an individual and collective perspective. Also in this case, trust and participation in community appear, in advanced economies, to have a greater effect on wellbeing than income (Bjørnskov, 2003).

As thus suggested by Kawachi et al. (2018), social capital gets in fact more value in the community context. They also state that what they define as "community level social capital interventions", empower more people than projects addressed to the individuals, contributing to the amelioration of the health of a larger part of communities, underlining as well the cost-efficiency of these types of activities. As it will be seen in chapter 2, this kind of interventions have an impact both on the people to which the activity is directly addressed, and on those who have a connection with them: here, it is possible to talk about "spillover effect" or "collateral benefits". What Kawachi et al. (2018) also suggest is not to think about different social capital interventions to apply in the same way to various contexts, but rather to think about the specific context and apply the social capital notion in order to improve the health of people in that specific situation.

As seen until now, social capital reveals having positive effects both on physical and mental health and social wellbeing. In fact, social relationships enable people to cultivate a sense of collaboration and solidarity among each other, norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness (Edmondson, 2003). Poortinga (2006) draws the attention to the analysis done on 22 European countries, in which individuals from a country who trusted each other and were active in the community, generally presented a situation of good health more than those in which the population lacked trust and participation. Moreover, Pinxten and Lievens (2014) stress out how social support and cohesion can have beneficial effects on mental health, being related to reduced stress and isolation and leading to access to information and to the

healthcare system. Social relationships in the neighborhoods can finally also bear a sense of pride and belonging (Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010).

1.2.3 Debates

As for wellbeing, also social capital proves to have some weaknesses. Sociologist Alejandro Portes has probably been one of the first to address the possible "dark sides" of social capital, which is de facto not always and in every place considered a good thing (Putnam, 2002, p. 8). Social capital may in fact be established and natural for those who live in a more privileged situation or for those people who feel a sense of belonging to a social group. However, this risks to lead to political, social, cultural and economic disparities among groups of people living in the same community and who lack the same amount of social capital.

In addition, social capital can improve social health and democracy in some contexts, while endangering them in others. In what Putnam defines as "civic communities" (Putnam, 1993, cited in Edmondson, 2003, p. 1725), social balance and civic engagement produce community wellbeing. As previously seen, although these are perceived as being positive factors, they can also reinforce isolation and distrust among members living in the same community. Thirty years ago, Putnam was bringing to the surface a phenomenon to which we are now increasingly witnessing. Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated distrust in politics, civic and social participation, generating a "spiral of uncivic negativity" (Putnam, 1995, cited in Edmondson, 2003, 1726). Moreover, the relationships within a group of people can have both positive and negative outcomes. This is also related to people's health and wellbeing, since these behaviors can in turn positively or negatively impact the health of the group members (Kawachi et al., 2017).

Even in contexts with high social capital, there could be a discordance in health conditions among the inhabitants, which is determined by the relations among them and the environment. Living in communities with a strong social capital, could mean to respect social hierarchies and norms while excluding others, leading to a potentially damaging condition. This is the reason why bridging social capital seems

in many cases to be more effective. In any case, social capital is well functioning in communities with a strong sense of trust among the members.

1.2.4 Social capital and the arts

In the arts, the social capital concept has been used to promote cultural events aimed at enhancing social involvement, health and wellbeing. However, the literature presents contradictory and ambiguous results of the interconnection among participation in arts activities, social capital and wellbeing. It is indeed often forgotten to focus on the participation processes and on their actual impact on people's wellbeing (Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010). Attention is rather brought towards the outcomes more than the processes of these kinds of initiatives, also because of the increased need to demonstrate their value in order to receive fundings from both private foundations and governmental institutions. Except for this, it is also debated that the concepts of health and wellbeing are often used without awareness of their double significance in medical and cultural context, while social capital is usually not sufficiently questioned (Hall & Thomson, 2007).
On the other hand, as highlighted by Upright (2004), already Bourdieu, in his early works, was theorizing how arts participation was a social product, being it the result of social connectedness and not of one's own experience. Moreover, it has to be mentioned that activities stimulating social connectedness such as artistic initiatives, can foster people's interaction. If this happens among people of different social groups, as deepened in chapter 2 and 3, they can increase both bridging and bonding social capital, diminish inequalities and prejudice, both linked to mental health and physical problems. As it will be explained later, physical participation in arts activities can both stimulate emotions and get people away from a sedentary lifestyle, which is also linked to physical and mental damages.
To sum up, social capital can be seen as a complex, multidimensional concept with differential effects that are sensitive to the contexts (Hawe et al., 2020). This means that social capital can play a key role in creating wellbeing for people participating in arts activities, particularly in generating individual and community wellbeing, but

that, if not adequately managed, can also lead to internal community divisions and strong biases.

1.2.5 Cultural welfare

Another concept that should be briefly introduced is that of cultural welfare. In the Treccani Enciclopedia, Stefania Schipani (2015) defines the term *welfare* as:

> [...] the set of interventions and services provided by public institutions and financed by tax revenues (welfare state), designed to protect citizens from conditions of need, to cover them from certain risks (welfare state or social state), to improve their quality of life and wellbeing, to ensure education, health care, assistance, pension provision, vocational training, university research, support for work and entrepreneurship, promotion of the family, etc. and a minimum standard of living in implementation of citizenship rights[1].

Especially in the last few years, the implementation of welfare for the citizens has been, among other things, associated with the cultural dimension showing, also during the pandemic, a positive impact on people's lives (Fondazione Symbola, 2020, p. 40). An interesting point of view about welfare is expressed by Adele Mimmi (2021) in *Welfare Culturale. La Dimensione della Cultura nei Processi di Welfare di Comunità*. Here, she points out how welfare and social cohesion are among the key points of the Recovery Plan, together with ecological and digital transformation. For this reason, she expresses the necessity for the welfare system to change and improve, in order to let everybody - and not only the most fragile groups - best express their "professional, creative, entrepreneurial, relational and caregiving skills" (Mimmi, 2021, pp. 31-32).

In this case, welfare is intended in a perspective of empowerment at both social and individual level. Here, the community becomes the "home" of wellbeing production (Allegrini, 2021). What has been expressed in advance when talking about social capital, health and wellbeing activities promoted through visual and performing arts activities, finds here the name of Cultural Welfare. In the Treccani Enciclopedia,

[1] https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/welfare_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/

Cicerchia, Ghiglione, Rossi and Seia (2020) express how cultural welfare draws form the understanding that cultural, artistic and creative actions can positively impact health, from a biological, psychological and social perspective, enabling the acquisition of survival and developmental abilities. These cultural initiatives can also influence subjective wellbeing, contrast inequalities and foster social cohesion, stimulating the development of social capital. They can contribute to proactive aging and to cope with depression, physical and mental issues deriving from social isolation, to reinforce inclusion of marginalized people, to contribute to the efficacy of clinical therapies, also supporting patient-doctor relationship and decelerating the progressive worsening of degenerative illnesses.

The validity of these interventions and their impact has been recognized as well by the WHO, which has recently released a publication concerning this topic (see Fancourt & Finn, 2019). It is therefore possible to say that artistic and creative practices have shown to be effective in contributing to many factors related to individual and community wellbeing and empowerment (Manzoli & Paltrinieri, 2021).

The concept of cultural welfare has first spread in the northern European countries, but also in Canada and in the UK. This approach usually requires collaboration among many professionals from different fields and disciplines, collaborating with each other in order to question and research topics such as social policy, public health, the arts and culture (Cicerchia et al., 2020), thus pointing out the social impact of the arts.

Cicerchia et al. (2020) also explain the economic outcomes of cultural welfare, stating that “this dynamic, in addition to configuring a net increase in social welfare, would end up being self-sustainable, because it could finance the cultural improvement interventions entirely through cost savings generated by the better quality of life for patients, likely producing large margins of net savings".

Among the research that have brought to the formulation of the cultural welfare, is the “salutogenesis approach”, first outlined in 1979 by medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky, who focused on the importance of people to produce and champion health, preventing diseases rather than concentrating on medical treatments of pains and illnesses. This approach is based on problem-solving and the understanding of the use of possible resources. The arts, among the other beneficial

effects, have also revealed their efficacy in implementing these two abilities (Enciclopedia Treccani, 2020). The salutogenesis approach is also related to healing and recovery, being in opposition to pathogenesis (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017, p. 17).

Going back to the concept of welfare, its new meaning - also re-elaborated within the context of cultural welfare - should be looked at from a more extensive viewpoint. In fact, the initial definitions and activities of welfare were mostly addressed to guaranteeing some forms of benefit to fragile people. In fact, it initially applied to the creation of wellbeing for ill or marginalized people. Indeed, it recently added to these aspects the willingness to develop means at the disposal of the entire population in order to cultivate their skills, competencies and professionality (Manzoli & Paltrinieri, 2021, p. 17).

Therefore, cultural welfare becomes a way to empower people, both the most fragile and the “healthy” ones. Empowerment actually indicates the process of "acquiring power" by individuals, groups and communities, which is obtained by generating awareness and developing both individual and group resources, aiming at transforming and improving communities from within, stimulating their active control of themselves and of events, without letting them always into the hands of external experts (Pontremoli, 2015).

This complex way of working is surely a substantial challenge, because it requires several meetings, debates and encounters with the community, in order to realize initiatives aimed at stimulating both the most fragile and the whole citizens’ wellbeing, activity and proactivity during their entire life (Montalto, 2021).

In this context, culture plays a fundamental role. As the President of Cariplo Foundation Giovanni Fosti (cited in Mimmi, 2021, p. 26) states, culture is:

> [...] A strategic asset for our country on which to leverage; a powerful tool for the growth of people and an effective driver for the economy; in addition to these factors, it has the ability to keep people together, create dialogue and generate value for communities, contributing to social cohesion.

Culture is in fact effective in facilitating relationships among people, building community and creating collective participation, while stimulating different

cultures' exchanges and dialogues, fostering creativity and innovation (Mimmi, 2021).

Cultural welfare could and should become central also from a policy perspective. As a matter of fact, even more in light of Covid-19 pandemic, some aspects of the societies have become more urgent. Among these, there is a redistribution of space and resources among people and the need to strengthen the bond between places and community, while aiming at valorizing spaces. Last but not least, the facilitation of intergenerational and intercultural encounters, while promoting locality and proximity. This would then also lead to a consequent increase in social capital (Allegrini, 2021).

In this sense, culture does not only have to be intended as pure entertainment - as it happens in many cultural industries - but as a possibility of cultivating, through a set of activities, wellbeing, life satisfaction and health, and not only "good mood and ease of mind" (Blessi et al., 2011). Surely, to change how people perceive the arts, the whole narrative surrounding them should change as well. Participating in cultural activities should be seen not only as one among many leisure and entertainment possibilities. The arts have in fact a greater potential in developing people's mind-set and abilities. Cultural production and dissemination can, through cultural participation, lead to social cohesion, physical and psychological wellbeing, as well as empowerment of individuals and of communities (Mimmi, 2021). Culture should therefore, in its broadest sense, play a key role in remodeling societies, assuming a central function in policies as well as in social and economic spheres (Di Biase, 2021).

The last concept that has here to be introduced is that of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) defined cultural capital in three forms, referring to educational attainment in the institutionalized one, to possession of cultural goods in the objectified form, and to people's values, skills, knowledge, and tastes in the embodied or embedded form. Particularly, embodied cultural capital in the form of cultural participation has been found to lead to healthier conditions (Lievens & Pinxten, 2014). By taking part in artistic events, it is possible to develop one's own social capital, also because of the changes in one's social networks. This in turn reflects on how the arts participation can be perceived as being deeply social (Upright, 2004).

Having done these premises, the main issue to analyze remains how artistic and cultural initiatives that see the community participation, positively impact health. These aspects affect many dimensions of human beings, from the biological to the psychological, from the philosophical to the social ones (Lievens & Pinxten, 2014).

1.3 Wellbeing and the arts

1.3.1 A developing field

After having done these premises, it is therefore possible to confirm that arts are an important resource in stimulating wellbeing at both an individual and community level.

Several research carried out during the last years have demonstrated how engaging in arts activities can lead to an increase in both subjective and social wellbeing (Jones et al., 2013) and how arts engagement can impact positive emotions, autonomy, life satisfaction and sense of purpose (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Especially during the last decades, research on the outcomes deriving from the interconnectedness among arts, health and wellbeing has further developed, impacting the policy of several - mostly western - countries as well. In this regard, the WHO report, realized in 2019 by Fancourt and Finn, put together outcomes from more than 3000 studies which documented an impact on ill prevention and health promotion, and on illness handling and medication. From the report, it emerges that already in the beginning of the 21st century, it was presumed that the arts had an impact on people's wellbeing, and for this reason research in this field started to be developed. But because of the lack of evidence, these studies had a small impact on the countries' policies (Fancourt & Finn, 2019).

What has been found out during the years, is that the arts do impact mental and physical health. In particular, it has been observed that the arts can "affect the social determinants of health, support child development, encourage health-promoting behaviors, help to prevent ill health, support caregiving", but also "help people experiencing mental illness, support care for people with acute conditions, help to support people with neurodevelopmental and neurological disorders, assist with

the management of noncommunicable diseases and support end-of-life care" (Francourt & Finn, 2019, pp. VII-VIII).

Most of what has been underlined above, deals with the topic of health of individuals intended in a medical sense. But what about the communities' health? It is clear that, after all the premises, a positive change on psychological, physiological, social and behavioral aspects in individuals' lives can reflect on the entire community's health, and that living in a healthy community can in turn impact the single subject's wellbeing. This is the reason why subjective and social wellbeing are interconnected and why the concept of health expands besides the individual medical condition.

For all these reasons, arts initiatives should be implemented, favoring as well a sharing of competences and knowledge among experts of this field, to also favor inclusion and reduce disparities among people from the same and from different countries. Moreover, the arts should ensure the same access to different groups of people, while all enterprises - not only those working in the arts field - should make wellbeing integral to their organization, in order to guarantee a better life condition for their employees as well.

As it will be further deepened later in this research, artistic initiatives, with their aesthetic and emotional elements, can contribute to emotional expression and control, while at the same time impacting on stress decrease (Juslin, 2013). Emotion and mental health are strictly linked, while stress is determinant in the development of other diseases. This "cognitive stimulation" activated when taking part in arts activities, can also lead to the development of learning opportunities and skills, while simultaneously reducing the risk of mental illness (Kaser et al., 2017). Other than this, arts engagement can lead to social interaction, fostering in turn social support, fundamental in illness and mortality prevention (Demakakos et al., 2013).

But why the arts? Essentially because, if other activities such as sport can also be health-promoting, the arts add to this aspect that of aesthetic and creativity, which "provide an intrinsic motivation for engaging beyond a particular regard for good health" (Fancourt & Finn, 2019, p. 5).

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, aspects such as health and wellbeing, quality education, sustainable cities and communities, decent work and economic growth are central. As the case studies taken into analysis in the thesis will evidence, all these goals can be implemented through the arts, in particular

through the performing arts. Especially now, after two years of increase in both physical and mental illness from many people of the global population, they can be a key instrument in both preventing and working on existing illness conditions and social distrust, answering to the present challenges of societies, because of the fact that they work both on an individual and social level.

There exists a wide literature on the revolutionary potential of the arts in strengthening social bonding, especially with music (Francourt & Finn, 2019, p. 9). Together with their beneficial effects on the body, the arts can be a means to diminish solitude and isolation (Collamati et al., 2018). Activities which are carried out in groups have been demonstrated being efficacious especially in encouraging collaboration and social inclusion, thus fostering social capital among communities. As it will be examined in chapter 4, the arts can also be useful to overcome trauma and conflicts by stimulating the cognitive, emotional and social sides of human beings.

Among the studies that have been carried out in this field, it has to be mentioned that of Blessi et al. (2011) which focuses on the impact of culture and the arts on individual psychological wellbeing. The evaluation of the impact of cultural activities on psychological wellbeing of the individuals served to understand the relevance and effect of cultural activities on subjective wellbeing, thus suggesting that cultural access, if recognized and supported, could be useful in outlining and fulfilling a new public health system. It finally has to be said that culture has an impact on wellbeing where there is high cultural access, while it is less impacting in context with inferior cultural access (Bologna & Cicerchia, 2017). Therefore, another of the challenges that should be faced by cultural organizations and institutions should be that of developing cultural initiatives in a conscious way, without leaving out parts of the communities or thinking, superficially, that short term interventions in marginalized areas would have a strong impact on individuals and communities.

Bologna and Cicerchia (2017) have also underlined how the initial findings about this topic, have suggested that cultural deficiency is usually meaningfully linked to a negative assessment of one's own health condition, and vice versa this opinion reduces in people with a richer cultural life.

In conclusion, culture and the arts have demonstrated having beneficial outcomes in all areas of human life, from suspending the fragmentation of the values

constituting community identities (Houston, 2005) to enhancing exchange among different cultures, reinforcing the urban system, services and infrastructure, promoting tourism, preventing illness and favoring people's wellbeing (De Biase, 2021).

1.3.2 Performing arts and participation in contemporary society

The performing arts include a range of disciplines performed (more or less professionally) in front of a live audience. These include theater, music, opera and dance, intended both as a form of entertainment or as a cultural experience.

Especially within the last decades, there has been a growing tendency of the performing arts to engage in social contexts in order to favor cultural and social participation. Indeed, the performing arts generally allow, more than other art forms, people's participation. Participation derives from the Latin *partem capere*, meaning to care for a part of the world (Quaglia, 2021). Participating therefore implies not simply to benefit from something that has been carried out by others, but to be actively involved (ibidem).

Participation studies and research often separates what is defined as *strong institutionalization* (Allegrini, 2021, p. 101), in which participation is advocated by organizations and takes place with regular events, and *weak institutionalization* (ibidem), where processes of participation "from below" are focused on self-organization by communities and take the form of occasional episodes. Even if the strong institutionalization model has the advantage of being supported by organizations which have an entire team of people and spaces at their disposal, it can however be "less inclusive or less "transformative"" (Allegrini, 2021, p. 101). In chapter 2, I will see how Centro per la Scena Contemporanea and Operaestate Festival in Bassano del Grappa, despite a strong institutionalization, are able to create both inclusive and transformative contexts.

Participation is usually intended as the practice of listening to the community, possibly carrying out a detailed analysis of the context in which initiatives are developed and searching for collaborative affiliation with people and organizations that are present in that environment. This is however a very complex process, that

leads therefore to describe as participatory something that sees the participation of a few (Quaglia, 2021, p. 54).

In her article *Chi decide chi partecipa? Ripensare l'epistemologia della partecipazione*, Gabriella Giannachi (2021) brings to light several debates regarding the topic of participation and the participatory practices in different fields. Differently from the definition given by Quaglia (2021) emerged before, Giannachi explains how the latin verb *capere*, which is contained in *participation*, is also related to the meaning of welcoming, accepting and understanding. For this reason, she suggests, to participate should also imply the act of acquiring knowledge.

Questioning what people should understand and who would be in charge of deciding who understands, Gabriella Giannachi traces some of the key contributions to this practice. She cites the American theater company *Living Theatre*, which had among its objectives that of producing a change of people's behavior in real life and for this reason was also used to give seminars to discuss the performance. Taking then into account the suggestions given by art historian Claire Bishop, Giannachi shows how the identity of those who take part in the participatory practices has changed in the decades, being initially (around the 1910s) addressed as a crowd or as a mass, and later as people, as community, arriving at today's volunteers. Bishop's consideration about the changes of these definitions falls into what she defines as "social turn" (2006), indicating how participatory art could be considered as a return to the social, rather than a social turning-point. Still in 2006, Bishop also analyzed how various artistic genres had started to work with the concept of participation, prioritising in general the "social collaboration" (Giannachi, 2021, p. 46), rather than the aesthetic side. In this regard, Giannachi highlights how "reducing everything to an aesthetic or social problem is unnecessary or perhaps even dangerous", because, she states, "I think it's not only art that has aesthetic value" (p. 49).

Nevertheless, as Michael Kelly (1998, cited in Giannachi, 2021, p. 50) highlights, participation can in some cases "produce an object, in others a performance, in others it may simply indicate a process or a set of relationships". Still, participation can also be, as underlined in 1997 by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport of the United Kingdom (cited in UNESCO, 2012), a form of economic consumption. Giannachi finally cites Markus Meissen and Jeff Howe, who see participation as a form of exploitation.

It is important to say that participation can also deal with issues of one's own personality and awareness, and it is strictly linked to individual and community empowerment (Franco, 2020). As it will be later deepened, even if a form of wellbeing can already be achieved while watching people performing, participatory art initiatives support wellbeing in a variety of ways. They strengthen relationships, foster connections and sense of belonging, they offer instruments to cope with adversities and enhance community cohesion (Daykin et al., 2021). Taking part in artistic events can also serve to expand social networks and make people feel they belong to a community.

Participation is finally strictly linked to the possibility to connect individual and collective interests, public and private life. Moreover, it is through participation that it is possible to build identification, belonging, emotive connection through which the relationship among individuals and communities is realized (De Piccoli, 2015).

During the last years, there has been an increasing tendency in considering the arts as a possible medium to bring wellbeing to individuals and communities, but already in the 1970s theater started to deepen the relationship with the social contexts, thus developing what is now called Social and Community Theater. Its peculiarity is that of being centered on projects that involve a team of people with both theater and psycho-social competences, aiming at the empowerment of individuals, groups and communities. Social and Community Theater is located within the major discipline of Applied Theater, and it finds its full purpose and legitimacy within the social context and through the contact with people (Pagliarino, 2015). Applied theater, whose father was theater director Augusto Boal (1931-2009), includes all forms of theater used in social, educational or therapeutic contexts. This form of theater has been first developed in marginalized groups, with the objective to reach a positive social change, deriving from the active participation and collaboration of people.

During the last years, studies concerning the possible positive outcomes of the performing arts have further developed. Although research has often led to unsatisfactory outcomes, therapies with the performing arts have proved successful on various forms of disease. Among these, it has been proved that music, among other things, has a strong impact on people with cancer, terminal illness, dementia, depression and that dance is effective in case of schizophrenia, cancer, depression,

stress, emotional eating and disorders. Nevertheless, these artistic forms are used in many countries to bring wellbeing also in a wider range of circumstances, thus signifying that further insights will lead to more research in the field (Dunphy et al. 2014). Besides, Brain et al. (2008) have for instance found out that performing arts practice has a positive impact on adolescents, leading to constructive changes in behavior, enhancement of social abilities and cooperation, especially between vulnerable youngsters.

Within the performing arts, dance - which is part of almost every culture - can be strictly connected to the notions of wellbeing, social capital and cultural welfare. However, dance cannot be defined as a universal art form, because the perception of the body is culturally constructed. In fact, culture, context and experience of a dance genre can influence the way in which people interpret its meaning, exactly how it happens with verbal languages (Williams, 1991).
Participating in dance activities gives the possibility to cope with stress and gives birth to a feel-good effect that has an impact on our body and outside it (Hanna, 2017). This has also been demonstrated by the fact that during Covid-19 pandemic, dance has been the main artistic form - if confronted with music, literature, theater, visual arts, architecture, film and games - in terms of correlation to various beneficial aspects, with significance/meaning, feelings/improved mood and social connection being the most perceived beneficial aspects.

Table 2: *Correlations between receptive participation in various types of culture and well-being benefits perceived by respondents (Chi-Square Tests)*

BENEFITS / ART	**Significance/Meaning** (self reflection perspective, appreciation of life, imagining futures, memory)	**Feelings/Improved mood** (getting into a desired mood, hope, guidance through difficulties)	**Social Connection** (belonging, understanding others, longing for connection)	**Aesthetic/Transcendence** (experience of awe, beauty, transcendence)
Music		■		
Literature	■			
Theatre			■	■
Dance	■	■	■	
Visual arts		■		■
Architecture		■		■
Film	■			
Games		■		

Source: authors' calculation

Legend

■ A significant correlation between art and benefits

□ No correlation between art and benefits

Image: Ascolani et al., 2020, p. 14

Dance is strictly linked to the human body, at a physical, mental and conceptual level. Nowadays dance is not only about being fit or athletic, but it comprises many spheres of the individuality of people who dance. As Sharon Chaiklin (2017) states in the Forward to *Dance and Wellbeing*, "The nature of dance itself is naturally therapeutic as it makes use of the totality of the human being: the physical self, the creative self, the expressive self, and the emotional self" (p. XVII).

However, dance has been perceived and continues to be seen in many countries with suspicion, since it is much related to the body and its sexuality, while in others it is deeply rooted in the culture, but not perceived as contributing to a deeper sense of wellbeing. Through both the support of a wide literature review and the subsequent analysis of the three case studies, it will indeed be revealed that dance has the power to originate beneficial effects in bodies and minds of individuals as well as in entire communities and societies, thus answering to the increasing challenge of health experts to improve people's physical and psychological wellbeing.

Being it seen both as a physical aerobic activity and as an art form, dance can thus promote an active behavior and self-esteem, preventing social, economic and political exclusion and favoring access to spaces also for vulnerable people (Portolés, 2021).

Bettina Bläsing (2017) has recently affirmed that "dancing allows us to be creative, to experience our body and its ways of moving in novel ways, and thereby to learn about ourselves" (p. 41). In addition, as John Ratey (2008) explains in *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*, movements which are more elaborated, lead to multiple synaptic connections. In this regard, it has indeed to be said that dance movements can be very complex. Lynn Hanna (2017) defines dance as "exercise plus", because it not only can be used in order to handle stress, but it can also work in psychological therapy, or to convey emotions and thoughts (p. 105). Still, it is not the end: dance can also affect the brain's pleasure and reward system, by releasing dopamine, which motivates in reaching reward and is useful to learn (Floresco, 2013). Finally, dance can positively impact wellbeing by allowing people to meet their "basic psychological needs", meaning to feel like being skilled, to be able to master oneself, to experience the relationships with others and to feel interconnected to others (Olsen, 2017; Quested et al., 2011, cited in Calmeiro & Jola, 2017).

These are just a few of the reasons why dance can be considered effective in enhancing individual and social wellbeing.

1.3.3 Dance, body and mind

Dance can be considered a powerful medium to increase better health and wellbeing of people. Its beneficial effects at the individual level are related to a great opportunity to reduce health-related problems, since it represents a pleasurable activity both to watch and practice (Calmeiro & Jola, 2017). The benefits of both these processes, watch and practice, will be further deepened in chapter 3. The pros and cons of this type of activity will be expressed in the same chapter.

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the Hungarian choreographer Rudolf Laban stated that everybody can dance. This has then become the slogan of

all the *Ausdruckstanz* of 1910s, 1920s and 1930s in Germany. Afterwards, Hanya Holm (1936), student of the German modern dancer Mary Wigman, took back Laban's concept, stating that this fact would have brought an "emotional stimulation from the monotonous level of daily routine" and that everybody would have been "able to find in this way a new stimulus, a new sense of wellbeing" (Holm, 1936, cited in Burt & Huxley, 2017, p. 206). Concerning the physical benefits, physical activity has been demonstrated to be linked to a general sense of feeling good, which leads to both physiological and psychological advantages. Neuroscientists state that dance participants feel happy, energetic and euphoric after dance activities, as well as released, relaxed and calm (Calmeiro & Jola, 2017). These effects have been found in children, adolescents and older people, meaning that the benefits of dance are effective at all ages.

When talking about the dancing body response, biochemical, neuronal and psychosocial issues are usually addressed.

At the biochemical level, Berthele et al. (2008) found out how constant physical activity produces the release of endogenous opioids in the frontal limbic area of the brain, leading to a euphoric feeling. Moreover, physical exercise affects the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis of the brain, which is in charge of the release of various hormones in the body, such as cortisol. The influence on this region generates a regulation of stress reactions. In case of high-pressure contexts, for instance during solo or group performances, the dancers have been found to have an elevated amount of cortisol, because they are subjected to a stressful condition. This means that the more there is a non-competitive environment, the less stressful dancing will be. In this regard, it has to be said that Berndt et al. (2012) highlight how professional dancers are subjected to an elevated stress condition which affects them and can lead to an impoverishment of their quality of life. Viceversa, lower stress leads to diminished anxiety and lower cortisol levels. This holds true not only for dancers, but for every working person. For this reason, it should be necessary to rethink also about the repercussions that a tense working environment can have on the human body.

At the neuronal level, the neocortex plays a fundamental role: it is the most peripheral and newest part of our body and can be divided into four areas called lobes, which dance employs, being a complex motor action. The frontal one is

concerned with the organization and execution of movement, while the primary motor cortex is in charge of intentional movements. The premotor cortex is responsible for both motor regulation and planning, and the assimilation of spatial information. The supplementary motor area controls posture, movement sequences and coordination, while the prefrontal cortex manages decision making and actions in accordance to the context and objectives of the person.

Other than having an effect on the brain and body of the dancing people, dance also impacts, at a cerebral level, people who watch dance.

First research in the field have brought to the study of mirror neurons in macaque monkey's brain (Rizzolatti et. al, 1996, cited in Calmeiro & Jola, 2017). A fascinating way to explore what happens with the mirror neurons is exactly through dance. In fact, brain activity in a dance spectator strictly depends on the familiarity of the viewer with the movements. If they watch movements with which they are confident, people's brain shows an increased functioning in the mirror neuron system. Watching dance leads to both a visual, auditory and kinaesthetic experience (Glass, 2005), but the last one seems to have a preeminent effect on individuals' brains. In addition, as it will be deepened in chapter 3 and 4, the mirror neurons are linked to the possibility of experiencing empathy, and for this reason neuroscientists have manifested an interest and developed research around this topic.

Moreover, the spectator's impact is also given by the dance narrative, live presence and personality of the performers (Calmeiro & Jola, 2017). The effects of dance on old people is effective in showing the positive effects of this activity on the brain and body. Aging has in fact harmful effects on people's wellbeing, with an increased reduction of gray matter and cognitive, sensory and movement abilities decline, also due to structural brain changes (Calmeiro & Jola, 2017).

In *Exercise Psychology* (2013), Buckworth et al. then underline the positive outcomes of physical exercise in the psychosocial context. Among these, there are a major perceived capability, the control of one's own body, autonomy and self-acceptance, social connection and belonging, factors which are able to have a repercussion on one's own esteem and self perception. Negative body image or negative feelings, perception and thoughts of an individual's own body, is determinant in aspects of self-esteem, obesity or depression. In this case, an aerobic activity such as dance, can effectively impact the body image, with the consequent

amelioration of the general bodily and mental perception of one's self. Talking about how to cope with depression and post traumatic stress disorder, an in-depth discussion will be carried out in chapter 4.

In the rest of the body, the organs also gain a benefit while dancing. In fact, the heart can find space in the ribcage, while the lungs can rub the heart by enlarging; moreover, Bernstein M. R. and Bernstein R. R. (2003, cited in Olsen, 2017, p. 188) express in detail what happens in the entire body:

> Over contraction of upper abdominal muscles can restrict movement of the breathing diaphragm (like old-fashioned corsets); tightness in the back muscles strains the posterior heart and kidneys. In forward bends and back bends, rather than compressing one surface while opening another, you can maintain spaciousness through head-to-tail orientation, ensuring the heart and other internal organs a spacious home. Then the lungs can cushion the heart instead of compressing the pulmonary arteries; blood flows freely away from the heart through the arteries, returning through the veins and lymph system. There is one continuum, pulsating the tides and rivers inside us. Unzipping back tension and feeling the upward wash of healthy flow through fluids and organs supports an experience of inner radiance; each cell is saturated and nourished.

Yet, research and literature suggest that body and mind are one thing.

Seligman (2011, cited in Hanna, 2017), working as a positive psychology therapist, outlined some elements which are part of wellbeing and that help dealing with stress. Dance has the capability to embrace all of them: positive emotion, engagement, meaning, accomplishment and positive relationships. They go from a sense of pleasure and comfort, to the full involvement in an activity, to the feeling of belonging, reaching objectives, support and sharing. Dance is functional in going through them. Being it a form of physical exercise, it is functional in diminishing stress and contrasting it. Moreover, physical activity can be a form of amusement, release muscles and improve mood and mental health. Train one's own body to higher heart rate and pressure, it will be more capable to prevent and behave in response to an increased level of stress.

1.3.4 Dance and society

Various studies carried out during the last years have brought to light the effectiveness of dance in enhancing group solidarity and the desire of assisting others, as well as recovery and avoiding injuries (Calmeiro & Jola, 2017, p. 13).

In contrast with research about dance as a form of physical activity, research concerning psychosocial wellbeing in relation to dance is generally scarce. It is although important to explore the social outcomes to which dance can lead as an art form.

Important in this context is the concept of community dance, which is strictly linked to the improvement and empowerment of communities, aiming at people's individual and social health. Community dance is a term that started to be recognised in the UK in the 1970s, referring at first to an idea of social support. In this regard, Sara Houston (2005) highlighted how "[...] community dance can help socially excluded participants to empower themselves and set themselves on a road to a better life" (p. 166). Here, dance professionals dedicate themselves to an art form that arises from social distress.

Working primarily in England, British dancer and choreographer Rosemary Lee can be considered one of the most important practitioners in this field, since she has been able to connect artists and communities by sharing values while focusing at the same time on the production of wellbeing, creating social bonding and building relationships among individuals and groups, while also working with non-professional dancers (George, 2017).

Moreover, community dance works around the idea that community is made up by individuals, and that therefore understanding and empowering oneself, it would be possible to better develop a relationship with the world at large. With this respect, "dance as a social practice, or a collective practice, can act as a setting in which to train being with others, balancing individual and communal dimensions, needs and intentions" (Evaluation #DanceAndWellBeing campaign, comment from two artists based in Italy, February 2021, cited in Portolés, 2021, p. 9).

Finally, the Dance and Wellbeing Campaign has to be mentioned. It consisted of a series of online dance classes by European Dancehouse Network and it was launched during the second lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic, from November

2020 to February 2021. This project was done in order to try to answer people's necessity to feel a sense of connectedness and of general - mental, physical and social - wellbeing.

Chapter 2

BASSANO DEL GRAPPA: PERFORMING ARTS FOR COMMUNITY WELLBEING

2.1 The context

In this chapter, I introduce the first of three case studies which will deepen the relationship between the concepts of wellbeing, social capital and cultural welfare in relation to dance.
Here I begin with a place, rather than a specific fact or event, in order to illustrate how from a distinct social and cultural context with a peculiar historical background, dance has been able to open its own way in the lives of people which are part of that community. In order to support this thesis, I have interviewed Roberto Casarotto, dance activist working with Operaestate Festival and Centro per la Scena Contemporanea, and Monica Gillette, dramaturge and choreographer. They both develop cross-sectoral projects and research.

Bassano del Grappa is a rather small town located in Northern Italy with slightly more than 40.000 inhabitants. Its past has seen the city among the protagonists of WWII and has undergone many social, political and cultural changes. A place of chatolic traditions and politically supporting right-wing parties, it is much tied to its traditional system (Franco, 2020), also in the cultural context. However, the statistics demonstrate how Bassano del Grappa, although being rather small, has seen a constant flux of migration towards the city, both from other towns and from abroad[2].
The Centro per la Scena Contemporanea is a Dancehouse[3] that was born in 2006 in order to promote contemporary dance on many levels. Bassano del Grappa is the only place in Europe that has a public institution - the Municipality of Bassano del Grappa - at the head of a multidisciplinary festival called Operaestate Festival and a center dedicated to research, professional programs and cultural initiatives

[2] https://www.tuttitalia.it/veneto/54-bassano-del-grappa/statistiche/popolazione-andamento-demografico/

[3] This concept will be deepened in chapter 3.

addressed to the community, namely the Centro per la Scena Contemporanea, from now on referred to as CSC. Before its creation, “there were not what we now call residencies, there were no professionalizing programs; there was a rich program, but above all there were big companies and big names, and there had never been any work done in the area to build a system and an ecology of local dance”, affirmed Roberto Casarotto.

Before 2006, Bassano was renowned for the Operaestate Festival, which was born in 1980 with opera plays, and then including dance, theater and cinema. Its program was spread across the summer period, but it was not active during the year. This is the reason why people active in the field, among whom Roberto Casarotto, started to question some issues: how to keep the relationships with the citizens alive during the entire year, and not only during the summer (facilitated by the good weather of the season, which gives way to organize outdoor activities)? How to build up professionals in the field? How to bring value to the territories through continuous actions? These were only a few of the concerns that they started to question before giving birth to an entity that would have been active during most of the year.

CSC is also embedded in a system of international relationships and collaborations. In fact, around 2010 the working team of CSC entered into contact with the European Dancehouse Network, a network which functions as a meeting point and support for all the European dancehouses. This happened thanks to the fact that they had already realized some projects that were part of European Union programs, thus starting with a minor experience of international collaboration and entering into contact with the international network. In addition to the EU projects through which they entered reached out the Network, they were already part of Aerowaves, a network promoting young artists and the mobility of their works in Europe. Since many members of Aerowaves were also part of the European Dancehouse Network and they were looking for an Italian partner, they took CSC in. Working with institutions and dancehouses spread all over Europe has revealed being of fundamental importance also because of the added value that this has brought to the organization, the public and the artists working at CSC. Entering the European Dancehouse Network has also helped to get access to economic support and important initiatives, but also to share experiences with people from other parts of the world who had already faced common questions and to share thoughts and

experiences with them. Hence, already in the beginning, CSC had a strong international identity. This aspect is related to what Roberto Casarotto defines as *multilayered*, an adjective that is also proper of dance itself*:*

> Very often you will notice that I refer to something that is always very multilayered. This means something that has an impact in one dimension, but also in many others, and I think this is very much related to the nature of the art we work on, that is dance, which is implicitly multilayered. So very often I like to refer to the fact that when we talk about initiatives, as far as we are concerned, very often we have a title, a mission, but in reality we realize that that project, initiative, activity, is the piece of a much more complex mosaic. So every action informs other actions. Thus, we arrived at the Network (the European Dancehouse Network), but through different paths.

There are but two things that distinguish the CSC from the other dancehouses. The first is the fact that they do not have a specific building used as a dancehouse, but they are housed in different edifices of the city. So they have developed a sort of spread dancehouse, therefore entering the European Dancehouse Network with a concept that was totally different from the others. Secondly, as above mentioned, they also differ from the other dancehouses for being part of a public institution, even if, as underlined by Roberto Casarotto, the artistic direction is independent.
Being part of a public entity can be a strength, but sometimes it can lead to miscommunications. In fact, the narrative used by CSC to present itself and its projects to the different city administrations is of key importance. In this regard, Casarotto expressed how they have started to elaborate a different way of communicating what they do and what they aim at doing with their projects, depending on who the interlocutors are. Casarotto states in fact that:

> […] Clearly politicians are administering the city, and so they come in with a whole set of agendas. So maybe words that are the expression of a certain thought are accepted by some administrations, while others are opposed to them. When we did the project *Migrant Bodies-moving borders* and *Performing Genders*, we were attacked in a very violent way by the local press through political movements that in the following elections became the administrators of the city.

Those who attacked the *Migrant Bodies-moving borders* and *Performing Genders* projects, had actually started to adopt a harsh communication towards them, that has been then stopped by the citizens.
Afterwards, they became the administrators of the city, and consequently those projects, which were still active, were attributed to and promoted by them. Casarotto continues explaining what happened right after to the city administrators:

> [...] They received a letter from the European Commission that congratulated them on how the Municipality of Bassano had brought to a successful conclusion these projects that had been opposed by political movements. And it was them. So there is this paradox that has been created. [...] Very often dance is able to intercept change before it's visible and then build systems of dialogue that are very solid, very integral and, when necessary, are told differently so as not to exclude anyone.

2.2 Community and space

CSC and Operaestate Festival are strictly linked to the community in which they are realized. Therefore, before further investigating the "Bassano system", the concept of community should be explored.
The term *community* originally derives from sociology and it has been then used in many other disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, political science and community psychology (De Piccoli, 2015). The term indicates a group of people sharing common origins, interests, beliefs and customs. The concept of community is generally used to indicate, as affirmed by Norma De Piccoli (2015) "a way of "being in society" characterized by unity, cohesion and social integration, with action aimed at achieving shared goals, with strong social ties" (p. 117).
This term became of primary importance between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, when the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, feeling the need to explain the social changes that were happening during that period, started to distinguish between the words *Community* and *Society*. Tönnies understood society as a product deriving from convenience and centered on materialism and separation among people, while community as based on human

relationships, reciprocal understanding and expression of common feelings (De Piccoli, 2015).

Piero Amerio (1996, cited in De Piccoli, 2015, p. 120), summarized the concept of community in some key aspects, namely "the interdependence of relational systems among people; the presence of a strong homogeneity of norms and values; the internalization of these shared norms and values and not necessarily formally expressed; the presence of a strong sense of the ingroup with respect to the external outgroup". It is therefore possible to understand how the idea of community is strongly related to the concept of social capital.

On the other hand, it is also legitimate to ask if, in the contemporary globalized and technological world, it is still possible to talk about community in this way. Globalization has led to both an enrichment in cultural life and to conflicts, and it cannot be denied that also technology and social media have contributed both positively and negatively to people's lives, often inducing a growing individualism and egocentrism, an increased attention towards the global dimension, often forgetting about the local one, and to social and political tensions. To this, environmental and health problems have added, contributing to further exacerbating the relationships among people and groups.

It could therefore be said that, in order to better live inside the world community, a focus on the local level is needed. Reconsidering the local dimension, reveals being useful also because a focus on localism would allow to develop strategies addressed to a smaller group of people who could experience actions and projects in a more direct way (Magnier & Russo, 2002, cited in De Piccoli, 2015). This, because the local community is the first place in which interpersonal relationships, based on human feelings of belonging and identity, could be established.

By focussing on local communities it is hence possible to contribute to the strengthening of a social tissue that could lead to an increased social capital, while supporting the development of forms of coexistence and civic feeling able to improve trust, reciprocal norms, tolerance and solidarity. Thus, participating in local communities and stimulating people's identification in them, can promote social, psychological, moral and physical wellbeing.

The concept of locality is strictly linked to that of territory. Territory can be seen as a "dynamic, stratified and complex outcome of successive cycles of civilization; it is a complex system of relationships between settled communities and their history and the environment" (Magnaghi, 2010, cited in Pagliarino, 2015, p. 147). In community projects and local development, inhabitants are the protagonists, and aspects such as valorization of the spaces, relationship among people and self-design are the main focus. In this context, the empowerment of the people belonging to the community becomes the main aim (Pagliarino, 2015). The relation between places and groups facilitate exchange, since space constitutes a shared component of the collective identity. Even if events happening in the world have repercussions on the single communities and individuals, it should indeed not be forgotten that people live their daily lives in cities and neighborhoods, and it is there where they connect their private life with the world.

The main question turns now to the ways in which it is possible to concretely intervene on the empowerment of communities and individuals, thus remodeling a passive living of a place into an active necessity. Community interventions often create spaces for exchange and possibilities to connect private and public life, while creating interpersonal relationships (De Piccoli, 2015). It also has to be said that working on smaller areas enables one to be more aware of the actual social capital and to valorize the social networks (D'Alena, 2021). Working on a smaller scale instead of huge territories, also serves to find more satisfactory answers to the necessities and the distinctive traits of each individual. In this respect, Michele D'Alena (2021) states that "Acknowledging differences overcomes dispersion and increases relationships: giving importance to space, staying close and planning territorially means sending a concrete signal to citizens and putting social capital back at the center" (p. 44).

What D'Alena (2021) also stresses, is the approach used by public administration, usually working per standard. This means that they generally do not get to know the people of the community in which and for which they are working, nor their specificities. CSC and Operaestate Festival, being embedded in the public administration system, constitute an exception.

As previously mentioned, CSC in Bassano follows a different concept of dancehouse. In fact, instead of being constituted by one specific building, CSC has been

subdivided among various buildings, including several realities that are part of the Municipality. Among these, there are Garage Nardini - the oldest Italian spirit distillery -, the deconsecrated church of the former Hospital of St. Bonaventura and the Remondini Theater. Then, it also involves the Civic Museum of Bassano del Grappa, the Teatro al Castello Tito Gobbi and Piazzetta Guadagnin. It is therefore fully part of the urban and community fabric of Bassano.

Moreover, because of Covid-19, CSC's Dance Well classes also spread to Parolini Garden, which was previously a botanical park and in which a film program usually took place. The need to have an outdoor location because of security reasons due to the pandemic, also led to reflect about residing in public places which are usually occupied by other people and about how to respect and be sensitive towards other human beings, as reminded by Roberto Casarotto:

> We did not know, for example, that at lunchtime a community of carers meets. They are mainly women from Eastern Europe who meet in one place to eat. And we were there next door to play music and make classes. So then a dialogue started, to the point that some of them invited the dancers to have lunch with their pickled cucumbers, sausages, these things. It was so beautiful, but even there we tried to be careful about how we built relationships with those people who are often invisible in these public places. So this has been a great opportunity to enter into other social fabrics [...].

It could therefore be said that, as affirmed by Dahyun Lee (2013), the informal environment has originated a more inclusive space. This has favored socialization, aggregation, meeting and listening opportunities, with public spaces becoming open centers of intercultural exchange (D'Alena, 2021). Also Monica Gillette stresses how, with other colleagues, they often talk about "safe spaces or trust building or space for deep feelings or emotions".

In the same way as the visual arts have expanded besides museums and art galleries, thus requiring new competences from the curators, the same happened with the performing arts, as soon as they spread beyond theaters. As seen before, they are in fact increasingly inhabiting public, private and virtual spaces, as well as making use of site-specific performances. With this last practice in particular, there has been a shift from the relation with the location to the dealing with interaction and mediating situations (Ferdman, 2018, cited in Ferdman, 2019). Site-specific

performances in particular, integrate with the context and the people inhabiting it, being therefore suitable to bring to the surface different meanings and values ascribed to dance by people in that specific framework. Because of this, they become a chance to merge dance to a more extensive social and cultural context (Lawrence, 2007).

Often, artistic initiatives also have the potential of regenerating urban spaces. This emerges also from Casarotto's words. When asking him if the activities carried out by CSC brought to an urban regeneration in Bassano del Grappa and if this was necessary, he replied:

> I don't know if it was necessary, but certainly the fact of inhabiting urban spaces with dance becomes automatically traceable, traced, and leaves traces. This is evident. In many cases it also generates a memory: those who actively participate in initiatives, for example in a square, once they cross it again, they will remember what happened. But also those who happen to be there by chance, and so maybe thanks to something that is happening, they read that urban space in a different way, or find themselves through emotions, associations, imaginations, to live that space in a different way.

The potentials of dance emerge also from an example brought in this context by Casarotto. He explained how they brought asylum seekers to dance and sing in squares and other places of the city, and from that moment they have started to be seen as artists. Casarotto continues, highlighting that:

> [...] The people of the city no longer looked at them as potential delinquents, but because they had seen them dance, had heard them sing at a microphone, had seen them legitimized by a cultural institution, they became people. [...] Just as when you bring parkinsonian people to dance in a square, and especially young people who are stopped by the police because they think they are drunk since they are wobbling. They become something else. And at the same time, seeing them in a public space accustomed us a little bit at a time to seeing or coming up with alternative definitions of beauty and excellence.

Community places in which artistic initiatives are developed, thus cover an increasingly important role also in fostering sensitivity about environmental and social issues. This can be considered as a way of practicing cultural welfare, since public places can also become spaces for encounters and active participation

(Scalfaro & Solaroli, 2021), thus aiming at developing relationships of trust and civic values, all fundamental in building social capital and, with it, social wellbeing.
Moreover, as pointed out by Roberto Casarotto, spaces can as well refer to "emotional, social, cultural and political meanings" linked to them and, as affirmed by Daykin et al. (2021), are "shaped by participatory experiences that reflect personal, local, national and global connections" (p. 136).
Finally, among the various kinds of spaces, Roberto Casarotto explains how also the virtual one covers nowadays a fundamental role:

> [...] I have experimented a lot and I am experimenting with working in digital space, so for me the digital is not a medium, but a space in which, like dance artists, you organize bodies according to a rhythm, a time, a constellation of opportunities linked to a space that may be flat, but it is a space. It is a space where you can meet people, civilizations, that you would have had difficulty meeting live. It's a place where you can build communities, so I see a lot of potential there.

Casarotto underlines then the necessity of rethinking about the places, reflecting on which are nowadays the proper ones where to propose a theatrical experience. In this respect, he thinks that:

> [...] The traditional theaters that we know are very inaccessible, many people do not feel invited to enter, maybe they are also intimidated. There are codes that perhaps no longer reflect or are no longer understandable for such a plural humanity.

We are increasingly witnessing the possibility of creating spaces in which to actually be citizens, therefore aiming at building inclusive communities.
With this respect, the role of organizations and institutions is fundamental, and with them, that of people responsible for the management of the initiatives. As it will be now analyzed, the role of the curator/mediator/facilitator is fundamental in the design process of artistic initiatives realized with the purposes outlined above.

2.3 Curating performing art

"Performative curating has the potential to enable different, open experiences for a specific temporary community by putting an emphasis on live encounters between art and audiences" (Malzacher, 2019, p. XX).

2.4 The notion of care

That of care is a notion that has to be handled carefully. The concept of care has, especially during the last years and even more during Covid-19 pandemic, become central in a wide range of activities and fields. "Care may refer to how members of a community are concerned with one another, as well as how humans relate to and look after the planet." (Portolés, 2021, p. 9). In the ordinary context, this concept is strictly linked to the people who work for the other's health and wellbeing.
The notion of care in the arts and its meaning in this field existed long before Covid-19 pandemic. In EDN Report (2021), it emerges an aspect of care that is essential to the arts: if this notion has to be positively used to cultivate the relationships with audiences, artists and institutions, it does not have to become a "patronizing approach" (Portolés, 2021, p. 9). Here, the challenge is precisely that of preventing some pedagogical approach that aims at bringing marginalized people nearer to the cultural context (Rancière, 1987, cited in Manzoli & Paltrinieri, 2021). The concept of care, Elisa Ricci (2019) states, comprises "qualities of attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness that can help construct better citizens, as well as making better moral agents. Care allows for neither neutrality nor distance and calls for self-reflection and constant reappraisals of one's condition" (p. 41).
Being Roberto Casarotto part of the EDN Network, his approach towards the notion of *care* is not completely surprising:

> [...] The word "cure" [...] I perceived [it as being part of] a very "top down" approach, that is "I know the cure, I know what you need, I know what is the right quality of dance that I have to give you so that you are well". That to me is very dangerous and yes, I do have some friction with what that kind of contextualization of the word care is. Caring

> is something else though. Taking care of the relationships that I establish with anyone who intercepts the proposals and initiatives that we develop is fundamental, as is taking care of how ideas and projects are developed during the Covid era. That is, horizontalizing experiences […] have started, but often the construction is shared, the responsibility is shared, and I see the potential of these new modalities.

The notion of care, on the other hand, can be understood as looking for balanced relations among people that are part of the communities and where social and economic models "that place human beings at the center" (Portolés, 2021, p. 9) are developed.

In the following pages, it will be seen how the notion of care, the role of the curator and wellbeing of individuals and communities are strictly linked.

2.5 The role of the curator

The term curator is strongly connected to the notion of care. In the arts field, the figure of the curator has become central mostly in the visual arts, entering the realm of the performing arts only recently.

One of the most renowned curators, Hans Ulrich Obrist, began his book *Ways of curating* by stating that:

> [...] The act of curating, which at its most basic is simply about connecting cultures, bringing their elements into proximity with each other - the task of curating is to make junctions, to allow different elements to touch. You might describe it as the attempted pollination of culture, or a form of map-making that opens new routes through a city, a people or a world (Obrist, 2015, p. 1).

I find this being one of the most appropriate definitions of what is the role of the curator nowadays. Today, this figure has to face many crises, from the social, to the economic, to the environmental one. To be able to do this, he or she has to rethink his or her work and address these significant issues (Sellar, 2017).

Among the central questions around this discussion are: who takes part in art initiatives and what can art explain about the individuals? How does the art from one culture differ from that of another? (Sellar, 2017). But also, how can curators

enhance their narration ability? How to strengthen communities and how to stimulate their participation in performing arts initiatives? (Davida et al., 2019). To part of these, it will be seen in chapter 3 how Yasmeen Godder has tried to find an answer, while here some questions expressed by Roberto Casarotto could be added:

> [...] How do you cultivate relationships with citizens? How can you become instrumental in building professionalism? How can you enhance the territories through actions that are not spot-on, but continuous?

In order to figure out how performing arts curation can meet the world's needs, it is also fundamental to deal with questions about race, culture, gender, sexuality, elitism (Sellar, 2017). The term *curator* still finds some adversity in entering into the common language of the performing arts, and even if it remains one of the most popular words in the visual arts field, it is getting more and more criticized. Some still think that curation is "just organizing" or that it consists in being a facilitation for artists (Wells, 2007, p. 29). When asking Roberto Casarotto and Monica Gillette what they thought about the word curator and its role, a new point of view opened, confronting with that of various scholars of the field, who quite recently outlined the characteristics of the role of the performing arts curator. The field of performance curation had never found place among the various fields of studies before, and until now it has therefore not developed much in its literature and discourse.

The term *curator* draws from the visual arts, where it indicated a person that, starting from the end of the XVIII century, was responsible for the collections exhibited in museums and galleries (Ferdman, 2019). Paul O'Neill (2012, cited in Ferdman, 2019) highlighted how that of the curator became a figure which acquired so much importance in the art world, to push back that of artists and scholars. From 1945 this figure established more and more with the growth of the art market, at the point to become, among 1980s and 1990s, seen as an art star and as the auteur himself, characteristics personified by curator Harald Szeeman (O'Neill, 2007).

It also has to be said that researchers do know the potential difficulties of a word such as *curator*, as underlined by Florian Malzacher (2019) in the prolog of *Curating Live Arts*:

> Does the curator aim to be a meta-artist, ultimately creating art without artists? Is the curator a neo-liberal agent, fulfilling the market demands even before the market itself demands them, well wrapped in seemingly anti-capitalistic discourse? And is it not anyway diluted, empty term by now, when every shop window is subject to curating? So it does not come as a surprise that now, as the concept of curating slowly makes its way into the world of the live arts, it is confronted with quite a bit of skepticism (Malzacher, 2019, p. XVI).

Many times the figure of the curator in the performing arts has been associated with the person able to transform and question the existing repertory-based theaters and performance. But it has often lacked a more profound reflection on the actual contribution in terms of artistic, aesthetic and political thinking of communities (Malzacher, 2019, p. XVII).

Up till not a long ago, festivals and theater directors were coming from the arts management field, often linked to business administration and the economical side of cultural events. They have become art directors of many organizations and initiatives, but often having too little knowledge of the artistic theory and discipline. Their programs were - and sometimes still are - therefore much profit-oriented: here, the art pieces are seen as "a "commodity" to be promoted through "branding" in which spectators are seen as "consumers" of "cultural products"" (Davida et al., 2019, p. 2). As opposed to these figures, some performing artists have started to organize artistic initiatives by bringing their knowledge inside the organizational process as well. Being in opposition to the business-oriented approach of arts managers, they started to face challenges through an experimentation of more socially and politically interventions aimed at community commitment, and for whom the notion of care becomes central in the artistic discourse. Davida et al. (2019) see these artists as closer to the figure of the visual arts curator. Roberto Casarotto, in the quality of dancer and choreographer first, became later an artistic director. This has impacted on his way of thinking, working and developing projects, because he has consolidated his experience in this field, but he also has a considerable number of points and people of reference. In this sense, Casarotto then specifies:

> Then it is clear that if you have worked professionally in the art, it is inevitable that you also have skills and relationships with others, which clearly build this legacy of knowledge that you carry with you. And so the ability to see the evolution of this art over time, in the bodies. Because bodies change. Nowadays, young people have physical dimensions that are very different from those of thirty or forty years ago, so the world has changed a lot and being able to keep alive curiosity and openness to not remain fossilized in a bible acquired in other times is fundamental.

Nowadays, the curator needs to foster meaning and stimulate people in finding their own, while exploring creative processes and access possibilities, forging and mediating relationships among the arts and the audiences, inviting them to be an active part of the realization of the artistic product or initiative. Surely, the fact that the curator is assuming an important role as a mediator among the artists and audiences has become evident. More and more, creative producers are concentrating on how, where, when, why and for whom the artistic events are created and performed (Davida et al., 2019).

Nowadays the role of the curator is also becoming increasingly focused on influencing how the public interacts, interprets and perceives the works presented. Therefore, curating in the performing arts cannot be strictly associated only with programming. Moreover, the shift happened in the visual arts from the work with institutional context to a more exploratory and independent process (O'Neill, 2012, cited in Ferdman, 2019, p. 20), is taking place now in the performing arts, with a change "from a logistics of programming to a concept for programming" (Ferdman, 2019, p. 20). That of programming can thus be seen, Ferdman (2019) affirms, as only one of the activities in the new performing arts management and curation, which is "non-building based, digitally innovative, and community-centric" (pp. 22-23). What emerges from this approach, is a more cooperative and non-hierarchical methodology, becoming a means for social change and opening to critical thinking, to activate new spaces for encounters and future research, while dealing with local issues (Ricci, 2019).

2.6 A different proposal

People working in this field are constantly challenging and questioning their position. This is also one of the reasons why some of them struggle to call themselves curators, preferring instead words such as *dance activist*, as in the case of Roberto Casarotto, or *facilitator*, as in the case of Monica Gillette. "The community dance practitioner of today", Barr (2013) states, "is choreographer and collaborator as well as social advocate and facilitator" (p. 116). This is true also if talking about the performing arts curator.

Roberto Casarotto as dance activist

The notion of activism in curation is brought to the surface, among the others, by Maura Reilly (2018). In doing this, she mostly refers to the visual arts, but she uses this term to talk about those who have "committed themselves to initiatives that are leveling hierarchies, challenging assumptions, countering erasure, promoting the margins over the center, the minority over the majority, inspiring intelligent debate, disseminating new knowledge, and encouraging strategies of resistance - all of which offers hope and affirmation" (Reilly, 2018, p. 22). Dance is more specifically associated with activism and wellbeing by Sherry B. Shapiro (2017), who turns her interest towards the way in which individuals and communities communicate their resistance and change due to difficult social conditions. She links to this situation the concept of "aesthetic activism" as "forms of practices that empower those living under dehumanizing conditions and seek to heal the human brokenness that is the result of these conditions; and further, to reimagine lives that might flourish with radical social change" (Shapiro, 2017, p. 661). This will be further investigated in chapter 4, where wellbeing will be more specifically related to the social and political context. What is interesting here is how she states how activists all over the world have identified methods to face social issues by means of creative forms of expression, centered on solidarity, collectivity and shared interests, thus aiming at reaching social wellbeing. As underlined by Corey Lee M. Keyes (1998), wellbeing

comprises in fact also social aspects such as “coherence, integration, actualization, contribution, and acceptance” (p. 133).
Also Roberto Casarotto finds it important to practice creativity in order to respond to social issues:

> [...] The thing that distinguishes a lot, what you call a curator - although I have problems with the word "curation" in this context and I never call myself a curator -, is the fact that I have been used to practicing creativity and then using it in moments when there are contingencies and you have to develop a strategy to respond to them. So looking at the world, every limitation can actually open up possibilities for you and become an opportunity to experiment with something that you wouldn't have faced otherwise. And that's a constant creative practice. So that stuff is fundamental.

But Casarotto does not define himself as a choreographer or as a dancer, but rather as a dance activist, because he “truly believe[s] that dance is a right of humanity”. Dance, he stresses, is the form of art that, more than any others, allows a positive transformation of those who practice it, because of the active involvement of the body that it requires. This changes completely one’s own perspective, as Casarotto points out:

> [...] And when you get into the perspective that there is no right or wrong way to dance, you have a crazy conquest of yourself, in space and time, but also towards a society.

To be able to actively work with and for the communities, it means to have a deep sense of humility, as stated by Roselle Pineda in *Curating Live Arts* (2019). It is the aptitude of being ready to learn from others’ stories and situations, and to rethink them on oneself while approaching the community from within. Performance curation can thus aim at consolidating both activist-community work and performance, meaning with “activism” also the possibility to find an active critical space, promoting process-oriented methods, transdisciplinarity and spaces for dialogue (Ricci, 2019). Being activist in the art field means to search for community participation in order to achieve social change and justice (Rosenberg, 2009, cited in Shapiro, 2017), but it also means to be open to listening and observing actively. In this regard, Casarotto asserts that it is important to listen to people of the community and to observe what happens around. This is necessary because, he

explains, to program an artistic and cultural initiative means to implement a series suggestions taken along different experiences and encounters. Thus, he underlines the importance of developing new forms of programming:

> I think that at this moment to experience individually and collectively is something to invest in and to find out what it means to live in the same space, in the same time an emotion, to activate individual and collective empathic systems, to open horizons beyond the boundaries of the body and also towards what seems unfamiliar to us. But how to get in touch with what is unfamiliar to us in order not to exoticize it, not to misunderstand it? [...] Maybe there is a need to invent other things, maybe there is a need in other cases to go through a physical practice so that your body finds itself maybe displaced in order to then access a certain type of experience.

Finally, being an activist it also means to face the system, so to say, and to confront oneself with different perspectives and system structures, as seen in the beginning when talking about the challenges that had to be faced by CSC in Bassano del Grappa, when the new administration attacked its projects.

Monica Gillette as facilitator

Monica Gillette, on the other hand, states how the word that she feels closer to her and to the performing arts values is *facilitator.* This, she clarifies, also because she is "oriented towards facilitating encounters", both with the audience, and with the members of the societies at large. Delving into this issue, Gillette explains the reason of her belief:

> [...] No matter what roles and titles people have, whether artists or producers or directors, you know there are so many… I mean that the essence of the value of dance for me is that it has this potential to levelize where we strip away the roles and the titles, and we need it on a human level. […] dance is the art that humanizes us the most, which brings us into a human context. […] I mean sure it's good to name who makes the choices and designs a program, it's good to make that transparent, so that one can orient around the choice that was made to make a program, but too often it goes into this anointment, like "you are anointed as the chosen one". And I feel it blocks the potential of art forms. That's a very personal opinion that I have.

Hence, Monica Gillette centers the role of the facilitator around the design and the creation of spaces for encounters, as well as around the de-hierarchisation of the roles. Manzoli and Paltrinieri (2021) instead use the term facilitator when referring to those cultural actors operating in the places in which they enter directly into contact with the communities, promoting creative expression and co-creation, collaborative as well as participatory activities, while promoting the fruition of cultural activities. De Biase (2021), underlines how the 1960s have seen the birth of a new professional figures, among which what he, together with scholars Alfieri, Canvaro and Scabia, in 1990 defined as "cultural actors", indicating those figures who were working as "catalysts-mediators-facilitators" (pp. 67-68). He then also traces the development of other professional figures such as the cultural animator, more focused on social and political participation and for this reason possibly linked to the figure of the activist; that of the cultural manager, more dedicated to the improvement of territories; the cultural planner, an operator who bridges the whole environment of a community; and finally, the audience developer, promoting access for the audiences.

Finally, Laura Delfini (2004, cited by Fabris, 2015) associate the figure of the facilitator to that of the community dancer and operator, with a strong ethical, social and political awareness, as well as being ready to listen and observe, recognizing the others' diversity from him/herself, while facilitating communication, doing this by means of dance and movement.

2.7 Conclusions

So, is the "Bassano System" effective in challenging the general structures in order to try to create wellbeing for the community through dance? And how?

First of all, the reason why dance can be considered a powerful tool in fulfilling this purpose, is that, as precised by Roberto Casarotto:

> Dance is the art that connects us the most to our bodies and to humanity without the need for other tools, right? So very often our bodies are already inside systems, and it's about having that sensitivity, about observing changes in society. It's not as of yesterday

> that we realized that we have a young multicultural society. [...] We've been working on the idea of saying, okay, what role models do we propose when we do workshops or publish a catalog or promotional materials? Let's make sure that anyone who opens that catalog can somehow reflect themselves in those images, in those colors, in those shades. [...] Here you put a body and there is no right or wrong way to read dance, and there the accesses are created.

Even if the activities carried out in Bassano del Grappa find some similarities with community dance, Roberto Casarotto does not make reference to this practice, while Monica Gillette states how she feels like going beyond it.

The activities proposed by CSC and Operaestate Festival are able to increase social capital in the form of both social bonding and social bridging, thus leading to a general increased wellbeing. What has happened in the context of Bassano, is the creation of bridged-bonding social capital (Lee, 2013), which tries to overcome the negative aspects of the two types of social capital, to "both bridge the differences between the two groups and bond the two groups into one" (p. 13). This form of social capital has revealed being efficacious in creating a more cohesive community, supporting integration and in-group trust. This has been evident especially in two cases. The first with asylum seekers who have been brought to dance in squares and that have started to be recognized as dancers. It is worth to say that the mayor of Bassano, being CSC and Operaestate Festival part of the public administration, signs contracts for asylum seekers, hiring them as dancers. The second case is constituted by people affected by Parkinson who, taking part in Dance Well classes, not only improved their health conditions, but also spread the benefit outside of the dance activities, to their acquaintances. In this regard, casarotto specifies:

> [...] And I'm telling you that many times we've touched on cases of people who didn't leave their houses anymore because they were ashamed, because they had some forms of disease, and now they've flourished. Their family members now come and tell us about how they turned their home life upside down and how they found inspiration. So, clearly that can be labeled as wellbeing, but it is no longer tied to those who participate in the dance classes, because in fact they expand it around their family unit, their friendships, and they become ambassadors of dance, they proselytize [...].

The spread of the benefits generated by these activities is evident when talking either to people living in the city or coming from the outside, who can immediately experience a general good-living atmosphere. The benefits are not only directly related to health: the Centro per la Scena Contemporanea and Operaestate Festival are key sources of events in the city, and wellbeing is therefore also related to economic aspects. In fact, the events in and around Bassano del Grappa, bring many people also from abroad all around the area and Region. Casarotto highlights how, through these activities, they have been able to produce a form of cultural tourism of people going to Bassano in order to take part in dance events and residencies. In this way, they have started to enjoy the places of the city and consume there. This has also contributed to the formation of collaborations among citizens and merchants who have become aware of the fact that the visitors were interested in Bassano's commercial offerings as well.

Before Covid, the number of people moving to the city for the dance events was around 200/300 each week, as Casarotto remembers. In this regard, he underlines both the economic and the cultural advantages that this flow of people has brought:

> [...] Imagine these 200 people moving from one theater to another, living, eating, drinking in the city. It is clear that they became very visible. And they were being recognized as the dance audience, which is the coolest thing. Then they were very multicultural, because they came from Asia, Africa, America, so visually they gave a very strong signal of multiculturalism. And this, in the context of Veneto where we live, clearly launches alternative signals to stereotypes and everything else. So what we are trying to do is also to contribute to, a little at a time, exercise the change of perspective [...].

What has just been mentioned, is another confirmation of how bridging-bonding social capital can be created, especially if considered the "closure" of the city itself, deriving from long traditions and politics.

Moreover, being Bassano del Grappa a fascinating city, surrounded by a distinctive naturalistic scenario, it allows people to enjoy the beauty of the landscape. This, together with the atmosphere that is created in the city, "activates systems of construction of wellbeing", affirms Casarotto. As previously analyzed, wellbeing is

not only generated by economic prosperity and wealth, but social connectedness and trust can be central in community wellbeing.

I have analyzed in the first chapter how wellbeing can be intended as a multidimensional concept, comprising both individual and social elements, and related to physical, mental, social or economical aspects. Casarotto seems to share this position about the notion of wellbeing. However, he goes a bit further, highlighting that:

> [...] Wellbeing for me implies multiple dimensions. I always start from the body and then I think about how physically you can develop a concept of wellbeing for a physical body. Then I think about the spiritual body, which is something that before Covid was not even mentioned, in fact in some contexts it was taboo, and with Covid in short probably the forced introspection that many people have approached, has somehow led to manifest a certain thought. [...] And then there is also the dimension of the collective body, that is, the physical, spiritual and collective body, which is just as important, in the sense that very often dance initiatives touch on all of these aspects at the same time, and so I am very intrigued to put into action initiatives that have this ability.

Wellbeing, Casarotto concludes, is constructed gradually, both individually and collectively.

This said, it is possible to state that even if not all of the people are invested by the same form of wellbeing (economic, psychological, physical), all of them contribute to the general development of social connectedness and trust, therefore leading to community wellbeing. Even if it has not been possible to objectively measure wellbeing of the individuals and of the community, through the observations that have been collected it is possible to confirm that in this context, behind an artistic process, one can observe social change and empowerment (Franco, 2021).

Going back to the city of Bassano, Casarotto explains how he associates wellbeing to the word *happiness*. This is because, even if wellbeing is not measurable and is in constant construction, the happiness of the people who live there can be perceived also by those visiting the city:

> [...] Probably you, as a person who visits that place, breathe an air in which you don't feel in danger, you don't feel threatened, you don't feel desolate, because around you maybe see smiles and you see people who feel well with their bodies, with their spirits

> and they feel well collectively together. It is no coincidence that some statistics say that the cities where there is also a very high level of economic wellbeing, often also have a very advanced system of intercultural dialogue, right? […] So I think it's very important to look at the individual and collective spheres and see how the individual lives himself in the city and in his relationship with others. So what we do is try to bring people to live better with themselves, but also with others in the environment. Again, multilayered, because you can, with dance, achieve all these goals and objectives.

Bringing together people, skills and places can find points of contact with the cultural welfare concept, since citizens' wellbeing is implemented by means of cultural activities and collaboration among people coming from different contexts as well as fields of study. To do this, it has been seen that an important role is covered by the spaces. It is in fact important to offer places in which people can feel safe and that can become a meeting and exchange point for the members of the community. It cannot be denied that social conflicts will continue to exist as part of human lives. But what can really make the difference here, is the ability to deal with them. Offering spaces for encounters and in which to construct and share community identity, is of fundamental importance. The key point here is trying to harmonize the story of the single individuals to that of the community, while not losing the identity of the subjects. This is what is called “culture of difference” and is “based on the effort to maintain the specificities and identities of individuals or groups that for history or tradition, express different attitudes and opinions, have different needs and requirements, but at the same time could be carriers of new ways of interacting and new resources” (De Piccoli, 2021, p. 138-39).
Cities are the place that can shape the future of communities and a city in which culture plays a crucial role can be ready to address the upcoming changes and challenges, by starting with the resources that are present there (De Biase, 2021), becoming a laboratory of transformation that is able to impact on the long-term with positive outcomes both the lives of the individuals and of the community. In the “cultural city”, culture becomes instrumental to trigger empowerment processes of the community and, through cultural welfare, stimulate people and institutions to share social responsibility and attentiveness (Manzoli & Paltrinieri, 2021, p. 19)

In this context, it has been seen how the role of the cultural actors is fundamental. They constitute a juncture inside the plurality of voices that are part of the

community. Nowadays, rather then being business-oriented, the curator should therefore be community-oriented, developing educational and innovative forms to connect audiences and artistic pieces, while fostering a deeper connection not only with the performance audiences, but rather with the whole community, thus linking the artistic creations and their presentation to the social and political structure of the communities (Davida et al., 2019). In this case, teamwork and collaboration can constitute an opportunity to share visions, skills and knowledges, as stressed out by Roberto Casarotto:

> [...] So in the end if you involve, from the beginning of a project, those who deal with communication, an artist who deals with organization, who also deals with administration, right? And they feel co-participants in creating something that is then offered to a community, there is a completely different involvement, so I also see that the attention to detail is amplified, because that thing also becomes a little bit personal, because you feel part of something and you feel that a part of you lives in that thing.

So the role of the new curators/mediators/facilitators is that of stimulating the communities' creativities, thus becoming "social architects or social sculptors" (Sellar, 2017, p. 11), as well as activists. Nowadays, they are in charge of creating spaces and opportunities for people who do not find a place in which to practice imagination, thus moving from the traditional venues to others in which it would be possible to connect people and build relationships among very different community members. Curators/mediators/facilitators have to be open. Finally, the curator has to bridge various languages, cultures and understand how to translate them for the whole community, focussing on the collectivity, rather than on his/her own meaning and artistic vision (Pineda, 2019). In this context, Monica Gillette highlights how performing arts curation can also be centered around the concept of wellbeing:

> [...] You're going to design a program and you think "How do I build wellbeing inside what I'm going to build and propose?", "How am I working? How am I treating people around?". If you orient around that, if you start to think about your own wellbeing, it changes the conversation you're having with people, or rather it changes how you're speaking with people. And if you value your own wellbeing in relation to others, then you're going to want their wellbeing as well, which means you're going to start making different choices.

But how is this process actually realized? Monica Gillette suggests that it could be possible by, for example, reducing the numbers of works programmed, which means that less works are going to be watched, but implementing other types of encounters with dialogues, workshops and debates.

Hence, also following Monica Gillettes' words, if curation works around the concept of wellbeing, it should aim at redefining both intimate and interpersonal relations, leading to a focus on the real notion of care, that "raises key questions about responsibility, suffering, protection, and so many other loaded terms that we have to deal with in organizing and working with communities" (Guy, 2019, p. 106).

Chapter 3
PRACTICING EMPATHY: A PROJECT BY YASMEEN GODDER

3.1 The context and the project

This chapter introduces the second case study of the thesis, namely Yasmeen Godder's research project *Practicing Empathy.*

In this context, topics such as the role of the audience and its engagement will be explored together with the concepts of empathy, emotions and the brain functioning of the audience members while experiencing a performance. Moreover, it will be seen how all these aspects together can contribute to shaping communities and how spaces again - as seen in the previous chapter - play a fundamental role. Before introducing the project itself, a brief overview on the background that characterizes Yasmeen Godder's work should be made.

Yasmeen Godder is an Israeli choreographer, born in Jerusalem but who has spent a great part of her life in New York. Her mixed background has enabled her to develop a more open vision of the world and of people from different nationalities. Hence, she has always been interested in the possibility of sharing thoughts and ideas "with different people and different societies" - as she stated during the interview I had with her. This is important to try to be confronted with other cultures and to see her own works every time from a different and new perspective. In her artistic practice, the Israeli context plays a significant role, due to the fact that it is her country of origin, but at the same time it is a place in which the presence of more identities and cultures becomes crucial and problematic at the same time. Despite the strong internationality that is clearly present in her pieces, Israel becomes also part of her works, and it became so even more during Covid-19 when, out of necessity, Godder states how she started to focus more on the locality:

> I know that here in my community in Israel, I found myself… you know, after years of touring, after years of always looking out, in which I was saying "Ok, I'm based here, but my work is all over Europe'', the locality became very important, the energy into the locality. As I already told you, I did this collaboration with a Palestinian artist,

> choreographer Nur Garabli, and I created a workshop for Arab and Jewish women to meet throuh dance. So for example, if that would have been during another time, I wouldn't have had the energy or the time. This has always been important for me, but the fact that I was here and I couldn't travel, made me be aware, or not only aware, but made me put more energy into the locality. So I think I'm not alone, I volunteer to give meals and I did a lot of this kind of communal work.

The space that people - audiences and not only performers - occupy with their bodies is also of key importance in her works, especially in her project *Practicing Empathy #2by2*. Before delving into it, it is necessary to take a step back to understand which conditions led Yasmeen Godder to elaborate this research.
In 2015 she was invited by Monica Gillette to take part in a project called *Störung/Hafra'ah*, which involved people with Parkinson's disease, scientists and dancers. It was a research project in which everyone was sharing his/her own knowledge and feelings, thus enriching the others and getting rid of hierarchic approaches, which do not contribute to creating effective collaborative conditions. It was through this project that Yasmeen Godder first entered into contact with the parkinsonians, with people of different ages and with a physical condition that was different from the able-bodied dancers usually present in her studio, as well as with scientists and experts with a distinct background. In this way it started a sharing of knowledge between diverse people that led her to understand the huge potentials of dance "to create meetings between people, to create interaction, to create situations, to influence environments", as she underlined. This fact influenced her deeply, giving her the possibility to reflect on the great power of dance for wider communities likewise. For this reason, Godder underlines:

> I was exploring a lot of different themes and trying to research deep things and I did it, it's not that I didn't. But I think that when I opened that door on that day I realized how limited the information in the group up until that point was. It was maybe people between 20 and 40 who were fit in a way, who chose a career as dancers, and it's not a bad thing, it's a wonderful thing, but it creates a very specific kind of life experience that you're drawing from. […] but at some point, opening up the door to other bodies, to other fields of thought, to people who were not trained dancers, brought to a lot of new experiences, information, emotions and also a lot of my company members started to explore other aspects of themselves.

Working with Parkinsonians, Godder then started developing a new approach to performance, which consisted in a less hierarchical approach. It is interesting to observe that the same consideration was underlined in the previous chapter by Roberto Casarotto when talking about the role of the curator.
Afterwards, two other projects - *Common Emotions* and *Simple Actions* - brought her nearer to working with the audience more interactively. About the first performance, Yasmeen Godder says:

> I was drawn by this idea that with very simple dance proposals, things that we do everyday in the dance studio such as throw our shoes in the corner, lay on the floor and start rolling, just simple things that are so basic in dance like partnering, things that we don't consider like skills or we don't consider to be something that it's very complex, are in reality huge tools for other people to connect to themselves, to connect to their bodies, to find wellbeing sometimes, you know, in a social situation as you are researching.

This performance was actually about common emotions and about the chance to connect audience members and dancers emotionally in the space, through a format in which the performers dance and invited at the same time people to meet in the backstage. In this way, the performance was going on in the front, while from time to time someone from the audience moved to the back where the dancers proposed various workshops. About this piece, Godder continues saying that:

> [...] [it] more and more interactive in the sense that what is happening on the stage is more and more influenced by what is happening behind the scenes and eventually it becomes like one big workshop of the whole space. And it is about common emotions and about the possibility to connect emotionally to each other, because in the theater in a way you always connect, I mean that's part of what the theater wants to offer to the audiences, that they feel what is happening on stage.

The work that definitely influenced her and which had as a direct response the *Practicing Empathy* project was *Simple Action*, a work that she presented in Bassano del Grappa, as well as the previous one. *Simple Action* is described as a "Participatory Choreographic Action" (http://www.yasmeengodder.com/works/stabat-mater) and it can be seen as a ritual. Here, the audience was all over the space, with the

dancers moving towards the audience one by one. The performers offered the people to hold them, inviting them to the centre of the space and asking if it was fine for them that they took their weight. People accepted, and the performers slowly lowered them to the floor. Godder reflects about this practice, bringing to the surface a concept that has also been addressed in the previous chapter, namely the notion of care. She states:

> [...] So it's like a practice of care, but I guess it's very much like a dance practice as well, because they were carrying the weight of someone else and you need to learn how to do that. But at the same time we all know how to do it because it's connected to taking care of children, parents, or people who need your support and this is the whole thing. It's 50 minutes of this, where slowly the performers offer other people to hold them, and then the audience holds the performers and slowly it becomes like a ritual of one action that everybody is doing together.

Yasmeen Godder cites here the word *ritual*, a term that will be deepened also in chapter 4: the ritualistic aspect of the piece was emphasized by the fact that it was performed in an inactive church in Bassano del Grappa. In fact, *Simple Action* was created as a commission by Roberto Casarotto, and it concerned the liturgical sequence of Stabat Mater. For it, they did not use the music, but rather the original text dating back to the Middle Ages. For this purpose, the Israeli choreographer worked with the musician Tomer Damsky, who realized a kind of hypnotic piece, in which it was impossible to distinguish the Latin words, but that put people in the condition of just loosening up.
In this regard, Godder expresses that:

> This impacted people very strongly, because first of all we all wanted someone to be carried by, you know. It's part of the need that I think many people have. This caused a general need of caring, of taking care and it touched people in many different ways about parenthood and about taking care of parents, for example.

The reason why people felt touched by this piece was also because during the period in which they premiered in Italy, people had a fixed imagery in their minds, also due to the huge numbers of pictures circulating on the media: that of the big earthquake

in Amatrice. At the same time, other people talked about war, but they also performed several times in Germany. There, a completely different imagery was present in people's minds, but it was deeply touching both the audience members and the performers, as explained by Godder:

> You know, we are mostly Jewish, not all of us, but most of us are coming from Israel and we were carrying the bodies of Germans, and they were carrying us. It has this kind of healing effect maybe, touching upon the ability to meet other people in a different way.

In response to the above-mentioned works, Yasmeen Godder decided to focus on the concept of *empathy*. She therefore started to research this word, which presents a very ambiguous use that will be later deepened and she started to think about the possibility of creating a series of pieces that would have touched upon this topic. This is the reason why, starting from 2019, Godder and her Company created a series of pieces through which they try and are trying to understand the deeper side of people, their emotions and inner worlds, and how this allows them to relate to others and to themselves at the same time:

> [...] with *Simple Action* [...] one woman wrote to me on Facebook, an audience member, and she said: "I went back to the world, on the street, after the show. I exited the theater and I went to the streets feeling like I had the ability to practice empathy". And I think that she, with her response, was really the inspiration for this new series of works.

Affected by the possibility of positively changing, with her works, people's experience in the world and in society, Yasmeen Godder started to think even deeper about the resonance that her pieces had on people, people from whom she continuously gets feelings and feedback. This, she stresses, is the fuel that moves her in doing her work. For this reason, she points out:

> That's what I want, I want people to take away from it and to have a shift and to feel themselves differently and to give something like a gift to give to others. This is really what's pushing me.

Practicing Empathy #1 has been created with a group of dancers from her Company, starting from a reflection on what it means to practice empathy with each other. It thus became a sort of group therapy in which the vocal sounds turned into a key ingredient of the performance, using them to express themselves and to respond to others. Here, "empathy can be explored as a way to support, encourage, and react to the depth and complexity of their own and other's needs and expressions" (http://www.yasmeengodder.com/works/practicing-empathy).

During the interview I had with Yasmeen Godder, she explained then in detail how the *Practicing Empathy #2by2* research project was born and in what it consists.

In this chapter, the focus will turn mainly on this second piece, because of the central role that the audience plays. When, together with her Company, she started to research empathy, they started doing it internally, within the Company members. But then they understood that, in order to better deepen the topic, they had to go outside. For this reason, they did a workshop with Arab and Jewish mothers of some children who are part of a community in Jaffa. The workshop was about practicing empathy, and during that time together, they researched several practices. Afterwards, they did a month-long research with a group of parkinsonians, and after that they went to Germany, where they worked with various groups of people - immigrant women, youth groups, senior citizens - exploring the same topic. At the time they went back to Israel with this huge baggage of knowledge, it was February 2020. Godder comments in this way the outcome of their research:

> We built a whole structure of a piece where basically we wanted to bring people in, and we offered these different practices that are really about breathing together and holding each other. There were a lot of different kinds of practices that we had accumulated from different research with different communities and then Coronavirus started.

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent shutdown of entire cities, it was no longer possible to perform, especially a piece in which people would have been supposed to enter into contact with each other. Indeed, people were not allowed to touch or to be close to each other. The choreographer specifically reflects on this fact, stating that:

> [...] Everything that we did was exactly what was not allowed and I think for me it's really interesting to think that my work, which became more and more about touch and proximity, it then turned to be the big no-nos of this period. Both touch and proximity became dangerous and even this word, "infectiousness", which I found so interesting in my research up until that moment. It is the idea of how we get infected about each other emotionally, also in a negative way sometimes, and not always positively, because sometimes there is negative emotional infectiousness that also leads to nationalism and fascism and things that are scary.

In response to this critical situation, Godder created, between the first and the second lockdowns of 2020, *Practicing Empathy #2by2*, which consisted of a performance made up of groups of two dancers interacting with two audience members at two meters distance. Here, the performance draws inspiration from the ideas collected while researching empathy in the various communities, but readjusting everything following the measures imposed by the pandemic. This is because with Covid-19 pandemic people were often told to be distanced two meters the one from the others. The interesting fact here is that a gesture which was proper of the public sphere, that of being in contact with people at two meters distance, became an act of intimacy between the audience members and the performers, creating what Godder defines as "a kind of safe place for people".

Finally, in July 2020 she has premiered her solo *Practicing Empathy #3*, which should have been developed with local and international groups, but that then was born out of the impossibilities to work with people because of Covid-19 pandemic. Also in this case, Godder expresses her viewpoint expressing that:

> This was a very specific moment in time in which I closed into myself after many years. I've always been very much involved with a lot of people, in my Company and in communities, and suddenly I found myself alone in the studio again after years and then I started questioning: "How can I practice empathy like this, when I'm not meeting people?". And then I started to go into research and found that there is also this thing called "self empathy" and I found it interesting that the work evolved into this theme, from practicing empathy to practicing empathy alone.

It has been seen how space is central in the context of this chapter from various perspectives: the space shaped by the international and local context, that given by

the social distancing required by the pandemic, as well as that created between the audience and the dancers during a performance.

Finally, it can be taken into consideration the space of the dancehouse: it was in *tanzhaus nrw* in Düsseldorf that I had the pleasure to attend *Practicing Empathy #1* and *Practicing Empathy #2by2* on September 30th, 2021. This dancehouse, as Centro per la Scena Contemporanea in Bassano del Grappa, is part of the European Dancehouse Network, an international network which comprises 47 members from 28 countries. Being part of this network, means to have the objective to "securing a sustainable future for the dance sector and to improve relevance for diverse dance among society" (https://www.ednetwork.eu/) and to foster cooperation to share ideas and practices. However, that of dancehouse can be a very different concept, depending on the place in which it is developed: as seen in the previous chapter, it can in fact be constituted by several buildings in which the activities are carried out - as in the case of CSC - or by one specific building, such as in the case of tanzhaus nrw in Düsseldorf. Dancehouses are spaces for developing practices, research, residencies and with educational purposes (Creek, 2019). Moreover, they are all financially supported, they serve as a meeting point and heritage protection spaces, give room for publics to enter into contact with an artistic discipline and finally they foster interdisciplinary cooperation.

Tanzhaus nrw in Düsseldorf is located in the ancient tram depot and was founded in 1978, becoming soon an internationally recognized dance centre and institution. With more than 200 performances presented every year and a broad number of collaborations, tanzhaus nrw stresses the fact that the differences among professionals and non professionals, subculture and intellectuals has been ironed out there, thus allowing a "communal experience of dance" (https://tanzhaus-nrw.de/en/house/our-profile). Finally, they have gained several rewards because of their engagement within the civil society.

Place and space cover a central role in impacting on the audience experience in the artistic context. Researchers such as Brown, have outlined an overview over the function of artistic venues architecture, mapping their evolution and arriving at today's "contemporary social spaces" (Walmsley, 2019, p. 35). Also Janelle Reinelt has noticed how people intend performances attendance as a meeting and socializing occasion (Reinelt, 2014, p. 358). Alan Brown, through his studies on the

performing arts, has analyzed how people are influenced by the places at the point that an uncomfortable feeling aroused by being extraneous to that same space, would lead to a failure in the artistic experience proposal (Brown, 2013, cited in Walmsley, 2019). For this reason, it is no coincidence that people often personify places, attributing them adjectives that would be generally ascribed to people. Finally, venues can also gain a symbolic connotation, which can either derive from experiencing them physically or from their circulation on social media (ibidem). As Brown thus implies, art spaces have a sociological function in the communities and they can be of worth for people also independently of the artistic events taking place within their walls.

After these premises, it can now be deeper analyzed who audiences are and how they relate with these different spaces.

3.2 Audience as a social phenomenon

In the following section, the attention will be turned to the *Practicing Empathy #2by2* project to question whether it is possible, by engaging in a performance which addresses the topic of empathy, to question issues regarding the audience wellbeing, and consequently that of the community and society at large. In the following part, it will be given a brief overview on what it means to be an audience, investigating the term and the terminology around it.

The literal meaning of *audience* refers to a group of people who listen passively (Allain & Harvie, 2014). It is often paralleled with the term *spectator*, which on the other hand refers to someone who watches. The term *audience* derives from the latin word *audire*, meaning to hear, but it misses the gerund, which indicates the act of effectively being an audience. As rightly expressed by Walmsley (2019), also the term *spectator*, even if having both a gerund and a noun, results reductive because it is limited to the act of watching. This appears as well with the word *theater*, from the Greek *theatron*, a place for viewing. For this reason, in 1992 the cultural scholar John Fiske used the term "audiencing", already employed in the cultural studies, to express the activity of being part of the audience (Walmsley, 2019, p. 7). Afterwards, scholars such as Lindelof and Reason, have used this term in the performing arts

field, extending the act of being part of the audience and including creative, social, analytical and psychological factors, saying that:

> *Audiencing* describes the work of the spectator. It describes acts of attention, of affect, of meaning-making, of memory, of community. A focus on audiencing recognizes that attention is a constructive or performative act, that spectators bring performances into being through the nature of their variously active, distractive or contested attention (Lindelof & Reason, 2016, p. 17).

As a matter of fact, the act of audiencing is seen by many researchers as an active one, in accordance with the general knowledge reminded by Walmsley (2019), that "sitting quietly in a darkened auditorium does not equate to a passive experience" (p. 66). Indeed, McConachie (2008) attests how audiencing at no time can be considered as being passive because "human vision is always selective and discriminating" (McConachie, 2008, cited in Walmsley 2019, p. 66).

It should be remembered that, among the factors which underlies the foundation of audience research, is Bourideu's articulation of the notion of cultural capital, which highlighted how "processes of social elitism exclude many social groups from the act of audiency altogether" (Walmsley, 2019, p. 28).

Still today, cultural managers and people working in the field of arts management, as also seen in the previous chapter, often address the artistic works to an "homogenous mass", as defined by scholar Caroline Heim (2010, cited in Walmsley, 2019, p. 5), being also the noun *audience* indicating a collective of people thought as sharing the same values and identity, which have often been underestimated.

It is however an untrue and misleading definition, since audiences do not mirror these characteristics. Understanding audiences as a unique collective of people, has often also led choreographers and performers to assume that people of the audience basically do the same things and think the same way, thus addressing them in the same way.

Walmsley (2019) reminds that "Audiences have been systematically, and sometimes cynically, sidelined, undermined and alienated by scholars, artists, managers, producers, arts organizations, policymakers, and society more broadly" (p. 1). What may not be considered is that audiences are composed of living people, who are diversified and who often feel the need to be more engaged, both during and after

the performance itself. For this reason, Heim bemoans the fact that in many Western contexts they are not allowed to express a critical judgment (Heim, 2016).
Nevertheless, the role of the audience is shifting more and more and not only because audience members are moving away from the conventional artistic venues and performance genres, but rather because they are "perhaps gradually transitioning into co-performers" (Walmsley, 2019, p. 7) and because the distance between audience members and performers is starting to increasingly shorten. Yasmeen Godder's *Practicing Empathy #2by2* is the perfect example of this shifting process, being the "duality of the meeting" between audience and performers central, as she reminds:

> I started out about six years ago because of different projects that I did [...] to shift a bit my way of working, to work differently on what I'm interested in doing and to start to understand and to question the societal impact of what I'm doing, if it has a meaning at all. What happens during this time that we spend together in the theater? Can it really influence the way people then go in the world or the time that they take out of their daily lives to meet with other people in space? How am I defining that time, how am I formatting that time? I am interested not just in dealing with how my work is influencing someone else, but to also see the duality of the meeting.

Undoubtedly, audiences also have a fundamental role in giving value to the artistic products, since, as observed by Chris Bilton (2017, cited in Walmsley, 2019, p. 171), "cultural products are increasingly 'social' products, whose meaning and value is rewritten by audiences". Even if the notion of product might be seen by some as reductionist, this sentence is key in what has been defined as relational perspective, meaning that the "cultural product" takes meaning only from the encounter with the audience. This is the reason why Rancière (2011) previously expressed the need for audiences to be "freed". Audiencing has always been recognized as a political issue (Walmsley, 2019), whilst audiences have often been seen as the "other" (Butsch, 2008, p. 3) to justify their objectification and the possibility to intend them as less intellectual and possessing inferior creative abilities. This is why, from Blau's point of view, audiences have often been prevented from contributing to the meaning-making processes: this mechanism is seen as a highly political one, thus belonging

to those who hold the power. Consequently, the audience has been limited to actions of silence and ovation.

In contrast with these aspects is the vision, expressed by Walmsley (2019), that "engaged audience members are active agents in an embodied, enactive and multisensory experience, and collectively, this act of audiency culminates in a powerful social phenomenon" (p. 172). Introducing the issue of active engagement in the performing arts also justify a new modulation of the concept itself, which could not be intended only as a product, but rather as a process (Walmsley, 2019, p. 80).

Talking about the audience, empathy plays a crucial role in the relationship between the performers and the audience members. The topic of empathy will be later deepend, but here it is useful to say that the sounds and behaviors of some audience members can influence the others, thus enabling the creation of social bonds. As reminded by Yasmeen Godder:

> You can also sit in the audience and you can feel the others' emotions around you and this influences you. For example if people laugh, you are more likely to laugh. So I was inspired by this kind of infectiousness, emotional infectiousness, that is also present in the theater, but I wanted to make it more obvious. Instead of being in the dark, I wanted this infectiousness to be present in the theater as part of the shows.

Questions of what audiences do and who they are have emerged quite recently and this has led audience researchers to delve into the topic of engagement. Moreover, the role of audiences has changed over time. Especially in these last two years, they have expressed at the same time a need to engage both physically and with other media and, simultaneously, to disengage.

3.3 Audience engagement

The Oxford Learner's Dictionaries defines engagement as the act of being involved in something in order to try to understand it (https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/engagement?q=

engagement). As previously anticipated, audience researchers have been attentive to how audiences engage in the arts, especially in the last years.

Many scholars have asked themselves what leads audiences to engage in the performing arts, what they look for in doing this, which beneficial effects they get from this activity and how this may influence both them and the society at large. This is a key aspect also to Yasmeen Godder's work, as she explains:

> [...] if I go back to Climax, the first piece, I realize that people want to be engaged. I was surprised to be honest, because as a viewer, I often enjoy sitting in my place, but I also understand the desire to take part in something, to give your body also an expression, not just the body of the people who are performing.

And yet, it seems that most of the research still concentrates on what Walmsley (2019) has defined as "micro context" (p. 49), namely the prompt reaction that audience members have when experiencing a performance. On the contrary, the effects that audiencing brings with many years of activity have insufficiently been examined.

Among the first and most important scholars to have introduced the concept of *engagement* together with that of *enrichment*, are Lynne Conner and Alan Brown. Conner calles for a more democratic and new form of engagement in the performing arts in response to the disengagement of audiences derived from their being regulated and silenced (Conner, 2013, cited in Walmsley, 2019). She then postulated that enrichment consists in assuming that audiences want to feel co-author of the artistic experience.

Already in 1982 Hirschman and Holbrook outlined that the first reason for audiences to engage in artistic experiences was primarily to fulfil their personal wishes and fantasies. Also arts marketers support this viewpoint, since they think of cultural products as consumed by consumers-audiences "to construct, sustain, and enact identity projects" (Colbert & St-James, 2014, p. 569).

In this context, Godder noticed how people who were present during the performance, were, with their behaviors and choices, also impacting on the performance and on the experience of the piece presented:

> [...] So already then there was this questioning. As we're proposing this moment in time for people to come to a theater or a performance, we were actually also allowing them to have an impact, to change, to shift the show, to be engaged in their own way.

Talking about the audience engagement, Godder then calls attention to another issue, which is that of the sensorial engagement and the need to engage the audience in a more meaningful way during the course of the performance:

> This was in 2014 and smartphones were becoming very big… and I think I started to become more intensely concerned with what is the experience that I want to invite people for. Because of course the shows start, we stand on stage, the light goes down and you see people: you see the light of people with their mobile phones. And you question: "What is this time? What is this time that we share? Can it really be something different than the usual "this bores me, so I can just go on Facebook"?. Whereas in the past you were committed, you could walk out but you were committed to something. I almost felt like the level of sensations had to be stronger, the sensorial engagement had to be stronger, both the being present in a space for the performers, but also the audience had to be more substantial.

3.4 Co-creation and immersion

Co-creation is a concept that has increasingly come to the surface in the performing arts during the last years and scholars have started to focus on this topic much more than before; however, it could be said that co-creation of products, value and meaning have entered the performing arts much before, since the Ancient Greek and Shakespeare (Walmsley, 2019). Also Yasmeen Godders finds the expression *co-creation* interesting, but she notices some difficulties in connecting this term with her work. This, she says, because the performance would highly depend on others. However, when presenting a piece, she and her Company always come with an idea and with a structure, leaving it open enough to allow people to enter into it with their choices, considerations and desires. She relates her thoughts about this topic also to a sense of responsibility. Thus, she specifies that:

> First of all, I don't know how safe it is, I take responsibility. I feel that a lot of these works have a sense of responsibility, they have to take care of these people. Because otherwise, if for example somebody just wants to throw him- or herself on the floor, I don't know… […]. I feel like it's like a hug, it has to be held but that's always the issue of how much you are letting go, how much you are giving a sense of independence inside of these proposals while you're also caring. I feel like I'm caring, I like to feel like I'm being carried sometimes. I enter and it's not about me, it's about someone else's proposals, but it gives me a chance to be inside of that proposal. So that's why I think that co-creation is a tricky thing.

It is true that co-creation remains an ambiguous term, but still it has a different meaning from coproduction. This last word refers precisely to the production phases of the creative process, while scholars such as Ben Walmsley have pointed out how co-creation has the capacity to enhance the participation in live performances, by establishing an empathetic connection with the artists (Walmsley, 2019).

From Yasmeen Godder's words, it is possible to deduce that audiences do not co-produce the choreographies that she and her Company present. On the other hand, co-creation also refers to the production of consumer value (Grönroos, 2011), an aspect which is present in *Practicing Empathy #2by2*, where the performance would lose its original meaning without the audience members participating in it.

It finally has to be said that the concept of co-creation is increasingly entering into the field of performance participation. This is because audiences experience the artistic pieces by engaging more and more cognitively, emotionally and imaginatively, in an attempt to grasp the deeper meaning out of the performance itself (Caldwell, 2001).

Immersion, on the other hand, refers to the intensity of audience involvement. Josephine Machon (2013) addresses the fact that in immersive performances the sensorial world comes first, as also emerges from Yasmeen Godder's words, and is accompanied by the importance given to the space. Machon goes on stating that immersive performances are characterized by the centrality given to the audience in the work itself, also in aesthetic terms. In this case, Godder considers it easier to relate the topic of immersion to her works, because she truly aims at working with

all the senses. In this regard, she cites her solo *Practicing Empathy #3*, which she created during the pandemic, finding herself alone in the studio:

> I definitely like this idea of let people enter with themselves, with their bodies, with more sensorial aspects of their being in my solo [...]. I have a section where I actually invite people to go into a kind of meditation and they enter with themselves into this kind of images and it's almost like a practice of taking care of something in the body and being aware of a place that's asking for attention. And then I take it to this image of ourselves inside of our bodies. So there's a moment that [...] it's more about what's happening to me right now, what's happening to my body, and again you don't have to, you can stay with your eyes open, you can reject it, you can say whatever you want and that's also always important for me, the ability of people of not participating if they don't want. [...] I think it's also important how you create internal space of the imagination.

As Machon expressed, the phrase "immersive practice" derives from the fact that audiences are involved in a multisensorial way, which "generates an embodied and lasting memory of the event" (Machon, 2013, p. 43). Embodiment has been seen by scholars such as Reason and Reynolds (2011) as the outcome of what has been defined as a "corporeal turn" (Reason & Reynolds, 2011, cited in Walmsley, 2019, p. 80). This has happened as a response to the engagement of the audience members with their full physical self.

At this point, one question comes quite spontaneously: why should audiences engage in immersive performances?

Living in a world which is getting everyday closer to the digital, or even to what has been defined as metaverse - a kind of virtual world -, it would be generally said that people feel the need to participate in activities which engage them physically other than creatively. Machon states how immersive experiences can foster human cooperation and sociability, as well as reciprocity (Machon, 2013). This exchange happens both with other audience members and with the performers, thus giving birth to "communal [...] opportunities" (Walmsley, 2019, p. 70).

Immersion has also been defined as *flow*. Hungarian-American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi was the first to detect this concept which is mainly a psychological one, and which indicates the feeling of being absorbed (Walmsley, 2019). He basically saw in flow an opportunity for self-empowerment, balance and happiness. From this, he continues, it derives that flow becomes "one of the central goals of the

self" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, cited in Walmsley, 2019, p. 78), the major peak in the search for pursuing wellbeing. However, this concept sees the limit in perceiving each audience member as individual. On the other hand, it could be interesting to see that empathy, which is established among audience members, can allow us to interpret flow as a group experience (Walmsley, 2019).

3.4 Emotions

Performance can thus be the perfect situation in which to take into exam group flow, which in turn can also influence the "emotional infectiousness" expressed before through Yasmeen Godder's words. The emotional aspect is a key component of the performance experience. It is in fact known that the act of watching someone performing originates a mental response in the viewer's mind that reflects the other's activity. This act of representing the other's movement in one's own mind, which combines physical and emotional reaction, responds to empathy (Foster, 2011).

Vischer and Tichener both agreed that the physical movements of the other's body - such as rhythm, intensity, and location, strictly influenced the viewer's bodily attitude. Already in 1982 Victor Turner anticipated the influence that performing arts had on audiences at both an emotional, spiritual and psychological level (Walmsley, 2013). This issue could maybe also be linked to the possibility of exercising and promoting wellbeing.

It should be noted that emotional engagement has been demonstrated to be the main reason why the audience attends artistic and cultural events (Walmsley, 2019). However, as Ben Chaim (1984, cited in Walmsley, 2019) underlines, the type of emotional engagement to which we are subjected during a performance may be deep, but it does not correspond to the experience that we actually do in real life. Still, the fictional dimension that is created with the performance allows the audience members to "experience emotions without danger" (Ben Chaim, 1984, in Walmsley, 2019, p. 70), that is what Yasmeen Godder actually aims at achieving with *Practicing Empathy #2by2*. In this regard, she specifies that:

> [...] Some people feel threatened by the proposals, it puts some people at discomfort. It's not intentional, I'm not trying to put people in an uncomfortable place, the opposite. I work a lot with the performers on creating a place in which people feel that whatever it is that they experience is ok and whatever it is that they feel is ok. And that's a huge thing because I think that *Practicing Empathy* is not just about teaching others, it's also about being able to be in that place as a performer. If I'm standing in *#2by2* performing in front of another body, how am I allowing those other persons and bodies to feel at ease with themselves as I watch them and they watch me?

Sauter indicated that the acts of describing, interpreting, evaluating and expressing emotions as the principal levels of audience feedback (Sauter, 2000). He later had a strong impact on the new generation of audience scholars, among whom Kirsty Sedgman. She states that "phenomenology has the capacity to reveal how audiences' responses are creative acts in themselves [because] emotional and embodied responses have a significant and legitimate role in the analysis of performance" (Sedgman, 2016, p. 9). The phenomenological approach is increasingly entering into the audience and cultural value discourse (Walmsley, 2019), trying to understand how audiences make experience of the performance.

Central to phenomenologists is the willingness to interpret phenomena by means of physicality and not by virtue of a conceptual approach. Edmund Husserl can be considered the father of phenomenology as intended in this context: he saw in phenomenology not a way to refuse the scientific approach, but rather "a ground state of reality that makes possible any science at all" (Walsh, 2013, p. 6). Contemporary phenomenology derives as well from Merleau-Ponty's theory, according to which "bodily perceptions of the world create the foundation for rationality" (Goralnik et al., 2017). This relation to the body is probably one of the reasons why phenomenology is interested in the performing arts.

Phenomenologist Roberta De Monticelli begins her book *Teoria ed Etica del Sentire* by stating that new research in the neuroscientific field have highlighted the importance of people's emotional lives in the constitution of their personal identity and being (De Monticelli, 2012). What thus emerges as a key aspect, is the need of shedding light on a level of the life of individuals that goes beyond the biological and the social one, entering the "sub-personal layer" (De Monticelli, 2012, p. 3).

She also addresses the topic of entering into relation with others, calling "psychological perception" our understanding of the others with which we enter

into relation: their moods, their inclination toward us, their communicative objectives, which then relates to what is the field of empathy (De Monticelli, 2012, p. 43). Finally, it has to be said that for the phenomenologists "nothing appears in vain, although not everything that is real appears" (De Monticelli, 2012, p. 69). This means that one can feel a hurting sensation when hitting something, but one can also feel "the nobility of a gesture, the vulgarity of an attitude, the wickedness of an action, the beauty of a masterpiece, the preciousness of a person" (De Monticelli, 2012, p. 69).

3.5 Empathy and audience

The theme of empathy has interested performing arts scholars for a long time, at the point that some see in empathy the audiences' most extreme impact (Konijn, 1999). As Walmsley (2019) highlights, the concept of empathy "arises in both intrinsic and instrumental approaches to audience research, because it emerges as both an integral part of a performing arts experience and a knock-on benefit that audiences apparently develop as they learn to identify with stage characters" (p. 75). Empathy thus results as a key ingredient of the performing arts field, together with emotional engagement, because of the impact that they have on the audience.

As above mentioned, the infectiousness which emerges by the contact among the audience members is central when talking about empathy: Hatfield et al. (cited in Heim, 2016), explores how audience members tend to "grab" others' emotions as a result of mimicry, while Heim acknowledges how audience members tend to "catch or are infected by the contagion of laughter, crying and even applause" (Heim, 2016, p. 22). This can in turn positively connect people, consequently consolidating into a community (Heim, 2016) and thus building up social capital.

This act of "communion" can also manifest with the performers themselves. This is what happens indeed in *Practicing Empathy #2by2*, in which a deep bond between the dancers and the audience members, especially those engaged in the performance, is established. As outlined by Walmsley (2019) "[...] in many empirical studies undertaken with both audiences and performers, the communal and collaborative nature of performance emerges as a core component of impact,

providing both groups with an empathic human experience that seems to supersede their physical distance" (p. 50).

However, the *Practicing Empathy #2by2* project is far more complex than what it seems to be, because it involves the audience on many levels, and different relationships are set up: at a first level, between the audience members taking part to the performance and the dancers; on a second level, between the audience watching the performance and the performers (which is constituted by both audience members and professional dancers), and at a third level among the audience members themselves.

3.6 The multifaceted concept of empathy and the brain

Nowadays empathy is understood as our ability to sense the other's emotional and mental states. It has several meanings that spread across the time, and today the term *empathy* is used in a wide variety of fields, from the business one to personal relationships. Even politics and marketing have been using this word. Empathy seems to be needed everyday more in society and in civic circumstances that nowadays, as illustrated by the cognitive psychologist J. D. Trout, are increasingly witnessing an "empathy gap", given by the difficulty of understanding the others, and even more if culturally and time-wise far from us. Some others have addressed the increase of social inequalities to a lack of empathy (Lanzoni, 2018).

But what is empathy?

The term appeared for the first time in the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th. It first indicated an aesthetic experience and was formulated by German aestheticians in order to illustrate the action of looking at an artwork and connecting with it at the point to move one's own body into the artwork (Foster, 2011). The German word originally used was *Einfühlung* (in-feeling) and it represented this act of projecting oneself into an artistic or natural object. It was then in 1908 that the term entered the English language, but its definition was then related to a physical receptivity to people and objects. Physicality thus came to play a central role (ibidem). Also the term *kinesthesia* was introduced in the end of the 19th century,

and it was then being attached by Sklar to the concept of empathy, arriving to define "kinesthetic empathy", an aspect which will be deepened in chapter 4.

This said, empathy started to signify a "changing sense of physicality that, in turn, influenced how one felt another's feelings" (ibidem). Nowadays, there are several meanings ascribed to the word empathy, that vary from the "ability to feel the emotions of others and understanding it from his/her perspective" (Judge & Vinayak, 2018), or as "a multifaceted concept which has been described as feeling what another person feels, imagining oneself in another's situation or imagining being the other person in their situation" (Downie & Jeffrey, 2016). In addition, this concept is used in medicine as a way to indicate "to feel what patients are feeling" (ibidem) or "as a capacity to understand the content of other people's minds and as the moral foundation of care" (ibidem).

What was then the early 20th century meaning of empathy - much related to the aesthetic experience - was later brought into the American environment to indicate a more compelling ability than sympathy, which was indicating more a sense of pity for another persons' pains.

Susan Lanzoni, in her book *Empathy: A History*, asks herself and the reader: "How is it that we sometimes move in synchrony with a dancer on the stage or an athlete running down a field? Do we at times lean to one side in an effort to alter the course of the bowling ball spinning down the lane? Do we feel the heaviness when observing a painted or digital image of someone lifting a weighty object?" (Lanzoni, 2018). The answer to these processes is empathy.

Going back to Yasmeen Godder and her research project which is based on this concept, she highlights the complexity of the word empathy:

> I feel like the more I work with it, the more I am confused. Because on the one hand, the idea of it is about curiosity, about being curious about someone else's emotions and staying open to look, experience and take someone else's emotions or state. But it's not necessarily about the fulfillment, it's not necessarily about the ability to really be able to do something [...]. And then how you practice empathy, how you work on being empathic to things that are different from us or that challenge us or that are not comfortable, so I think this is why I'm curious about this word. I'm curious about it because it's not just this nice thing, it's not just this. It's about finding this ability, but knowing that it's also hard, that it's also difficult.

Nowadays, empathy has almost replaced the use of the word sympathy, in its being "a deeper-going ability to engage with a variety of feelings and to inhabit, sometimes even bodily, the other's perspective" (Lanzoni, 2018). Since its translation, this concept has been used in several fields, from the psychological, to the sociological one, from politics, to advertising and marketing. But at the same time, precisely because of the spread in its usage, it has lost part of its value.

Among the people of our times to have used this word, there has been Barack Obama. He and his supporters started to see empathy as the feeling that gives the possibility to question oneself and put oneself in discussion. Not long before he used this term, a research by neuroscientists Antonio Damasio and Mary Helen Immordino-Yang was published, arguing that empathy was among the feelings that were deeply coded in the brain (Foster, 2011, p. 126). People make use of their feelings and bodies in order to answer to others' as well as to different social and psychological contexts (Foster, 2011, p. 127). But one issue that we are assisting is that, even if the brain is arranged to involve empathetically while relating to others, the new media and technologies could jeopardize its capability of making people be empathetic towards others.

In this context, the brain plays a fundamental role. In fact, among the other things, researchers have demonstrated how "brainwaves and heartbeats of live audiences start to sync as they become collectively immersed in live performance" (Walmsley, 2019, p. 77). When watching dance, viewers mirror the rhythms and actions of the performers onto themselves, thus leading to a neurological response, which is in turn linked to emotions. However, the way in which one sees and perceives the others, changes in relation to social and cultural factors and one's own experiences. Reason and Reynolds (2010) studied dance audiences and verified that several audience members think of themselves dancing while watching dance, some at the point of feeling themselves into the dancing body of the performers.

Yasmeen Godder, in this respect, thinks oftentimes about the value and the power that the meeting between audience and performers can bring. In this relationship that is created between people and dancers, a reciprocal experience is established:

> I started to understand that the performers are agents that have a particular specific information that could be also influenced by other information. I feel that it's also extending the spectrum of the performers being influenced [...]. If people laugh then I take it to a more comic place. If it's very quiet, there is a tension, and that informs me as a performer. But can this, the presence of these emotions, have a bigger place? Could it be more influential? So it's shifting the amount, you know, and not the percentage of influence [...]. Empathy is there in performance. People empathize with what they see. There are mirror neurons and people have the ability to imagine themselves in the bodies of people performing, so that exists anyways. It's more about acknowledging.

First studies on what happens in the brain of people watching other dancing, developed with the findings of mirror neurons in the 1990s: dance has then been revealed as an interesting field of research of this phenomenon.

These neurons activate more not only when an individual performs an action, but also when they watch someone performing an action. So "as we watch someone moving, motor circuits in the brain are activated that do not necessarily result in visible movement" (Foster, 2011, p. 123). Therefore, it seems that watching a dance, the viewer "is literally dancing along". The same happens in real life: if one sees someone walking on the brink of a cliff, the viewers of this action will automatically move their bodies in the direction of the "safe side". Having seen what empathy is, it could be finally possible to say that mirror neurons and empathy in the viewer are strictly linked, which is also the reason why neuroscientists have increasingly demonstrated, as anticipated in the first chapter, an interest towards empathy (Lanzoni, 2018).

After all these premises, it can be thus confirmed Ben Walmsley's (2019) hypothesis that "empathy and intersubjectivity emerge as physiological and biological as well as psychological and sociological phenomena—phenomena whose true cultural significance remain seriously undervalued" (p. 77).

3.7 Conclusions

What emerges from this case study is a reflection on live performance - which is related to the presence of the performers -, on the role of the space, of the audience

members and of empathy. Finally, and most importantly, how all these aspects can merge together and contribute to enhancing social wellbeing.

First of all, liveness has demonstrated, in this context, to be a key element. Even if, as seen also in the previous chapter, the virtual dimension has become an important space of exploration, especially due to Covid-19 pandemic, it has to be said that liveness still constitutes a fundamental aspect of the performing arts in the physical relationship established between the audience members, between the audience members and the performers, and with the space itself. Moreover, liveness allows a direct engagement and interaction, which in turn brings an intensified experience (Barker, 2013).

Liveness thus allows audiences to "seek different personal, social and aesthetic goals" (Walmsley, 2019, p. 67), by heightening the audience's emotional state. This last aspect is also related to the distance from the performers: the closer they are to the audience members, the higher will be their emotional involvement. Moreover, the nearer the encounter is between the audience and the performers, the greater should be in turn the last ones' responsibility in creating a safe space in which people can feel at ease when expressing their feelings. If this space, which is "internal" to the performative act, can contribute to an individual and intimate opening up, the artistic venue on the other hand, constitutes an opportunity for cultivating social capital and community engagement values.

Moving then to the notion of empathy and its several meanings, the main aim here was that of understanding if "practicing empathy" not only in a performing arts context, but in social life, can turn into a positive act of cultivating social wellbeing.

One data that has to be analyzed in the context of social wellbeing is that many people feel underestimated by others. De facto, "feelings of inferiority can [...] be destructive to individual and collective wellbeing" (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2019). Furthermore, feelings of inferiority have been demonstrated to be linked to an impaired mental health condition and wellbeing. Also because of increasing economic disparities that have grown even more with Covid-19 pandemic, feelings of inferiority have spread, adding to the already much diffused psychological concerns. On the other hand, being esteemed by other citizens came out in research as a major factor for living in a healthy community (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2019).

Feeling inferior to someone else implies that a hierarchy among the members of a society is created: when feeling to belong to the lowest part of the social hierarchy, stress and anxiety responses can emerge, thus bringing to the dangerous outcomes analyzed in the first chapter. Per contra, the possibility of expressing oneself entails "a liberation of the individual from social hierarchies [...] and an emphasis on wellbeing" (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2019).

Yasmeen Godder, together with Monica Gillette and Roberto Casarotto, follow this un-hierarchical approach in their projects, paralleling their knowledge and abilities to that of non-trained dancers or of people with different abilities. Thus, people are encouraged to deal with each other "in a more empathetic and inclusive way" (ibidem), because of the simple fact that human beings have a visceral need to be perceived as valuable in the eyes of others.

Empathy, however, is not always positive, as also expressed by Yasmeen Godder:

> I think empathy [...] it's not always this good feeling. Sometimes to empathize is, I don't know if to call it dangerous even […]. I was also reading this interesting research from a woman who has sent it to me, about these Palestinian-Arab doctors from Israel who were living in Israel and went to volunteer in Greece for the ships that were coming from Siria to help the refugees. And the research was about empathy: they wanted to help these refugees because they could empathize with them through their identity and by feeling a connection to their situation, but that created a lot of emotional difficulty, stress and trauma, and this was a lot about how empathy could be also traumatizing.

Research has in fact demonstrated that empathy can also lead to a negative internalization of others' emotions, at the point that this gloomy feeling would reverberate in oneself, thus negatively impacting one's own wellbeing. Because of this, researchers have started to distinguish between positive and negative empathy (Judge & Vinayak, 2018). Positive empathy resulted, on the other hand, in a positive outcome for psychological wellbeing because "taking others' perspective indicates doing away with egoistic perspective of one's own self and therefore helps in reduction of selfish and impulsive behavior" (ibidem). In addition, positive empathy would help to develop emotional aspects and social abilities (ibidem). From this, it is thus possible to understand how empathy could also contribute to enhancing

social wellbeing, being it related not only to oneself, but to actions directed towards others.

To conclude, the *Practicing Empathy* project by Yasmeen Godder altogether could serve as a way to educate people about empathy, letting individuals confront themselves with both positive and negative aspects of this multilayered concept which is empathy. Interesting to say in this context is that, talking with two of the audience members who took part in *Practicing Empathy #2by2*, it emerged that the performance allowed them to better understand where their individual limit was beginning and where they had to stop in order to let the other person commence, because the contact that they established when working together gave them the possibility to listen to oneself while at the same time listening to the other. I would argue that this aspect of the performance opens up an interesting reflection about the possibility to cultivate healthier relationships in society at large.

Yet, future and further studies are needed in both the context of audience engagement in the performing arts and in the exercise of empathy as a way to foster individual and social wellbeing.

Chapter 4

ARGENTINIAN SURVIVORS TO MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

4.1 The context

The research carried out until now has seen as central the role of communities and of the audience members in the performance context. It has been indeed highlighted how wellbeing has to be intended, as discussed in the initial part of this thesis, as a very social concept. However, a debate on single subjects and individuals is fundamental in order to get a comprehensive view on the concept of wellbeing.
For this reason, the last chapter discusses the issue of individual healing after a traumatic experience, and in particular of healing through dance. Moreover, precisely because of the fact that dance is associated by many anthropologists to a ritualistic form, the concept of healing rituals is addressed.
When talking about traumatic experiences, one has to deal with the realm of the "psychosocial", which has been defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as "the intimate relationship between psychological and social factors" (UNHCR, 1998, p. 13). If traumatic events were once considered sporadic, nowadays it is acknowledged that millions of people are subjected to traumatic experiences, from accidents to sexual violence and abuse, to war and torture. One of the worst violations of human beings and their rights is precisely torture.
The case addressed in this chapter concerns specifically psychological and social circumstances. It regards the survivors of the military dictatorship in Argentina, which took place between 1976 and 1983, and caused the disappearance of 30.000 people, while only few others survived. The last ones still bring with them traumatic memories.

Having initially been one of the most advanced countries of Southern America in terms of social integration and economic prosperity, Argentina went, from around 1930, through a long period of financial bankruptcy, deindustrialization, and production crisis. This led in turn to the impoverishment of a broad social group, with its consequent exclusion from societal life (Novaro, 2015). This crisis of around

40 years had a repercussion on the entire civil and political system, which ended up in a coup d'état on March 24, 1976. On that day, the Argentinean armed forces broke into the Casa Rosada - the seat of the Argentinean government - removed President Isabel Martínez de Perón from office and took power (https://www.repubblica.it/). Afterwards, they stated that they did this in order to "remedy to 40 years, or perhaps more, of conflict and failure", and to guarantee the order of the nation (Novaro, 2015, p. 9). From that day and until October 30, 1983, a seven years military regime, called "Process of National reorganization" began, practicing a policy based on terror (https://abuelas.org.ar/).

During these seven years, people who were opposing the dictatorship were repressed by different military groups after having received a free pass from the police to operate in a specific area. There, the targeted people were kidnapped either in their homes, or in public spaces, at work, or when studying, mostly during the night (CONADEP, 1984, cited in http://documenti.camera.it/). They were then taken to the centres of clandestine detention (CDC) where they were systematically subjected to tortures in order to acquire information. Still, tortures often continued even afterwards, during the course of the detention (https://www.sciencespo.fr/). 365 of the secret prisons that had been set up by the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the Federal Police during that period were located in Buenos Aires.

But who were the victims of this regime of terror?

Most of them were workers, but also university and high school students, professionals, employees and teachers. They were both men and women, and they were seen as "subversive" not because they were involved in armed struggles, but rather because they were not in favor of the economic and political program of the dictatorship (Memoria del Buio, 2008).

Those who disapproved the regime, were subjected to "arbitrary detentions, executions, forced exile, torture, rape and sexual violence, theft of property; attacks on civil, political and trade union freedoms; censorship, persecution of all kinds" (https://cmila.cancilleria.gob.ar/it/).

The history of the Argentinian facts is strictly related to issues of human rights violation of the Argentine civil population. In this regard, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, on its report about the violation of human rights in Argentina, explained the cruelty of the detention, stating that:

> A high percentage of the interviewees [...] have been subjected to torture [...] [and state] that they are subjected to sanctions [...] for completely trivial reasons, for example embroidering inside the cell or being found in possession of fruit peels, such as tangerine, which according to the prison authorities are used to make fermented drinks. (Memoria del Buio, 2008, p. XX)

Many human rights organizations have conducted research all over the world, to find the members of the families that had disappeared. Among these, the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* - a group of mothers of the disappeared people - reunited in April 1977 in order to receive some news from the government about their sons and daughters. After a few months, in October, also the grandmothers started to look for their grandchildren and thus the movement *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* came to light. These groups of women were aware of the fact that their daughters and nephews had been imprisoned while pregnant and had been assassinated after the childbirth. At the same time, the children, deprived of their identity, had been appropriated by the militaries and officers of the detention centres (Memoria del Buio, 2008).

After the re-establishment of the democracy in the end of 1983, Argentina was drowning in debts and had fallen in a deindustrialization process (Castilla et al., 2021). In that period, several organizations working in the human rights field, such as the National Commission for the Right to Identity, started to search for the disappeared people, as well as their sons and daughters.

Together with the several violations to the freedom of many Argentinians, hospitals and research centres for mental health had been destroyed or shut down during the period of the dictatorship, along with degree programs and the abduction and banishment of professionals of the field. Due to the increasing need for support and cure, and the lack of centres in charge, some experienced therapists felt the duty to provide survivors or fugitives for help, creating what is nowadays known as the field of "Mental Health and Human Rights," "Political Trauma," and "Psychosocial Effects of State Terror" (Castilla et al., 2021, p. 76). Besides, this community of people working under constant threat, needed to rethink their therapeutic processes, because they were not dealing with a psychopathological condition, but rather with

the consequences of a socio-political trauma. Thus, they started to talk about "psychic suffering", instead of psychic pathologies (Castilla et al., 2021, pp. 76-77).
In this context, the dancer and therapist Maralia Reca has carried out a research about the healing process of the survivors of the Argentine military dictatorship through dance movement therapy. In the following paragraphs, topics addressed in the previous chapter will come to the surface, thus highlighting the several points of contact with the previous case studies that could seem - at first sight - to diverge from the one presented here.

4.2 Survivors, torture and trauma

A survivor is a person that has found him or herself under threat and in a situation of risk for his or her life: under these circumstances, the brain and the body activate an answer in order to escape, not through a planned and weighted series of actions, but rather through the activation, in their bodies, of the survival instinct (Fisher, 2021). The survival instinct is fundamental in a situation of danger: when the amygdala, the structure of the emotional memory, detects an unsafe situation, it activates the sympathetic nervous system, which in turn sends a warning sign to the hypothalamus. This stimulates the release of adrenaline, which prepares the body to fight or flight (Fisher, 2021). Adrenaline increases the heart rate, which consequently sends more oxygen to the muscles; at the same time, it deactivates the non-essential systems, together with the prefrontal cortex, which constitutes the "thinking brain". This is also the reason why, after having lived traumatic experiences, people are often no longer able to narrate them.
During the Argentinian military dictatorship, precisely because of the activation of the survival instinct, some people managed to escape and/or survive to the tortures perpetrated by the armed force.
Torture has been defined by Castilla et al. (2021) as:

> [...] Any act in which severe pain or suffering (physical or mental) is inflicted on a person in order to obtain information or a confession from him or a third party, to punish him for an act he has committed or is expected to commit, intimidate or coerce, that person or others for any reason, on the basis of any kind of discrimination. (p. 80)

However, the Center for Legal and Social Studies - CELS (cited in Castilla et al.) - states how torture is "primarily a matter of changing the organization of psychic representations" (pp. 80-81), thus leading to a huge psychic damage, while the act of gaining information can be considered only a minor one. Torture, even if generally universally doomed, is still used in many countries in the world for political reasons. There, torturers see themselves as homeland servants who maintain order and avoid higher damage (Pakman, 2018, cited in Pakman & Sluzki, 2021). Trying to refrain any possibility of rationale for exercising torture, also several human rights organizations all over the world have tried to give an explicit interpretation of what torture is and how it is exercised, thereby stressing how torture acts are never acceptable (Pakman & Sluzki, 2021, p. 131). However, torture acts end up being justified by some media - possibly in accordance with the perpetrators - as well as by the victims themselves, who accept the twisted vision of the torturer as true and correct. As a consequence, victims build a sense of guilt in themselves "ending up believing that they have somehow contributed to their own victimization" (Sluzki, 1993, cited in Pakman & Sluzki, 2021, p. 131).

After having suffered tortures, the survivors and those around them enter a long period of darkness (Pakman & Sluzki, 2021). This takes place because, Pakman and Sluzki (2021) state, "the violation of some basic fundamental and arguably universal principles of human existence that characterizes torture" (p. 129) generates durable wounds both on the body and the memory. This hinders "the right to a quality of daily life, distorting identities, actions, and the ability to establish relationships of trust and mutual comfort" (p. 129). Therefore, once endured in torture, individuals lose the sense of who they are and of their personality, living with a compromised awareness of the reality and being unable to express through words the lived experience (Pakman & Sluzki, 2021).

In addition, everything is amplified by the fact that the victims feel far from the others who have not lived such experiences, thus heightening their isolation (Pakman & Sluzki, 2021). It is in these circumstances that social capital finally breaks, and with it the possibility of the person to live again a "normal" life in his or her community and society at large.

What can also happen is that people who surround those who have suffered from torture - and trauma more in general - are led to behave in an empathetic way, manifesting their support to the horrific facts to which the victim has been subjected. Still, the traumatized subjects do not feel the warmth of that act of proximity, thinking that those who have not undergone the same episodes, cannot know how they really feel (Pakman & Sluzki, 2021). This issue ends up in creating an obstacle even during the therapies. This is the reason why the therapeutic process, in these cases, is gradual and demanding, both for the patient and the therapist. The therapy takes place, Reca (n.d.) states, through a "process of communication between a therapist (who has been trained to evaluate and help bring about change) and a patient" (p. 9). This aims at understanding and adjusting some of the attitudes of the patient in order to improve his or her life quality and, consequently, his or her wellbeing.

Traumatic experiences such as torture have a huge impact on the body and on the brain, and their effects are manifested in multiple ways via acute physical, perceptual and emotional response. The reason why a trauma is defined as a legacy is that it brings with it effects that last for many weeks, months or years. This happens because the reactions to the traumatic events, called "implicit memories", constantly bring to the surface the traumatic experience that has been lived, hence leading to a mental and body feedback that can take place sometimes even more times each day (Fisher, 2021).

Among the other bodily manifestations of traumatic events are difficulties in originating simple movements and extreme strain in the body, which can in turn reflect on the social interactions with others and on one's own wellbeing (North, 1975, cited in Gray, 2001). Moreover, this condition leads to a status of anxiety and muscular tension (Gray, 2001).

Among the consequences related to trauma at the social level, is the loss of trust in human beings, the concern of being vulnerable, the fear of getting addicted to substances, the apprehension for exposing oneself and a concern for trying to avoid sadness and anger (Fisher, 2021). All these, as easily understandable, are forms of emotions or sensations: as Ogden, Minon and Pain (2006, cited in Fisher, 2021) highlight, trauma is indeed more likely to be remembered in the form of a sensorial

element, rather than through words. This is the reason why the body has come to be more central, even in therapies.

The research with traumatic experiences and memories has evolved in the last years, arriving to understand the further repercussion of the trauma and how to deal with it by means of a new modus operandi, which should be less overwhelming for the patients and should lead to a chance of empowerment for the patient (Fisher, 2021). This change in dealing with the traumatic experiences has seen as protagonists not only the therapists, but the survivors as well (ibidem).

4.3 Healing through the body: Dance Movement Therapy

Until quite recently, it has been thought that the best way to make people re-elaborate their traumatic experiences was by means of the words and the story of what had happened to them. However, precisely the victims have made the therapists realize that exposing their stories was not of relief for them, nor was it the right way to heal (Fisher, 2021).

In the healing process, a key aspect is also covered by emotions. They are, Berger (1992) specifies, "[...] related to visceral action and visceral action to outward movement" (p. 100). In the previous chapters it has been seen how emotions are related to the brain activity and how this can influence people's mental states. Survivors from traumatic experiences are often inundated by a broad range of emotions: as a consequence, because of their difficulty to handle them, they become almost insensitive (Fisher, 2021). Feeling this wide amount of emotions is the cause of a disturbing and re-traumatizing experience which gets the patients away from the curative process. Moreover, quite frequently people are not able to remember their stories or, while narrating them during the therapeutic encounters, they move with their mind to another place, losing their presence and even forgetting to be with the therapist. Dealing with the memories of the painful events only through words has thus been revealed as being difficult and inappropriate in various contexts and for several reasons.

Around the 1990s, therapist Judith Herman, together with others working in the field, noticed how the therapy carried out until that moment was leading to a major

pain for the patients or a difficulty in going back to everyday life (Fisher, 2021). They thus understood that survivors should have been actively part of the healing process, becoming themselves collaborators of the therapists (Fisher, 2021). This, in contrast with the fact that victims were and are systematically deprived of their own choices and reaction possibilities.

The activity of the patients in the healing process can therefore be manifested either through an acknowledgement and education of what the torture has caused them at a psychological level (thus dealing with psychoeucation) or, as of interest in this chapter, in the body movement (moving to the topic of dance movement therapy). In this process, however, adequate attention should be put on the patient's ability and willingness to collaborate.

When trying to remember a traumatic memory, Van der Kolk (1995, cited in Fisher, 2021, p. 24) has demonstrated how the prefrontal cortex is switched off, and in particular that areas that are responsible for memory and verbal expression, while the non-verbal areas of the brain - the limbic system and the amygdala - become more active. As anticipated above, this means that those people who have been subjected to traumatic experiences throughout their lives, lose the ability of expressing themselves through words, while remaining still able to remember the events in a physical and emotional way. These “sensorial” memories of what lasts in the bodies after a traumatic event, are no more related to the past as in the case of words. They are rather felt as being present (Fisher, 2021).

Survivors to tortures are people who have been obliged to do something they did not want: for this reason, the therapists always have to remember that the patients do not have to be forced to do anything. For the same purpose, therapists are encouraged to deal with the patients by using positive empathy - concept explored in the previous chapter - to establish a “caring and productive doctor-patient relationship” (Lanzoni, 2018). Moreover, when dealing with torture survivors, the relationship between mind and body has to be taken into account. The body is in fact, as reminded by Scarry (1985, cited in Callaghan, 1993, p. 417), “the place of creation out of which we build the world and invest it with meaning”. At the same time, Pontremoli (2015) underlines, it becomes the place of self-knowledge and mutual communication, combining “verbal elements, facial and bodily expressions, gestures and movements in space” (p. 109). However, after torture the ability of

expressing oneself by means of words is reduced to an infantile state (Callaghan, 1993), with the body becoming an extension of the self in the world: body turns itself in the cause of pain. Callaghan (1993) reminds how working with it and with movement thus allows survivors to create and find a space to "re-own the body and reinvest it and the world with meaning" (p. 417).

In this context, Dance Movement Therapy (from now DMT), also known as Dance Movement Psychotherapy or Movement Therapy, can offer one of the instruments to address healing processes. Emerged after WWII, in a period in which Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was also theorized, DMT is defined by the Association for Dance Movement Psychotherapy as "a relational process in which client[s] and therapist engage creatively using body movement and dance, as well as verbal and non-verbal reflection […][to assist] the integration of emotional, cognitive, physical, social and spiritual aspects of self" (https://admp.org.uk/).

Another definition is that given by the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA), which describes "dance/movement therapy as the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration of the individual" (https://www.adta.org/). Dance Movement Therapy is not only about using dance in a practice of healing from traumatic experiences, but it is rather a definite approach, a discipline through which, as Pontremoli (2015) explains, practicing and encouraging "physical, emotional, cognitive and psychosocial integration of the individual, as well as to improve the quality of life of the person" (pp. 112-113).

DMT usually takes place by means of improvisational processes in order to "develop awareness of and with the body" (Csordas, 1993, cited in Tantia, 2012, cited in Acarón, 2017, p. 221), through which the person involved can represent his or her subconscious (Singer, 2017). Rudolf Laban, one of the most influencing figures in this field, proposed that expressing oneself through dance, it is indeed possible to convey meanings related to the inner self - namely, the subconscious or unconscious dimension, which comprises dreams, memories, emotions and associations -, that could be difficult to be manifested through other forms of communication (Singer, 2017).

Working with space and body, with rhythm and movement, it is possible to re-find balance and work on gesture, on coordination and synchronization, meaning the

psychomotor activity. With DMT it is thus possible to work on a body-mind level, trying to re-establish the body meaning given by the combination of movement and emotions. Thus, Pontremoli (2015) points out that individuals "act in a transitional space, ritualizing experiences (use of the body memory) and contributing, in this way, to the construction of identity" (p. 113). The importance of a body-mind continuity is also expressed by Callaghan (1993) where she designate torture experience as a phenomenon in which the physical and the psychological aspects cannot be detached (Gray, 2001).

Among the first to have identified dance movement as an educational and transformational experience, even before a creative one, are Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) and Martha Graham (1894-1991). The real father of DMT can be however considered the Hungarian eclectic choreographer Rudolf Laban (1879-1958). He focused his attention both on the individual who, in his/her being a human being, is in him/herself a dancer; and on the community-scale dimension, thus going beyond the single individual and opening up to the group realm (Pontremoli, 2015). Stating that "the changes in the psyche do not occur simply at an individual level, [...] but also at a collective level", Laban underlined the value of building relations "with the culture, with the social society, not only with a group of people but with different things which are culturally important" (Singer, 2017, p. 640).

Other names that have contributed to the development of this practice are Marian Chace (1896-1970), Trudi Schoop (1904-1999) and Mary Stark Whitehouse (1911-1979). However, the contemporary and most widely spread techniques are Herns Duplan's Expression Primitive, the Dacemovement Therapy by the American Dance Therapy Association and Maria Fux's Dancetherapy (Pontremoli, 2015).

This last is of particular interest in this context, being Maria Fux an Argentinian dancer formed with Martha Graham in New York. For her, dance is not only about technique, but rather a constantly developing experience. Moreover, recalling Laban's theory, she also postulates that dance has the objective to express an internal side of individuals, in order to communicate it to the outside, and looking for a meeting with real life.

Her method concerns the use of rhythm to deal with space and as a tool to address emotional conditions, the use of music, of "mother words" - words which enclose in

themselves a potential meaning of the movement - and of creative stimuli which suggest the formulation of a movement (Pontremoli, 2015).

Nonetheless, her method is not strictly related to a therapeutic process, but rather with a form of prevention. As highlighted by Persico (2006, cited in Pontremoli, 2015, p. 114), it places in fact the individual of every age and psycho-physical status in the condition of exercising "the maximum possible of its resources, bypassing the bodily and physical limitations [...]".

Her method, however, was not the same used starting from 1973 in Argentina and developed afterwards with the victims of the tortures of the military dictatorship, because of the lack in the usage of a psychological and psychotherapeutic scheme (Reca, n.d.).

During the 70's, as previously mentioned, Argentina went through a period of social repression which was born out of conflicts between the left and the right wings of politics. With the purpose of restoring public order, the Armed Forces made a coup d'état in 1976, which then, through a series of horrific actions, led to the violation of the human rights of the political opponents. Dancer and dance/movement therapist Maralia Reca has illustrated, with her year-long research, how DMT has served in "reconstructing the world of survivors of torture" due to socio-political circumstances.

It has been observed how torture gives birth to a nervous system disorder, with the consequent sensation of the "explosion of the self" (Reca, n.d., p. 13) and how DMT can contribute to re-establish both the persons themselves and their relationships with the outer world (ibidem). Bettelheim (1981, cited in Reca, n.d.) expressed how traumatic events caused by political situations lead to the most acute stress condition. Being trauma interrelated to the socio-political context, it means to address one's own psychological and physical damages to the social relations and context of which one is part. It has been already examined how people who have suffered from tortures struggle even more in relating to others. Being the body the means through which people make experience of the others and of society at large, it becomes central to the traumatic discourse (Reca, n.d.). Reca argues that these kinds of trauma actually go beyond PTSD; also Martin Barò (1990) and Madariaga (2002) address the problematic of defining them in terms of PTSD (Barò, 1990,

Madariaga, 2002, cited in Reca, 2017). They can rather be considered as "psychosocial trauma".

In this context, Reca refers to one case emerged during 1977-78 in particular, that of Lola (a fictional name used for the patient due to privacy issues), a person who suffered from torture and violence perpetrated by the Argentinan government.

Psychosocial trauma resulted, as will be seen in this case analyzed by the Dance Movement therapist, in loss of balance, personal limitations and problematic boundaries and it has seen an improvement by means of DMT.

4.4 The case of Lola

The story of Lola is that of a survivor of the tortures perpetrated during the period of the Argentinean dictatorship. Maralia Reca reported how, thanks to DMT, she managed to heal most of her inner wounds deriving from the undergone experience.

Lola had been arrested and transported to a prison located in the north of the country. There, when she was not being tortured, she spent her time painting. In order not to be discovered, she used to destroy her works by eating them, but in spite of this, she believed that painting gave her the chance to survive.

During the first meeting with the therapist Maralia Reca, whose number she had gotten from some acquaintances, silence dominated. Upon arriving at the office, Lola began to tremble, and the therapist received her in the arms to calm her down. Lola's traumatic experience had compromised her relationship with the space, that is the reason why, during the first few encounters, she could not stand in the center of the room, but always to the sides. An intolerable amount of feelings arising from her experience distressed her: this, as seen above, is very common in survivors of traumatic experiences, where an excessive amount of emotions can become overwhelming.

The therapeutic process was therefore carried out first by making Lola understand that she was in a safe space, until she herself began to move towards the center of the room (Reca, 2017).

Through DMT, Lola has been able to regain confidence in herself and in the space around her; to not perceive herself as fragmented, but rather as a whole, giving her the sense of unity she had lost; she also matured in her relationship with others, returning to trust them. In addition, she became stronger, while before the pain pervaded her, and her skin had become too sensitive. The movement used during the course of the therapy was not mechanical, but rather related to emotional conditions. Working with rhythm, she was able to regain a spatial-temporal organization, manifesting her sentimentality, which in turn allowed her to establish a conversation of movements with the therapist. The culmination of this work can be identified as a true ritual, as also observed by the therapist herself, as Reca (2017, p. 654) underlines:

> In one session, in the middle of Lola working with patterns of movements that were fairly simple and some of them joyful, she asked for several blankets and soft music. She piled the quilts on top of each other until the structure was reliable, and then began to slide between them, entering through one side and, with a swimming-like movement, appearing on the other side, repeating the action again and again until she said that she had set up the dance of her martyrdom.

What emerges from this case study and the healing process through which Lola went, is that if words do not allow the processing of emotions or memories deriving from the traumatic experiences, movement can. Indeed, already in 1929, Janet (cited in Reca, n.d., p. 9) pointed out how "corporeality constitutes the basic quality of existence".

Moreover, Reca (2017) underlines, "mind and body are two facets or two ways of conceptualizing this single information system" which is life, deriving from the fact that body and mind give birth to a reciprocal relation in which the first influences the second and vice versa (p. 649). This topic is also strictly related to the concept of kinaesthetic empathy. The term *kinesthesia* derives from the Greek *kine* (movement) and *aesthesis* (sensation), and it first concerned the muscular sensation of moving (Foster, 2011). First coined in 1880 because of an increasing broad research on nerve sensors in muscles, the concept has been revised many times arriving, in the 20th century, to be replaced in the neurological field by the concept of proprioception (Foster, 2011). However, dancers and choreographers have

continued to work around the importance of kinaesthesia, referring it to the experience lived by people watching dance and connecting it more to the emotional side (ibidem).

With the finding of mirror neurons, the concept of kinaesthesia has been then associated with that of empathy. Kinaesthetic empathy, Reason and Reynolds (2012, cited in https://journals.openedition.org/cps/446) remember, "refers to the ability to experience empathy merely by observing the movements of another human being". Finally, kinaesthetic empathy is also developed in the relationship between the patient and the therapist, where, Reca (2017) specifies, "the therapist becomes a mirror or a witness reflecting the other person's non-verbal expression" (p. 649).

4.5 Healing rituals

The words *healing* and *ritual* have come to the surface more times in this chapter. It will be thus discussed if it could be possible to find some commonalities between the healing processes carried out by means of Dance Movement Therapy and healing rituals practiced in various cultures around the world. In fact, Gray (2001) discusses, "the crosscultural origins of DMT in the rituals and healing practices of other cultures has relevance for the treatment of torture survivors internationally" (p. 34). Several research in the performing arts field are of the idea that art in general constitutes a "quintessential human ritual" (Walmsley, 2019, p. 41). The ritual can be intended as "an ordering expression of the world [...] which is repeated in order to reinforce that order" (Cascetta, 1990, cited in Pontremoli, 2015, p. 21) and "a form of expressive action" (Quack & Sax, 2010, p. 5). In a situation of social crisis that compromises the social interactions among the members of a society, rituals allow social restoration.

Some of the characteristics of rituals can actually be found in the dance movement therapy improvisation process, which for example characterized Lola's therapy. Rituals have in fact, states Pontremoli (2015), "an active function, never sclerotic, formal or conventional; it has the power to operate creative modifications on itself and to have a transformative function. Ritual always moves from change, conflict or transformation" (p. 22). Rituals are expressed through culturally determined

symbols, which need to be studied in order to be understood correctly. This is what also happens with DMT, where the therapist has to interpret both the culturally determined and the universal body language symbols of the patient.

Talking about performance studies, Turner is considered one of the first to have underlined the ritualistic essence of performance. He connected it to acts of arousal and of hypertrophy, which allow an intense emotional activity and eventually lead to a transformation of the individuals (Turner, 1982, cited in Walmsley, 2019). His notions have then been acknowledged by biometric, psychobiological and neurobiological research. For this reason, Turner may have preceded and influenced subsequent studies which deal with the emotional, spiritual and physiological repercussions of the performing arts on audiences (Walmsley, 2013). In this case however, as for Barbara Ehrenreich (2007, cited in Walmsley, 2019), performing arts are seen as a communal, rather than an individual ritual. This discourse lies in the theoretical divide between phenomenologists and anthropologists. As Walmsley (2019) highlighted, if the firsts have demonstrated that the Self "can never be at one with or possess the Other", anthropologists on the other hand have presented "ritual practices as a communal rite" (p. 40). Seen from this perspective, the healing of Lola through DMT, precisely because of its individualistic nature, could be considered as a ritual of healing from a phenomenological point of view.

Talking about performance and healing, Self-Revelatory performances have to be discussed as well. They are a form of drama therapy, in which a performer gives birth to a piece from his or her life concerns, which can derive from either present or past experiences, but that will have a healing effect on the present life of the performer (Emunah, 2015). However, scholars seem to agree that drama therapy - another name for Self-revelatory performance - takes place in groups and is usually witnessed by an audience.

On the other hand, also DMT can give birth to pieces which are then performed in front of an audience. In therapeutic performances used in DMT, "performance expectation [...] become a ritual" (Acarón, 2017, p. 225). Nonetheless, as in the case of DMT, the healing process occurs in the precise moment in which the life material is re-elaborated and "brought outside". Healing refers to recovery of both social and individual health. In the therapeutic process, this translates in the sharing of the

personal experience by the side of the inmate and that of the qualified therapist (Womack, 2010).

Going back to the notion of ritual, it has been associated by anthropologists such as Malinowsky to either religious or magical phenomena, the second having more practical purposes than the first. Still, “the goal of the ritual is "healing", which in both cases is understood to reduce symptoms of illness, as well fostering a sense of wellbeing and harmony” (Quack & Sax, 2010, p. 7). This is surely one of the goals of DMT as well.

However, Samuel (2005, cited in Quack & Sax, 2010) states how healing rituals could be dealing only with minor psychological disorders. This is not the case with the therapeutic process carried out with DMT. On the other hand, as Samuel (2005, cited in Quack & Sax, 2010) highlights, healing rituals overcome the body-mind dualism to work on the entire individual system as a whole , which finds again a point of contact with the theory and practice expressed by DMT. In this regard, Samuel talks about the "healing narrative," meaning that human beings experience “themselves in "narratives" that form "body-images" which are neither psychological nor physical but both at the same time” (ibidem). It is thus possible to see how the body comes to be central both in healing rituals and in DMT.

Even if there can be found various points of contact between healing rituals and DMT, it has to be clarified that DMT does not deal with religious, nor with magical aspects. Moreover, healing rituals better fulfill their task when in a community context. This is because rituals lead individuals to agree with a system of beliefs, bringing communities to socialize in a “more acceptable mode of behavior that community tolerates or accepts” (Mann, 1996, p. 2).

As previously seen, DMT can also take place in groups, but it was not the contingency of the case presented here. Lola was subjected to an individual therapeutic process. Still, her ritualistic act during the therapeutic process can find a point of contact with ritual gestures, which, Alexander (1991) affirms, “constitute a class of mediating actions which transform the style and values of everyday action, thereby becoming the very ground of action itself” (p. 77). It is by means of her ritual-like action that, going beyond her life routine, Lola has had the possibility to heal and to transform her everyday life (Alexander, 1991).

4.6 Conclusions

Wellbeing is strictly connected to the possibility of building communities and, with it, relationships among people. This has been seen in the beginning of the thesis when talking about social capital. Cultural actions can enhance relations among subjects, but there is another step to do before: that of building, or better said "rebuild", the life of people who have suffered from traumatic experiences. In the particular case of the Argentine military dictatorship, the act of making people disappear was also aimed at eradicating families and social ties, also damaging the new and future generations (Castilla et al., 2021). Moreover, Singer (2017) reminds, "social interactions are the foundation from which a person develops" (p. 640). Nowadays, thousands of people have experienced traumatic experiences: when going through a therapeutic process, therapists have to take into account the background of the single individuals as well as the cultural environment in which they live or have lived. Every traumatic experience thus has to be addressed differently.

However, talking about the therapeutic approach with which this can be faced, DMT has revealed being a good substitute for other forms of therapies. This is because oftentimes, survivors are not able to tell their experiences through words, while dance, other than being a powerful means of communication, "provide[s] insight into the values and structures within a particular society" (Singer, 2017, p. 633). Dance Movement Therapy has demonstrated to be effective in improve people's wellbeing from many perspectives: in the control of the body in the space; in the handling of time and rhythm; in the relationship with others; in understanding the other's movement by means of kinesthetic empathy (Chaiklin, Lohn & Sandel, 1993 cited in Reca, n.d., p. 10).

It is thus possible to say that DMT reveals positive effects both when practiced with one individual, but also when practiced in groups, where the latter can be efficacious in enhancing self esteem and the representation of one's own image in the others (Pontremoli, 2015). Moreover, it has been observed how DMT practices, if realized in front of others, can be efficacious not only for those performing, but for the audience as well (Heber, 1993, cited in Graff Low & Ritter, 1996).

To conclude, it could be said that dance has had therapeutic purposes for centuries. Generally used in healing contexts, it was likewise practiced "to influence fertility, birth, sickness and death" (Kleinfeld, Lebed & Molinaro, 1986, cited in Graff Low & Ritter, 1996). Being linked to creative aspects, dance can foster an emotional response, which is exactly at the theoretical foundation of Dance Movement Therapy. DMT sees in fact, as explained by Graff Low and Ritter (1996), the integration of "emotional, spiritual and cognitive selves with the environment", finding in this some points of contact with the healing rituals practiced in various parts of the world (p. 249).

Still Dulicai and Goodill (2007, cited in Reca, n.d.), express the necessity to integrate movements with words, in order to get full sense out of the movements of the patients, in a more exhaustive way.

However, the process of dealing with the body can also trigger memories, that at times could reveal being even more dangerous, being the body the direct means through which people experience reality which, in turn, mirrors the experience of torture (Callaghan, 1993). This implies that it is important to take particular care when working with people subjected to traumatic experiences and to give them support. Here, the role of dancer and choreographer is put aside, in order to let that of the therapist come to the fore. In this context, "judgment is suspended, aesthetics become secondary, and the patient/client's movement repertoire becomes the focus" (Schmais, 1970, cited in Acarón, 2017, p. 221). This recalls Monica Gillette's consideration about the importance of giving voice to the other, and not only in the context of a specifically therapeutic process:

> "[...] In the *Migrant bodies - moving borders* project, the very first residency was in Bassano and four dance artists went into I think "habit mode". [...] But within a couple of days there was this shock feeling and this look of "Wait a minute, we have totally disregarded the dance that is living inside all these humans in front of us". So we had a full shift in our approach [...], which was that everything had to be understood as encounters and sharing practices. [...] And so we had to meet and acknowledge a very powerful level of what it means to share a practice and to create a reciprocal environment. A reciprocal environment to me really enforces me individually and I hope it brings people in the room to speak, act, think and listen from a deeper personal level in relation to everyone else in the room as well. So it's personal in relation to the social.

The most important point of contact between the words of Moniga Gillette and the topics addressed in this chapter, is the theme of personal in relation to the social, of reciprocity. This is key: individual and social aspects intersect themselves. In order to reach social and community wellbeing it is important to work on both of them. Individuality is key to building sociality, but at the same time sociality is fundamental to improve an individual's social capital and wellbeing.

CONCLUSIONS

So, returning to the initial research question: can the performing arts, and dance in particular, stimulate physical, cognitive, and creative processes, thereby promoting the wellbeing of individuals and communities?
In an attempt to answer this question, I have brought to light several issues, interweaving them together.

In particular, the first chapter has been dedicated to an in-depth examination of concepts such as wellbeing, social capital and cultural welfare.
It has emerged that the concept of wellbeing cannot be considered solely linked to good physical and psychological health and to the economic wealth of individuals, although these spheres play a fundamental role. Wellbeing is in fact closely related to and dependent on the social context and interactions between people, which can in turn impact on the health and wellbeing of the individuals.
However, the importance of subjective wellbeing must be taken into account: in every human being, physical and psychological wellbeing are strictly linked, as an alteration of the first can result in a damage of the other and vice versa. In this regard, it has been seen how stress and depression are among the factors that have the greatest impact on the body. These considerations thus confirm the definition given in 1948 by the WHO, according to which the concept of health is associated with physical, psychological, but also social wellbeing.
However, the definition of wellbeing still seems to be very broad and, in some cases, blurred. Indeed, it includes several dimensions, as emerged from the interviews with professionals active in the performing arts field such as Roberto Casarotto and Monica Gillette. For Casarotto, wellbeing consists of a continuous process and is related to three "bodies", namely the physical, spiritual and collective ones, which are in constant dialogue with each other. For Monica Gillette, though, it is about the possibility to bring one's own self and one's own body into society, cultivating the capacity of encountering others.
However, some critiques to the concept of wellbeing have emerged: in fact, this concept can happen to be addressed to people who already benefit from a privileged condition. This brings in turn to an exclusion of a large portion of the population,

whose concerns are based on economic and material problems, a condition that has been further exacerbated by the pandemic.

I would conclude by saying that wellbeing should be directed towards all individuals, independently of their status or physical, psychological and economic condition, guaranteeing everyone a higher quality of life and acting as a complement, rather than a substitute, for State material support.

The environment in which one lives, together with the social networks and relationships developed in it, have a strong impact on one's own wellbeing. These elements are part of what sociologists in the early 20th century described as social capital, another topic which has been deepened in the first chapter. Much of the literature discusses how social connections do in fact have an impact on people's life, where the construction of social capital results in the improvement of the communities members' living conditions. It has in fact been discussed how the groups of people that share a higher social capital, are also those with a greater widespread wellbeing among its individuals. For this reason, moments of encounter between members of the community, made possible by cultural initiatives that can serve to build social capital, can ultimately foster individual and social wellbeing. Since artistic participation and artistic initiatives have demonstrated being able to promote interconnections between social groups, they can help to break down social barriers, stimulate emotions and contribute to reducing physical and mental issues. In this regard, the validity of artistic interventions has also been recently accredited by the WHO. Yet it is not so simple, and I will soon explain why.

It has finally been pointed out that such initiatives, to be effective, need to be adapted to the context in which and for which they are developed.

The social impact of culture flows then into the concept of cultural welfare, which sees a collaboration and partnership between several realities, highlighting also in this case the social impact of the arts. It has been discussed how welfare, a concept which was first related to the most fragile groups of people, has now seen a development in its desire to empower everyone. Here, empower means that individuals and communities "acquire power" to develop and pursue a positive transformation.

Cultural welfare thus becomes a political and economic tool, through which it is possible to promote places and territories, while cultural production and

distribution can, through the participation of individuals, lead to social cohesion and wellbeing.
From the introductory chapter hence emerges another key issue: that of participation. Therefore, going back to the previous argument about the validity of artistic interventions, it clearly comes out that, in order for them to be effective and to have value, they must see people's participation.

Taking into consideration dance as a performing art discipline, it has been investigated how it can have positive effects both in those who practice it and in those who are mere observers. Dance has in fact, through various research, demonstrated its ability to lead to a general sense of wellbeing, being the very nature of dance therapeutic at both an individual and communal level. Dance is in fact able to stimulate the physical, creative, expressive and, finally, the emotional dimension of the self. In this regard, three case studies have been taken into analysis.
The second chapter has thus been focused on the first case study, namely the context of Bassano del Grappa, seen as a city and a system capable of stimulating its community wellbeing. The story of the Centro per la Scena Contemporanea, a dancehouse located in Bassano, is that of a centre for the research, development and promotion of dance, where its activities aim at involving the community throughout the entire year. The internationality acquired by this centre, which is inserted in a European network, has made a relatively small reality such as Bassano, an international point of exchange, bringing added value to both the local community context and to the European one.
In this chapter, the concept of community, which is closely linked to the projects promoted by the CSC and in turn connected to that of social capital, has been addressed. Bassano del Grappa, also thanks to the activities promoted by the CSC, has allowed over the years to foster cohesion and bonding among different social groups and to promote a greater unity among its community members.
Thereafter, the topic of the performing arts curatorship has been discussed. With it, the figure of the curator has been questioned: the curator has here been defined as a facilitator or mediator, but also as an activist. These different viewpoints emerged from the words of Roberto Casarotto and Monica Gillette, who favor a different interpretation of the term *care*. Casarotto notes in fact how taking "care" should not

imply the adoption of a top-down approach in the construction of an artistic program, but it should rather mean taking care of relationships and listening to people. For Monica Gillette, being a curator today, it means designing and orienting artistic projects towards facilitating encounters, both between audience members and societies in general.

These figures have therefore also adapted to today's new social contexts: nowadays, curators must indeed interface with various social, political and cultural issues and must know how to deal with them through different forms of narration. Finally, the curator is increasingly assuming an important role in understanding how audiences interact during the performances and how they interpret and perceive the works presented, thus reconfirming his/her role as a mediator.

Just as Roberto Casarotto and Monica Gillette suggest the need to orient artistic practices towards a de-hierarchization of the roles, the same happens in the choreographic field with Yasmeen Godder, whose research projects are analyzed in the third chapter. In particular with *Practicing Empathy #2by2*, the de-hierarchizing approach of the choreographer is manifested through direct contact between the performers and the audience members, where the last are led to immerse themselves in the performance with all their senses. This suggests the choreographer's need to promote a greater sensory engagement for the audience during the performances. Yasmeen Godder questions here the concept of empathy, often linked to that of wellbeing. We come to understand how empathy, a concept that over time has changed its meaning, is to be "handled with caution". This, in fact, unlike what is often thought, can also have negative implications.

Just as in the previous chapter, here too space finds a central role. Space can indeed be that defined by a city, by a dancehouse, but also that determined in the relationships between individuals - which has seen a change in the last two years -, or that shared by the audience members and the dancers during the performances. Audience involvement in the performance, however, must take place in a safe space. Safe in the sense that people must feel free to communicate their emotions without fear. Only in this way, Monica Gillette points out, people can be able to express themselves in relation to others. This is of key importance, because the possibility to express one's emotions allows, as highlighted by Roberta De Monticelli (2012), to build one's identity. This leads, consequently, to experience wellbeing. Participating

in a performance as an audience member, becomes therefore an opportunity for self-discovery and empowerment.

Finally, chapter four deals with survivors of the Argentine military dictatorship that occurred between 1976 and 1983. Taking a step back and returning to the discussion on individual wellbeing, it clearly emerges, in this circumstance, how it is closely linked to the social context. In fact, Bettelheim (1981, cited in Reca, n.d.) reminds us that the stress conditions resulting from socio-political problems are those that cause the major amount of stress, where stress, again, becomes one of the main causes of physical and psychological problems.

Central to this chapter are the themes of trauma and torture, and how they can impair individuals' awareness and ability to verbalize their experiences. This is how Dance Movement Therapy becomes an opportunity for people to express their emotions and, therefore, their identity.

Since the body is the means through which individuals primarily experience reality, it has been demonstrated how it is necessary to activate it during the healing process.

Healing also sees as central the role of the therapist, who becomes a true mirror of the patient. This theme is also linked to the topic of kinesthetic empathy, which indicates the possibility of feeling empathy simply by observing the movements of others. Therefore, the need to pay attention to the notion and the use of empathy comes again to the surface, confirming, also in this framework, the necessity of dealing with it carefully in order not to endanger both the patient and the therapist. This finally opens the way for questioning the usage of the word *empathy* in a daily context.

In conclusion, this thesis has allowed me to collect multiple observations from different cultural and scientific fields, helping to discuss and relate a broad literature regarding issues such as wellbeing, social capital, cultural welfare, dance and the performing arts, performing arts curatorship, audience research, empathy, trauma and healing rituals.

In this way, it has been possible to understand that the arts, and in particular dance, as capable of involving all the senses and the body, can bring benefits to individuals and communities. The performing arts have in fact revealed being an interesting and

useful instrument to handle actual diseases and social mistrust, dealing with the new societal challenges at both an individual and collective level. These beneficial effects, however, are only achievable if the artistic initiatives see the participation of people. Civic participation, as well as the creation of social networks, norms and trust among people – all key aspects of social capital -, are indeed fundamental in the construction of individuals and communities' wellbeing.

Still, we have assisted to a decrease in participation by people in almost every sphere of social activity. To elaborate on this statement, I refer to the *XXIV Rapporto Gli Italiani e lo Stato* (The Italians and the State) edited by LaPolis of the University of Urbino and Demos. This concerns the specific Italian context, but it could find, without difficulties, reflection on the broader global context. The report shows how, because of the pandemic, almost all areas of social life have seen a drastic decrease in people's participation, which in 2021 has reached peaks less than or equal to 2011. These include initiatives related to the environment, the territory, one's own neighborhood and volunteer activities. But also political events or protests, activities in professional or cultural associations, sports and entertainment. The only aspect that has increased, compared to 2011, is that of political discussions via the internet, which is however lower than in 2019 and 2020.

This brings us back to an observation made by Gabriella Giannachi (2021) in *Chi decide chi partecipa? Rethinking the epistemology of participation*, in which she states that today, given the great social changes taking place, it is necessary to take another look at the epistemology of participation and redefine it. What does it mean to participate nowadays? How can artistic initiatives foster individual and social wellbeing in a society which has changed its approach to the social context and to participation?

Future research could thus try to answer these questions, as well as continuing to develop programs and research about the benefices brought by the performing arts. Moreover, it could re-discuss and redefine the value of terms such as wellbeing, welfare, curatorship, empathy, trauma and participation, together with their use and their role in today's modified society.

APPENDIX

Interview with Roberto Casarotto

PC: Good morning Roberto. I would first start with a brief introduction. I am Paola Curci and I am studying Arts Management at Ca' Foscari, which is a Master's degree program. I took a course with Professor Susanne Franco during 2019/2020. It was Elements of Theater and Live Art Production. You have also come once during a lecture, in which you have talked about the Dance Well project. Together with the Professor we have outlined the topic for my thesis, which is the relationship between dance and wellbeing and how this can then expand generally to the community, as well as bring physical, psychological and social benefit.

RC: There's a European Dancehouse Network publication out these days, I don't know if you've seen it yet.

PC: Yes, I have seen it and I have followed it. Professor Franco sent it to me last week so yes, I have actually seen it.

RC: Well good, because I thought maybe that's one of the most up-to-date texts that we have available, and so it could be useful.

PC: Absolutely, thank you very much.

RC: But here, I don't want to interrupt you any further.

PC: No, not at all. So, I don't know if you already had a chance to look at the questions. Anyway, let's say the first part is more in general about the Centro per la Scena Contemporanea. What it is and what it is about. I pretend to know absolutely nothing.

RC: Sure, sure.

PC: So, if you feel that maybe my questions are reductive, there is absolutely no problem, you can range. The second part goes a little bit more inside the theme of wellbeing and what it is, and then the last is about curating.
First of all, the Centro per la Scena Contemporanea, from what I've read, was founded in 2006 by the Municipality of Bassano del Grappa. So I was wondering, how and from what needs comes the will to give life to this Dancehouse? And then, why Bassano?

RC: So, it was conceived in order to create a system to promote the culture of contemporary dance in an area that in 2006 had a cultural offer of dance that was very much tied to traditional systems, where there were not what we now call residencies, neither professionalizing programs. There was a rich program, but above all there were big companies and big names, and there had never been any work done in the area to build a system and an ecology of local dance. This is why it was founded in Bassano del Grappa, which is the only city in Europe, a public body, to have a multidisciplinary festival and, since 2006, a center dedicated to research, to the construction of programs for the professional development of artists, but also of operators for the involvement of citizens - what we can call community-oriented initiatives - and then to all those that are international relations.
Bassano del Grappa was at that time a well-known reality for a festival, but apart from the summer program it had no activities during the year, so the Centro per la Scena Contemporanea began to build a system of actions, initiatives, activities that are very complementary to the festival. In the sense that clearly you can summon an audience for events for a few days during the summer, but then how do you cultivate relationships with citizens? How can you become instrumental in building professionalism? How can you enhance the territories through actions that are not spot-on, but continuous? From these and many other questions came the need to have something, an entity that was active 360 days a year. So from there, we started with international relations that allowed us to accelerate the process of introducing the codes of contemporary dance, but also to share experiences with people from other parts of the world who had perhaps already faced common questions. This is why, from the beginning, from its genesis, this center had a strong international identity.

PC: In fact it would have been in part my next question. Since the CSC is a Dancehouse, which is also part of the European Dancehouse Network, why is it important to be part of this network? What does it bring?

RC: So, yes. We arrived in that network practically in 2010, but we were already active with several projects supported by different programs of the European Union. So we arrived in the network with a small experience of international collaboration and this allowed us to develop a thought on what it meant to work internationally, on what it would have brought to our organization, to our audience, but also to the artists, so we entered in the network with this logic. Very often you will notice that I refer to something that is always very multilayered. This means something that has an impact in one dimension, but also in many others, and I think this is very much related to the nature of the art we work on, that is dance, which is implicitly multilayered. So very often I like to refer to the fact that when we talk about initiatives, as far as we are concerned, very often we have a title, a mission, but in reality we realize that that project, initiative, activity, is the piece of a much more complex mosaic. So every action informs other actions. Thus, we arrived at the Network (the European Dancehouse Network), but through different paths. In addition to the European Dancehouse Network we were already in Aerowaves, which is a network that promotes young artists and the mobility of their work in Europe, so many members of Aerowaves for example are also members of the European Dancehouse Network. And it was right there, in a meeting of Aerowaves, that some colleagues from Scandinavian countries said "We need an Italian partner. You are the reality that at this moment is closer to the concept of Dancehouse", even if in Bassano, as you then articulated in one of the questions, we do not have a building for the Dancehouse, but we live in different spaces. So we've also developed a concept of a diffuse Dancehouse, and every time it changes, because maybe now they start renovations in one of our spaces and we go to occupy other spaces, which become spaces for dance. So we would also come into that network with a little bit of a different concept. Then we are a public institution, so even there, a very different structure from all the others, even if we still have an independence in the artistic direction, right? The thing that we have benefited so much from with that network

is that, thanks to the various supports that the network generates, we have been able to carry out important initiatives, very important conventions, and we have always actively participated in the construction of thought, the sharing of experiences, the circulation of that common cultural capital that European dance generates.

PC: Instead, going back for a moment, I thought about this thing: since you're part of a public entity, what does it happen when the administration changes?

RC: What happens? I personally think that we're developing a great capacity for building alternative narratives of what we do. That's because clearly politicians are administering the city, and so they come in with a whole set of agendas. So maybe words that are the expression of a certain thought are accepted by some administrations, while others are opposed to them. When we did the project *Migrant Bodies-moving borders* and *Performing Genders*, we were attacked in a very violent way by the local press through political movements that in the following elections became the administrators of the city. So those who had heavily attacked these projects had arrived at a very violent communication, until the citizens of the city said it was enough and then they stopped. They became the administrators, they became the subject to which those still-living projects referred because they were not finished yet, and they received a letter from the European Commission that congratulated them on how the Municipality of Bassano had brought to a successful conclusion these projects that had been opposed by political movements. And it was them. So there is this paradox that has been created.

PC: Yes. And at that point?

RC: At that point... they could only protocol that letter, in fact that project has remained in the history of the European Union because they often mention us, they invited us to conferences and everything, and what could they say? There is such an important recognition, isn't there? It is clear that then, I repeat, political agendas are often marked by people who are not those who administer you, so many times they refer to systems that are perhaps decided in other places. And so what we try to do is to remain anchored to our integrity, to remain anchored to our values, to remain

in dialogue with citizens in order to understand how the world is changing around us. Very often dance is able to intercept change before it's visible and then build systems of dialogue that are very solid, very integral and, when necessary, are told differently so as not to exclude anyone. So the great exercise of this time is just being able to narrate what we do differently, depending on who the interlocutor is.

PC: Sure. And instead, talking about the dialogue with citizens, here the question comes back. You said in fact that CSC includes several realities that are part of the Municipality, such as Garage Nardini, the deconsecrated church of the former hospital of St. Bonaventura and the Remondini Theater. Then it also involves the Civic Museum of Bassano del Grappa, the Teatro al Castello Tito Gobbi and Piazzetta Guadagnin. So it seems to be part of the urban and community fabric of Bassano. And so I have thought of this reality as a system, the "Bassano System", which, with its activities, can be observed as a wellbeing-maker, let's say, for the entire community. I wondered if the citizens felt this link - an answer that I believe has already been partly given -, and if they benefited from it.

RC: So, I think that they benefit from it. I would also like to add that during the pandemic, we started to inhabit the Parolini Garden, which is a former botanical park in the city, that we used to live only with the film program. Since last year we have been holding Dance Well classes there, because clearly being outdoors we protect everyone, and at the same time we have also developed a whole series of considerations on how to inhabit public space regularly populated by other people. So, in what way do you position yourself with a human sensitivity and respect? We did not know, for example, that at lunchtime a community of carers meets. They are mainly women from Eastern Europe who meet in one place to eat. And we were there next door to play music and make classes. So then a dialogue started, to the point that some of them invited the dancers to have lunch with their pickled cucumbers, sausages, these things. It was so beautiful, but even there we tried to be careful about how we built relationships with those people who are often invisible in these public places. So this has been a great opportunity to enter into other social fabrics and I think that we are visible with the activities, we are visible with what we generate for those who, for example, practice dance. But at the same time we

have created a cultural tourism that comes to Bassano for the dance events, for the residences, so it lives in hotels rather than apartments, it consumes in the city. It is often a public that is very interested in the quality of Bassano's commercial offerings, and many of the citizens have become aware of this fact, so much so that there are several collaborations underway with the merchants' association, and they report the results of having this flow of people who, at certain times during the summer program in particular, are very present. Before Covid we had about 200/300 people who came to the city for a week. So imagine these 200 people moving from one theater to another, living, eating, drinking in the city. It is clear that they became very visible. And they were being recognized as the dance audience, which is the coolest thing. Then they were very multicultural, because they came from Asia, Africa, America, so visually they gave a very strong signal of multiculturalism. And this, in the context of Veneto where we live, clearly launches alternative signals to stereotypes and everything else. So what we are trying to do is also to contribute to, a little at a time, exercise the change of perspective, both for us, and for those who participate in the activities, but also for the citizens of Bassano that maybe see people come into the store who are very strange, very new, very unknown, but also who bring a beautiful message. And that's one thing. At the same time, Bassano, precisely because it is a beautiful city, which has a very special naturalistic, scenic outline, it becomes a place for those who come in residence, for those who come to follow the festival, those who come to do activities, that are enriched at least by beauty, right? And so I think that, from that point of view, it activates systems of construction of wellbeing.

PC: Okay, but so how do you measure wellbeing, other than in economic terms? You're also talking about having that confirmation, maybe brought in by the flow of people who lead to an economic benefit, monetizable and then measurable in that sense. Instead, talking about the other side of wellbeing, how can it be measured on a quantitative level? Has the “wellbeing goal” been achieved?

RC: I don't know, I think it's not reached and it's not attainable. For me, I associate what you asked me with a word, which is happiness, which you can perceive. Now, it's a big word. But I think that if you go to a city and you perceive that the people

who live there actually live well and feel well in that place, probably you as a person who visits that place, breathe an air in which you don't feel in danger, you don't feel threatened, you don't feel desolate, because around you maybe see smiles and you see people who feel well with their bodies, with their spirits and they feel well collectively together. It is no coincidence that some statistics say that the cities where there is also a very high level of economic wellbeing, often also have a very advanced system of intercultural dialogue, right? Or the cities where there is a very advanced system of intercultural dialogue are also the cities where citizens say they live better. So I think it's very important to look at the individual and collective spheres and see how the individual lives himself in the city and in his relationship with others. So what we do is try to bring people to live better with themselves, but also with others in the environment. Again, multilayered, because you can, with dance, achieve all these goals and objectives. So the idea is a little bit to build experiences that both from a point of view of practices, and from a point of view of vision, lead people to live better with themselves, to live better collectively, and to enter into a deeper tuning with the ecosystem in which we live, because I believe again that if we talk for example about the environment and the ecological turn, it is very important that individuals and societies that are invested towards a respect for the environment, are feeling well. Because the moment in which you have internal conflicts or societies are off-balance, it's very hard for them to take care of the environment together, right? So, this is the process and it aims to build a system of awareness and practices that have a cohesive capacity. So that's kind of what we're working on in the present, especially after and during Covid, when we realize that bodies are highly traumatized. People are more or less aware of the traumas that they have embedded.

PC: Yes, that's true. I don't know how you experienced this situation. I personally feel it on me, and it's almost strange, because it hasn't been reworked, but we've been thrown into this reality in which we don't really know how to behave, so it's a process that will surely be long and difficult. And so I firmly believe that dance in this can also help because of its relationship with the body, the relationship that movement has with space and with others.

Then I would ask you another question. Going back to the realities that make up the system, let's call it like that, this system of awareness, has there also been an urban revitalization, if it was needed in Bassano?

RC: I don't know if it was necessary, but certainly the fact of inhabiting urban spaces with dance becomes automatically traceable, traced, and leaves traces. This is evident. In many cases it also generates a memory: those who actively participate in initiatives, for example in a square, once they cross it again, they will remember what happened. But also those who happen to be there by chance, and so maybe thanks to something that is happening, they read that urban space in a different way, or find themselves through emotions, associations, imaginations, to live that space in a different way. I believe that there are immense potentials there, that I hope we could discover more. Especially when we brought in some contexts - I'm talking about squares, but not only that - for example asylum seekers and then from that day they were identified as artists. So the people of the city no longer looked at them as potential delinquents, but because they had seen them dance, had heard them sing at a microphone, had seen them legitimized by a cultural institution, they became people.

PC: But were the people watching them aware that they were actually asylum seekers or was it not made explicit?

RC: It was not made explicit, but it was very clear, also because, in short, we do not have many African children who have not arrived through migration. So they were very much in line with a whole series of imaginaries. Then we did not declare it, because for us they were artists. But, yes, it was clear. Also because if you bring ten or twenty of them, it is clear that you have an impact. Just like when they entered the theaters. And when we watched shows that had to do with issues of racism or even with references to stories of our news, and they were in the room, people got emotioned in a different way. Just as when you bring parkinsonian people to dance in a square, and especially young people who are stopped by the police because they think they are drunk since they are wobbling. They become something else. And at the same time, seeing them in a public space accustomed us a little bit at a time to

seeing or coming up with alternative definitions of beauty and excellence. So you no longer associate professional dance with one type of body, but little by little you begin to say, “Well, there's Silvia Gribaudi who has her roundness”, and I defy anyone in Bassano not to identify her as a professional, right? So even there, a little at a time, with everything we program, we try to keep in mind the intrinsic value of the exhibition of alternative bodies, of bodies that are also representative of a plural humanity in a plural society, which is the Italian one.

PC: Yes, which actually is such a current discourse that however you seem to have been able to predict. Because if we listen to the speeches and the central themes, especially those discussed in the last periods, it actually seems to be a natural thing that should have been argued - as it happened in Bassano - a long time ago. So it is as if you were able to anticipate and predict this discourse that should have been made long since.

RC: But I believe, Paola, that it comes a lot from the artistic form. Dance is the art that connects us the most to our bodies and to humanity without the need for other tools, right? So very often our bodies are already inside systems, and it's about having that sensitivity, about observing changes in society. It's not as of yesterday that we realized that we have a young multicultural society. You go to any school in Bassano and you find children of all colors. But no teacher is not white. So no, we've been working on the idea of saying, okay, what role models do we propose when we do workshops or publish a catalog or promotional materials? Let's make sure that anyone who opens that catalog can somehow reflect themselves in those images, in those colors, in those shades. This is to make this art recognizable in some way and because compared to others it does not need intermediaries, because it is different from the spoken theater for example, where you need translations. Here you put a body and there is no right or wrong way to read dance, and there the accesses are created.

PC: Yes, it really is a universal language in that sense.

RC: That's also a bit of an overused phrase. If I start programming only the ballet and the big companies I'm not actually proposing a universal language, I'm proposing a language that works for me for a thirty-something, white, middle-class audience that comes to that theater. It becomes universal the moment I start asking myself “Where do I do these initiatives? Who are they accessible to?”. Because even with the number of seats, at the moment in which I have fifty spectators, I ask myself "Do I sell the tickets to those who arrive first, or do I reach out to people who might never come to buy a ticket, and therefore create a variety among the audience?”. Because if not, in this particular time, the risk is to create very exclusive natural ghettos.

PC: It's a vision that I hadn't thought about, and I thank you for opening up these new perspectives. I really thank you because this comparison also helps me to rethink certain concepts that I take for granted when I read them in books, but that in reality are not necessarily true.

RC: But the truth, you know...

PC: No, of course.

RC: Some perspectives are different and that's okay, in the sense that if you talk to someone who probably runs a community theater in a city in the Veneto region, you're going to get another point of view and that's okay, I mean thankfully. The thing I think about a lot is when we talk about access, what do we mean? More than from a theoretical viewpoint, I mean from a practical point of view. I often start from practice, that is, from doing and then elaborating a thought eventually. But the fact of throwing the body into a physical situation, very often makes you realize elements or situations that you could not have theorized.

PC: Maybe this is a part of an answer to a following question in which I would have asked you, let's say, if your being a curator of performing arts, meaning curator as an alternative term to artistic director, has influenced your way of doing this job. Because from what I have often read - without taking for granted what I have read in this case -, it seems that many festival directors organizing artistic events, have

been trained in a more managerial environment, in which perhaps it emerged the discourse of the cultural product and of the public as consumer. And not many artists have actually taken on this role. So maybe your being primarily a dancer has influenced your way of working, perceiving and being able to relate to these situations.

RC: I think so, for several reasons. First of all, because having incorporated experience, I have very clear and almost foundational references. Then it is clear that if you have worked professionally in the art, it is inevitable that you also have skills and relationships with others, which clearly build this legacy of knowledge that you carry with you. And so the ability to see the evolution of this art over time, in the bodies. Because bodies change. Nowadays, young people have physical dimensions that are very different from those of thirty or forty years ago, so the world has changed a lot and being able to keep alive curiosity and openness to not remain fossilized in a bible acquired in other times is fundamental. In my case, I have specialized in dance and I don't touch other artistic disciplines where I feel I don't have the skills and cultural background that I have somehow absorbed. I also have a degree in Business Administration that helps me build budgets, but that's another story. But no, the thing that distinguishes a lot, what you call a curator - although I have problems with the word "curation" in this context and I never call myself a curator -, is the fact that I have been used to practicing creativity and then using it in moments when there are contingencies and you have to develop a strategy to respond to them. So looking at the world, every limitation can actually open up possibilities for you and become an opportunity to experiment with something that you wouldn't have faced otherwise. And that's a constant creative practice. So that stuff is fundamental. Then in my case I don’t have a politicized identity, because unfortunately in Italy there are still people who are invested with important positions, but they are somehow put there by politics without public notice and maybe without the skills. I don't want to open a controversy, but this is also to distinguish between the fact that very often I find myself working with colleagues who have a background as dancers or at least very close to the practice and I see that with them I go faster. Then there are those who maybe come from a different world and so you don't have to take anything for granted. Even in the way you take

care of relationships with artists, with the public, and so on. Very often those who have practiced dance have an attention to these aspects that you don't even have to investigate in any way. Those who come from outside, maybe also for a matter of not knowing, sometimes need to be more informed about certain dynamics, certain aspects that are actually fundamental.

PC: And instead, I would have a curiosity: why do you say you have a problem with this word, with the term “to cure”?

RC: Because very often I associate it with a whole series of theories... You referred to a publication edited by a person who also involved me in a debate in Israel on the word "cure" and I perceived a very "top down" approach, that is "I know the cure, I know what you need, I know what is the right quality of dance that I have to give you so that you are well". That to me is very dangerous and yes, I do have some friction with what that kind of contextualization of the word care is. Caring is something else though. Taking care of the relationships that I establish with anyone who intercepts the proposals and initiatives that we develop is fundamental, as is taking care of how ideas and projects are developed during the Covid era. That is, horizontalizing experiences, which require much more time, have started, but often the construction is shared, the responsibility is shared, and I see the potential of these new modalities. There is a greater involvement of people, there is a common construction of something that also has a more radical impact because it is not the project of a person.

PC: Okay, so in that sense you mean "horizontal," in the sense that it involves and brings together multiple ideas at the same level and then brings them together into something that becomes...

RC: It brings together more skills than ideas, so in the end if you involve, from the beginning of a project, those who deal with communication, an artist who deals with organization, who also deals with administration, right? And they feel co-participants in creating something that is then offered to a community, there is a completely different involvement, so I also see that the attention to detail is

amplified, because that thing also becomes a little bit personal, because you feel part of something and you feel that a part of you lives in that thing.

PC: And let's say this. This is a reflection of mine on the discourse of curatorship: I am very fascinated by the curatorial discourse, but it also fascinates me - and actually I wanted to take that direction in the thesis - the audience research, which I do not like to call *audience* because it excludes a whole other part of the senses, and not even *spectator*. So let's say *pubblico* (*public* in English), that as an Italian word it can be the most homogeneous. But I firmly believe that in reality the curator of performing arts must start from the audience. Meaning that he or she should do that work on the contrary and that then, if the entire organization is invested with this perspective, starting in a way from below, he or she can really return something more, and not something that the organization itself has done for itself, let's put it this way. I don't share the discourse of "curating" as "I offer you that product and that's right", but I would like to give back to the word curating the meaning that it could have. Even there, there is no right and wrong, but let's say it should be more inclusive. So even in this case, listening to different points of view can help me find a different way than what may be interpreted by other researchers who understand curating in this top down sense, which I would like to turn around a bit.

RC: No, no, I find myself very much in what you're saying. I believe that today we must be very careful to become aware that we have entered a new era and that the fact of nostalgically chasing after what we knew until 2019 is a choice of great responsibility. This, with respect to understanding where we are, where the bodies of those around us are, how we can share or intercept needs and how, also from an artistic point of view, what we are going to build, to propose, has a relevance for the present time. How can we build experiences that inform possible futures? And especially, how do we look at the different generations, the different needs of the generations? Because very often we only focus on a certain age group and assume that others have different needs. We never think, or we think little about building proposals that are somewhat transversal. I think there is great potential there today.

PC: So if I were to ask you how your role, let's call it artistic director, can help answer and then influence in generating wellbeing? Because it's a form of influencing, it's not just about giving. So those might be the questions to look for answers to, the ones you said now, I mean.

RC: Yes, those are some of the questions. I think you have to practice a lot the art of listening, even metaphorically, and the art of observing. Because then what is a programming system, as far as I'm concerned, is nothing more than putting in place a whole series of signals, of suggestions that you've picked up in different paths. I think that at this moment to experience individually and collectively is something to invest in and to find out what it means to live in the same space, in the same time an emotion, to activate individual and collective empathic systems, to open horizons beyond the boundaries of the body and also towards what seems unfamiliar to us. But how to get in touch with what is unfamiliar to us in order not to exoticize it, not to misunderstand it? This clearly implies also building formats of initiatives different from "I propose a show" or "I propose a dialogue session with the artists or the expert who tells you what you will see". Maybe there is a need to invent other things, maybe there is a need in other cases to go through a physical practice so that your body finds itself maybe displaced in order to then access a certain type of experience. And that's really fascinating to me, which is how to construct these experiences.

PC: And in this last year, in fact by now even two, how do you feel your role, your doing and your approach have changed?

RC: So, I have experimented a lot and I am experimenting with working in digital space, so for me the digital is not a medium, but a space in which, like dance artists, you organize bodies according to a rhythm, a time, a constellation of opportunities linked to a space that may be flat, but it is a space. It is a space where you can meet people, civilizations, that you would have had difficulty meeting live. It's a place where you can build communities, so I see a lot of potential there. I see more and more important the need to activate processes of sharing and rethinking of how we manage the power that is given to us and equally urgent to think about places. What

are the places today in which it makes sense to propose a theatrical experience? Because I think that the traditional theaters that we know are very inaccessible, many people do not feel invited to enter, maybe they are also intimidated. There are codes that perhaps no longer reflect or are no longer understandable for such a plural humanity.

PC: This is beyond Covid.

RC: But with Covid, at the moment when certain cathedrals were closed, there was either a lack of something or creativity was felt to be born in other spaces, and when it was born in other spaces you saw the response of people. And in some cases you saw hundreds or thousands of people who never went into classic theaters, actually participated actively and felt welcomed, and embraced what was being proposed. That got me thinking a lot. So it's clear that you can't exclude one or the other, but maybe integrate them more, and think about how to build programs where you certainly need the event in theater X, but in parallel you do something along the river, for example.

PC: Yeah, yeah. Okay, in the meantime I'm reworking everything, because it's a lot of stimulus and I'll have the occasion to put all the ideas together later as well. We got a little bit messy and I apologize. I would go back to the last two questions, so then actually they can be the closure. So what is wellbeing for you, which then actually is happiness, in part, but I don't know if, in short, you also have a different idea of what wellbeing might be.

RC: Wellbeing for me implies multiple dimensions. I always start from the body and then I think about how physically you can develop a concept of wellbeing for a physical body. Then I think about the spiritual body, which is something that before Covid was not even mentioned, in fact in some contexts it was taboo, and with Covid in short probably the forced introspection that many people have approached, has somehow led to manifest a certain thought. In other cultures it is fundamental, the physical and the spiritual body are inseparable, but in our Eurocentric western context I would like to say that there is also that dimension. And then there is also

the dimension of the collective body, that is, the physical, spiritual and collective body, which is just as important, in the sense that very often dance initiatives touch on all of these aspects at the same time, and so I am very intrigued to put into action initiatives that have this ability. Wellbeing is built a little at a time, it is a path in which you may never feel completely in a state of wellbeing, but it is something that you build individually and collectively, because in many cases I have seen how systems of collective solidarity have literally saved people's lives.

PC: For example?

RC: For example in times of lockdown, when some of our older dancers with Parkinson's were desperate at home and they were sick, they were physically sick, they would start some outreach initiatives of their group, so they started exploring the digital. Their dance teachers did some crazy digital literacy work, they taught them how to install zoom. I mean it sounds trivial to you, but it literally saved people's lives. And that came from a shared sense of responsibility, of feeling part of a collective body, and so the moment some parts started to give signs of weirdness, the rest reacted. And this is beautiful, because it also reacted autonomously. It is not that the curator arrived and said "Ok guys, you have to do this".

PC: Yes, and in fact about the initiatives, I have outlined some of them, but I know it's just a short list: for example Dance Well, Migrant Bodies and Act Your Age which were some of the projects that I think also may have contributed a lot to this strengthening of wellbeing in the community and in individuals. So I was wondering if you could - aside from Migrant Bodies which you've already recounted in part - if you have anything to add about the other two in particular.

RC: Yes, Act Your Age was actually a precursor to a lot of things that happened in later years, because we started out with the idea of investigating alternatives to the young, athletic, wonderfully formed bodies that we were seeing on stage for dance, so we started out by saying "but what about the old dancers?". Then from the old dancers we moved on to the older members of society, and that's where Pandora's box opened up, in the sense that there was a whole system of dialogue built up with

parts of our community that we had never approached for contemporary dance, and that's where we saw the potential, because they were getting so excited that they would then go to more traditional dances and say "but this thing is boring, it doesn't give me food for thought, I want the more engaged stuff." Literally they said so. So no, absolutely these projects, precisely because they had specific themes, brought us closer to groups, to people, that we would have never intercepted. And so, unconsciously, we have always activated relationships in which reciprocity was the basis. So I didn't arrive with a cultural offer: you take it and I see that it is good for you and I am happy because I have contributed to your wellbeing. No, there was actually always a flow whereby the artist who generated something, took something from these people that then informed their own practice. So the artistic practice of many artists who have gone through these projects has changed, it has become something else, it has approached new artistic forms, highly artistic, and also in this there is a fundamental component for me, because in some parts of Europe there is community dance and contemporary dance. What we've tried to do is always to involve artists who were active on stages, so you didn't have a simplified version of contemporary dance or something that is like pleasant entertainment. Very often these people were confronted with very deep creative processes, with artists who then became the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale. So for me this is fundamental, isn't it? That is, working with people doesn't mean making a second-rate dance, but when you find the right artist, it means working in a system of reciprocity, so you will definitely give something of your artisticity and you will have to translate it, so that it is accessible for non-professionals, but you will definitely receive something from them that will shape your practice. And that's what we've tried to do in all these European projects that you mentioned. Also working with artists, so that what they encountered somehow became cultural knowledge, which would then inform the dance progression system even years later.

PC: Okay, I kind of would have ended with the "list" questions. And I was wondering something about Operaestate as a festival: in what relationship is it with the CSC? Is it promoted, is it created, how did it originate?

RC: Operaestate was born first, wasn't it? Because it's been around for 41 years, and then next to Operaestate the CSC was born, so they are not legally two separate entities, because legally the entity that runs them is the Municipality, so the legal representative is the mayor of Bassano. So the mayor of Bassano currently signs contracts in which he hires asylum seekers to be dance teachers for Dance Well.

PC: This is a crazy thing.

RC: You know that the current mayor of Bassano is philosalvinian.

PC: And in fact that's the reason for the initial questions about the administration.

RC: So, when faced with something like this, I don't say it publicly, but it does happen. And it gives me hope, because it keeps alive a system of actions, of activism, of social evolution, in spite of the fact that there are ideologies that you somehow try to find a way to limit.

PC: I thought somewhere, I can't quite remember where, I found an adjective related to you, which was activist choreographer, activist dancer. Do you reflect on yourself more in those words?

RC: I always call myself a dance activist. I don't call myself a choreographer or a dancer anymore because I don't do that anymore. I did it, but now I'm a dance activist. Because I truly believe that dance is a right of humanity. I even consulted a jurist and he said that it's an appropriate term, because it expresses the right of expression and I think it's the art that more than any other changes people's lives the moment it's practiced, because you get involved with your body. And when you get into the perspective that there is no right or wrong way to dance, you have a crazy conquest of yourself, in space and time, but also towards a society. And I'm telling you that many times we've touched on cases of people who didn't leave their houses anymore because they were ashamed, because they had some forms of disease, and now they've flourished. Their family members now come and tell us about how they turned their home life upside down and how they found inspiration.

So, clearly that can be labeled as wellbeing, but it is no longer tied to those who participate in the dance classes, because in fact they expand it around their family unit, their friendships, and they become ambassadors of dance, they proselytize, so when there is a show they come with everyone, their whole group. And that gives meaning to what you do, which is different from putting people sitting on chairs and doing big numbers. And there's more to it, right? So yes, that thing is important.
So, to get back to the question, Operaestate was born 41 years ago, in 2004/5 they realized that one festival was not enough and they decided to invest in something else and the CSC was born. Imagine two, as if they were two macro projects. One that aims to produce a program that is offered to the public of an extended area, because it is not only Bassano. The other builds a lot of the content that you see in the festival, that elaborates thought and that contributes to the advancement of dance culture. But they all work under the same structure, which is the public body. They are very complementary behind the scenes, because in the Operaestate program, for example, you find the results of many European projects. So one is instrumental to the other. The Operaestate Festival gives the visibility that a festival gives, so it gives you the possibility to be promoted in the press, to have an audience and so on. At the same time, much of the content is generated by the work you do during the year or years. And much of the audience that comes to see the shows is intercepted by many projects. So they come to see the shows with a built-in experience, the moment they enter certain systems of practice they also understand how to articulate their critical response to things. So it's very difficult for people who come to Dance Well - and that's about a hundred people every week - that, when they see an artist or a show that doesn't convince them, they throw up the worst things on the artist. This derives from practice, from how you use the language in classes, and so on. A lot of artists say "when we do sharings and there are Dance Well dancers, we open notebooks and take notes because alternative narratives come out". So in a way, with the CSC you also create an audience that is more sensible, more respectful, more curious, you also nourish curiosity, which is a fundamental thing. Alessia, my colleague, is doing an amazing job with schools. I didn't tell you this before, but she started about 7 months ago with two artists and a researcher from Fitzcarraldo, to investigate with middle, elementary and high school teachers how the experiences developed on zoom by dance classes could shape the way teachers develop distance

learning. We were supposed to do five meetings, the teachers asked to continue, and they're moving on. And now we're doing a three-day intensive in July in Bassano. A call went out and in twenty-four hours forty-three teachers enrolled. You understand that there you open a revolution, because they will come to the Parolini garden to dance, to elaborate a thought on the skills that they develop while they dance and how to take suggestions to build classes that are rhythmically more engaging, where there is a greater attention to students. There you lay the foundation for change, and change can only be made by engaging people.

PC: Sure. And how can this "system" - I'm going to call it like that right now -, how can it reach other municipalities, other cities in such a strong way? Because it seems to me that it is something that is really needed and let's say not in a light, frivolous way, as entertainment, but that it should become something rooted. There is no method I guess, there isn't. I don't know though, how do you expand the word and get the value across?

RC: So today I would tell you that in my opinion it can't be an individual planning, but it has to be something that several people do together putting together different skills, and among these skills I would recommend that there should be a creative mind. In that sense, then you need a very good organizer, and you need different skills today. For how complex our reality is, I imagine that we need a micro team in which we also need a creative mind. I'm a big believer that every idea needs to be contextualized. As you said, it's not a replicable model that I copy and paste, but I develop a thought. Where I go, who I interact with, how I respond in those circumstances versus how I would respond in another system. So even there, getting into listening, getting into observation, being grounded in your values.

PC: And you have to be perhaps also very inserted in the community in which you want to develop it, it's not that I arrive and bring my knowledge from Turin to Rome, obviously I have to study Rome well.

RC: Yes and no. I think, however, at some point you have to jump in, otherwise it takes decades and we don't have the time for that, so I think it's very much in the

care of relationships. So if you go to Rome and intercept people who can be bridge builders, it is clear that even there it is a teamwork, it is a teamwork in which even your own trust is built through these people who are the trade union, because if you go to a community of Chinese and say "I want to do a project with you", I do not know, maybe you are lucky and they come, but maybe not. Whereas if you work with someone who is recognizable to them, who translates your language into something that others can understand and recognize, then maybe the transition is easier and maybe it will lead you to achieve initial results more quickly. For this reason, I think that understanding how to work with different systems and different communities today requires teamwork. But that can be your way of working, of understanding what your skills and ways are in that system and not being afraid to learn by doing, because that I think is the most important thing. If you're waiting for the system to change... a lot of times it's also easier to create new spaces than to wait for existing ones to become available.

PC: Sure, especially today I really think that reality itself requires skills that can't possibly be taught. They have to be developed as well as new jobs, new professions, so you have to kind of invent and not be afraid to learn by doing because yes, I think that's what the future will require.

RC: Just think, I hope a lot in the new generations because in my opinion there is something called vitality that I see very much slumbering in the old ones.

PC: Who knows?

RC: Have a good job.

PC: Thank you, thank you very much Roberto.

RC: No, thank you Paola. If you happen to think of anything else don't hesitate to contact me.

PC: Very kind of you, thank you so much for your time.

Interview with Monica Gillette

PC: Ok, so I just wanted to give you an insight about my thesis and what I'm working on and then make you a couple of questions about what you do, your research, some things that I've discovered and that I would like to deepen. So, my thesis starts with an overview on the concept of wellbeing, how it changed and what it comprises. Then I also deal with the topic of social capital and how it is connected to wellbeing. This is because I also wanted to delve into it in a more community and social way, and not just talking about physical and mental wellbeing. Then I develop a part, still in the introduction, that addresses welfare and cultural welfare, the last being a new field of research that I found really interesting. I started a book yesterday and I almost already finished it.

MG: Which one is it?

PC: It's about Community and Cultural Welfare. It has been published by some professors from the University of Bologna in July of this year.

MG: Oh, wow, really fresh.

PC: It's called "Welfare di Comunità" and the authors mostly talk about community welfare, how it is strictly connected to culture and what is in general participation in the artistic processes, but they also deepen what participation really means, and the fact that it is a word that in politics for example is often used in a superficial way.

MG: Right.

PC: And then I go on with dance and how it is connected to all these topics, so wellbeing, welfare, social capital and so on. And then there are three case studies. One is Bassano del Grappa intended as a system that creates wellbeing and welfare for the whole community and its inhabitants.

MG: Wow, beautiful.

PC: And then there is Yasmeen Godder's *Practicing Empathy*. I know that you are part of it.

I talked to Yasmeen last week, well it was 20 days ago, but it seems like yesterday. It was a deep conversation and it was so useful for me to understand her point of view, but also to get to know what empathy really means and also to get another perspective about this topic. So basically I'm going to research it in two directions: the empathetic field, with its lights and darks, but also how the audience in that case can benefit from being involved in a choreography and a project in that way. And then the last one is more about a case study that happened years ago and is how through dance and movement therapy some people that suffered the tortures during the Argentinian dictatorship from 1976 to 1983 healed through this practice. So these are the three case studies.

Also, I have a question for you then about how you perceive the curator in the arts, but also in the performative context. Because it's a topic that I would like to deepen in the context of Bassano and when I asked Roberto Casarotto what he thought about curators and their role, he told me that he didn't really like the term *curator* and that he defines himself as a dance activist. So I wanted to know if you have another point of view or if it's the same, and how you perceive this world that has entered the performing arts field in the last years, we could say.

MG: Beautiful, it's wonderful to hear what you are researching and that two of your case studies, locations, people, and projects are so close to my heart. They really shaped and impacted my whole journey in dance for the last 8 years roughly. So it's exciting for me, I'm really happy to meet you and I look forward to eventually reading your outcome, because it's incredible to have your perspective and your in-depth research and analysis of these projects. So thank you for this energy in the morning.

Great, so I'm not sure where you want me to begin.

PC: Maybe from the connection with your work and how you also entered in connection to Bassano and Yasmeen.

MG: Great, yeah, it's an interesting overlap. I first met Yasmeen and within the first year that I met her, I became a dancing performer in one of her pieces, and while we were working on that creation, parallel things were happening. Roberto Casarotto, who had supported Yasmeen's work for many years, was just starting Dance Well and simultaneously, when I was working on the creation of this piece with Yasmeen, in that moment as a performer, I was invited to develop a parallel project in Freiburg Germany, where I live. And that was also dealing with dance and Parkinson. Like a total coincidence, I was busy with it at the same time as Yasmeen's other long-time collaborator. So we were in two different countries, questioning the same thing in the same context. So it was through Yasmeen that she said: "It is so interesting that you're both doing this right now, it would be great if you meet". And so we met. We invited Roberto Casarotto here to speak at an ending conference that we had on the topic, and due to this kind of synergy, of momentum that each of us was starting out of this place, we started asking questions about dance in relation to Parkinson. Here in Freiburg I was also developing a pilot project of how dancers, scientists and people living with Parkinson's come together to do collaborative research. So at that moment we weren't only asking to create, to think about dance classes for people living with Parkinson's, but we were asking how we can collaboratively research movement from three different backgrounds, or three different qualities of expertise.

So when I was building that pilot project, it was when I was in collaboration with Yasmeen for the performance, and actually we started to realize in this kind of triangulation among the three of us, how much we shared values in this. And in Freiburg Germany we decided to go for a larger funding and we invited Yasmeen to join us. For one year, she probably already told you about the *Störung/Hafraah* project. So that was for a bit of a year, that we were co-researching in both countries.

PC: And which year was it?

MG: 2015 to 2016. And my pilot project, the one that preceded it, was 2014. So we called it *Brain Dance* and it was a two-months project that allowed us to really set up the one-year project. And so there is a lot of information that I can share about these two projects, but I have the feeling that Yasmeen touched on a lot of it already.

So I'm trying to think about what might be of use in the growth of this project. And the growth of our questions as well. I guess that maybe I'll track that part. So, I was in a moment in my career after I performed this piece with Yasmeen, and that's the time I turned 40 and I was in that moment of my life in which I was kind of questioning "Do I want to keep going through and continue as a dancing performer and creator or do I feel the shift coming?". In fact I was feeling the shift coming in the role I wanted to have in dance. And the big question for me was "What else is a dancer's knowledge good for, or what else is my knowledge good for?". And at that time I felt like the only examples I had in front of me were either keep dancing, become a choreographer or teach, give workshops. And I just felt that those weren't enough options. And that was what was visible to me at that moment. So I really ventured out asking what a dancer's knowledge is good for. And what else can be embedded, what else can be in dialogue with other disciplines, how can I move into the community. But for me again I felt limited by the options. There were models or examples of community-based projects, but I felt I wanted to kind of push understanding to what my practice of being in the studio all day was, an embodied practice, how that might interplay with thought, with reflection, with shifting identity, with knowledge creation. So I was also questioning this at the same time. We went through this year and I think… If we want to center this on wellbeing, I think the layer of understanding a project around wellbeing, was to put at the heart that I wanted everyone's wellbeing in that project to matter and to start to deconstruct the hierarchy. But also how to support that everyone brings their full self to the process which looks differently depending on the person. So the work that we became almost mediator for, supporting for, with "we" meaning the professional dancers, in the German context was when young scientists and researchers were coming into the room and being with us. We were asking them to bring their full self and so kind of drop away titles and roles and codes and ways that they might have been very comfortable with in their scientific setting. We were asking to tap into the human and personal themselves, which kind of became a friction because they used to be keeping an objective distance, so it was shaking up quite a bit for them. For the people living with Parkinson's it was a different pathway, really valuing their daily lived experiences as equal expertise to the scientific research and to the skills developed by the professional dancers over the years. So, their lived experience was

valuable seen and engaged within our entire project and for the professional dancers, for many of us - we were in total 18 roughly, 16 maybe between the two countries - it was also to try to make visible and become aware of the knowledge living inside each of these artists individually and how this expertise could support the room. We were also having open houses with the public on a regular basis, and it was about how we then involve these encounters and these meetings with the audience to share our questions and our research. So not only sharing works and performances or open rehearsals, but actually share our questions, share what we were confronted by, share how we collaborated together to question movement disorder. What is movement disorder? How do all these people come together to question it together? It was a very collaborative process, but you can't just call something collaborative and expect people to be collaborating. I've learned through that project that there's a lot that has to be supported along the way, so people really feel they can show up with their full selves. The whole journey has to be facilitated. It's a thing people are used to doing. So, that's a base.
Do you have any questions about that? Because I'm about to go to the other projects.

PC: I would have many questions, also because of this book that I've recently read and that I'm still re-elaborating. For example, I have in mind this part in which it was said that the well... so, welfare contains the word "well", but also the wellbeing of people in general, up until now it has been mostly directed towards people who already have some difficulties, who are old or fragile, but it is still difficult to create welfare to work on the life of people that are…

MG: considered healthy.

PC: Yes, exactly. And that should be the basis for a healthier society in general.

MG: Yeah, beautiful.

PC: Because if you work on everybody's wellbeing and not just to provide wellbeing to people who already suffer from other issues, then in that way you can really create

a network of healthy people in the community living in a good way together and helping each other and in that case this really can close like a circle.

MG: Absolutely, that's beautiful.

PC: So, I was also thinking if there is... not a way, because it's not that I have to bring an answer to a way of doing this, but how have you confronted yourself with healthy people in order to try to make them healthier in a way, and to create wellbeing for the collectivity? I'm sorry, I'm trying to re-elaborate all the concepts…

MG: No, sure, sure. I would say there's two things that came up in me as I was listening to you. I'm going to zoom in on a work that I first began to sense inside of the project that I was just describing, the *Störung/Hafraah* project. Then the next project that I did in Bassano del Grappa with Roberto is a project called *Migran Bodies-moving borders* and I was the editor of the digital handbook for that and also a type of project dramaturg that really accompanied the process of the artists and the encounters. The aim of the project was to discover, capture and create practices of inclusions between professional dancers, migrants and refugees and I would add the dance institutions that were hosting the partners. So what I want to zoom in on those two projects, is the word *reciprocity*. Reciprocal meaning looking for the equal exchange inside of each relationship. So the way I first felt this inside of the dance science and Parkinson's project was to ask again and again and again how, over that one year, we created an environment where everyone felt that they were equally giving an expertise and taking profit, meaning benefitting from the expertise of the others to try to give and receive on an equal level, which then places you in the position of having to ask yourself: "What do I need and what do I want, as far as quality of life and an expanding curiosity is taking me?". I know that I've said two keywords that are central also in Yasmeen's first research projects and then developed into *Practicing Empathy #1*, that is almost like a mantra: I want, I need, I fear. Maybe she spoke about this, I don't know. But there was a lot of asking around about what I need. And I don't mean it in a selfish way or in an egotistical way. It's almost like dropping and listening to what does my body, what does my soul really need, not career driven or material driven, but listening to the body, to the inner

landscape and drop into that. And that's a practice of trying to move away from the patterns and habits and codes that we embody and move more deeply into an essence or a primal sense of needs. It's a deep, deep listening to one's self. So, I diverged for a moment because I wanted to zoom-in on that keyword of the need. Because in a way we were asking everyone in that project to show up with their personal needs and desires to advance their questions, because it was a research project, and to show up in a place that was personal and private. The reason that became important for me, in that project, was that very often when I'm working with people having a disease or having a disadvantage or are marginalised, it gets into this "help" mentality, like we are trying to help them. Sure we are trying to help, but if that's the center of the conversation, you already have an imbalance. You're taking away the capacity of the perceived "receiver" to do any giving. And for me this is taking away a huge part of dignity. So it was a constant questioning and asking: how is everyone contributing and how is everyone receiving? And how can we keep that on a very balanced level? So needs have to be met and we're not falling into saviour modes, you know?

The same thing happened in the *Migrant Bodies-moving borders* project. The very first residency was in Bassano and four dance artists went into the "habit mode". It's a habit, meaning they created a dance workshop and they gave it; the migrant and refugees joined the workshop and it was very one way. It was very generous, because it was a beautiful act of generosity, but within a couple of days there was this shock feeling and this look of "Wait a minute, we have totally disregarded the dance that is living inside all these humans in front of us". So we had a full shift in approach for the following residencies in the project, which was that everything had to be understood as encounters and sharing practices. Not a one way giving practice, but a sharing practice. Everything that was developed had to be like "Here is my practice and here is my dance. How do you dance? What's your practice? What's your story? What's your narrative? What's your music? What's the knowledge inside of you as a dancer?". Giving to migrants and refugees that were coming from diverse cultures… if I make any generalization, my main generalization is that many of them were growing with dance in their culture and life far more than us western European. So it was embedded in our culture in a totally different way. And so we had to meet and acknowledge a very powerful level of what it means to share a

practice and to create a reciprocal environment. A reciprocal environment to me really enforces individually, and I hope it brings people in the room to speak, act, think and listen from a deeper personal level in relation to everyone else in the room as well. So it's personal in relation to the social. And in that journey we were trying to understand what reciprocity is. This might touch a little bit why Roberto speaks about dance activism rather than curation. For me it's connected because I think… I speak for myself, I don't want to speak for him. For me, I also feel passionate and let's say activist, about rethinking, questioning, challenging the structures and the systems that are currently in place and trying to understand if it's serving the wellbeing of all the stakeholders, meaning all the artists, all the participants, the public, the taxpayer money, the people working inside the organization… if we really start to think: "Is this really serving everyone's wellbeing?", what you also want to ask is "Is this serving my wellbeing?". If you start to really ask these questions, things and structures start to shake a bit. Things have to start to be done a little bit differently. Not a bit, but a lot; but we need to start with a little so that we can create the change. Until more people, let's say the one that are not confronted with disease or disabilities... but if more people who live a privileged life and are not being forced to those questions yet, I think that if they also start asking that, we will find more reason and more strength to create change in society and I think it's necessary, it's a necessary ingredient for me.
I don't know if I'm going too off-topic. I'm weaving together a lot of things that are very valuable to me.

PC: No, sure. But about the word *curating*, it's really a strange word, because it derives from "take care", so it can also seem to be one way. I take care, so I give what I have to one or more people. I take care of my project and I create it in a really one-way approach, as you were also saying before. It shouldn't be that in this case, for how we want these projects and dance to affect people. But in the arts I don't know if there is another word that could be used, or if the word curator instead of "project manager" or of "artistic director" still works nowadays and if it works in the performing arts. This is also something that I'm still questioning, because from what I've read it is also a recent topic, that of the performing arts curator, and people are increasingly investigating this figure.

MG: Yeah, yeah. I can only share my own beliefs around it and I'm not sure if I'm so good at commenting on the large professional scale, because I'm already a bit of an anarchist. But I mean, the word that I feel more comfortable with or that I feel is more useful in line with the values I want to see inside the performing arts, it's facilitator. But this is also because I'm very oriented towards facilitating encounters, also encounters with the public, if we want to say this, but generally encounters in society. No matter what roles and titles people have, whether artists or producers or directors, you know there are so many… I mean that the essence of the value of dance for me is that it has this potential to levelize where we strip away the roles and the titles, and we need it on a human level. Roberto and I have spoken a lot about this: dance is the art that humanizes us the most, which brings us into a human context. So for me one reason why I'm uncomfortable with the term curator is that you... I mean sure it's good to name who makes the choices and designs a program, it's good to make that transparent, so that one can orient around the choice that was made to make a program, but too often it goes into this anointment, like "you are anointed as the chosen one". And I feel it blocks the potential of art forms. That's a very personal opinion that I have. I feel much more comfortable… I'm interested in designing, supporting, framing, creating contexts for encounters and what can emerge from that.

PC: I think you probably got the point of what I had in mind. Last year someone asked me what a curator was for me, and I answered that for me a curator is like a mediator, because he/she has to put together not only what is his/her experience and that of the artist, but to take the point of view of the people. That was last year and I still hadn't started this research, but for me it was already important to find a point where the audiences' language, that of the artists and that of the person who is creating should meet. So that was my initial idea, and I also understand when you say that the curator seems now the person who has reached that role and who is being told "You will have the power of doing this and that". I think it's much more connected to the visual arts, and how the visual arts are perceived today. And the fact that it has been talked a lot about these superstar curators that became even

more important than the artists that were part of the exhibitions they were curating.

MG: Right, right.

PC: And this is growing now in both the directions, also in that of the artists that are so famous but are not part of a specific movement. So now there are the superstar artists, the superstar curators and that's probably very egocentric, in a way.

MG: Yes, absolutely.

PC: And that also reconnects to what you've said, even if you said that it was a personal point of view. I think it's not only that. I will deepen the topic and probably I will find out that it's not really like that.

MG: I mean it's interesting to take forward a little bit of what we were already saying. I mean, if you try to think what's curation and the relation to wellbeing… actually if you're going to design a program and you think "How do I build wellbeing inside what I'm going to build and propose?", "How am I working? How am I treating people around?". If you orient around that, if you start to think about your own wellbeing, it changes the conversation you're having with people, or rather it changes how you're speaking with people. And if you value your own wellbeing in relation to others, then you're going to want their wellbeing as well, which means you're going to start making different choices. It's like, how and when you're having conversations and what are you expecting of others in relation to what do you expect of yourself. I mean, it changes everything. And also, if you start to center that in a curation question, then perhaps you're programming less works. Maybe it's less productions and pieces that are being watched, just watched let's say, but maybe it's investing in programming other types of encounters. You know, maybe instead of focussing on five pieces, you focus on one piece and create dialogues and workshops and discussions around the things coming out from it. I think that maybe, as I listen to myself saying some of this, I think it is because I'm always looking towards the embodied experience. And I feel like it's also a big aspect of the *Practicing Empathy*

project… But the value I feel of the embodied experience, first of all it does implicate one's presence inside of something, so it roots you and brings you inside of a context and inside an artistic process. And it doesn't mean you have to be active and participating, it just changes the awareness of your presence. You know, even if you're just a witness. But I feel like, asking the question around embodiment in relation to presenting work or creating a program, it's sometimes about allowing and creating space for processing and reflection and digestion time inside of the stirring it up... you know, the provocations are necessarily needed and valuable, but then how are we thinking about taking care of the destabilization that would come from all of that? Where is the space and time given? What's the tempo of that? If you start to reframe all this through wellbeing, you ask different questions. One asks different questions. I mean, 'cause I do not program a festival, but I do design a lot of programs. I think of the design of public encounters and I'm always trying to understand what's the embodied component inside of it.

PC: And reconnecting all what you said to a question that I also had: what is wellbeing? Do you have an idea of a definition of what wellbeing could be for you? And how do you think it could be measured? After you have had these exchanges with people with Parkinson's, for example, then how can both of you perceive that the other has reached a sort of wellbeing?

MG: Mmm, that's a beautiful question. I was going to go to another group that I worked with to try to answer, but I would go back to the Parkinson's group. Wow, there's a lot that comes up in those questions from me. But I think the first one I want to speak of is being seen, when we're dancing together, the connection that is built… I guess there is the deepening of connection to one's self, for everyone in the room, and that's the deepening of connection to the others and as each dancer is discovering their own ability and rediscovering new movements, recalling movements they may haven't done in a long time or realizing there's a lot of creativity and capacity to create new movements. Like all of these discoveries about what one's own body can do, while one is discovering that individually, you're also in a community where others are seeing that with you… you see them, and they see you. So there's like a shared memory being built, and what people can do together,

they often can't do it alone in this context. The social component is vital. There is so much dance I've seen coming out of the dancers in the specificity of Parkinson's. There's so much dance they've done, that could only be accomplished as a group because they were in the room together. Because when they're alone in their home, it's shranked and reduced. They're dealing with the constraints of the symptoms of this progressive disease. So what emerges in that room is because of this collective potential of movement, rediscovering, creating… but yes, there's a lot, when I've heard your question, about visibility. Being seen feels really important. As far as how to evaluate that, well I think any sort of measuring of populations that are marginalized, their own voices and descriptions of their experience is of the most valuable. And then you were also asking how do I define it. I kind of have a practice of redefining, re-questioning what wellbeing is almost on a daily level. I don't think it's summarizable as one thing, except the one that's been the most recent with me. I'll share it with you. It is, let's say, one layer of it and I've been carrying it for almost two years. This is because of a project I was involved in and that couldn't be performed because of Covid, but hopefully in April it will finally have its première. And it's working with a group of young people, teenagers to mid 20s, young adults, around the topic of gender identity. The group started out with 13 of us and several trans and non-binary in our group, and the première couldn't happen, but long story short, it went into many digital versions and we created a workshop called *Anatomy of Togetherness* where we brought in other non-binary, trans, LGBTQ+ people into a digital journey together. And I think the thing that I keep on feeling to, or listening to, is how one feels comfortable in one's own skin. How can I facilitate that feeling and experience for everyone, but how do I also keep asking that of myself? Also, I did two projects with people that had been impacted by cancer, and if I start looking across, I worked with many diverse populations that have been showing up to dance for different reasons, but something I see kind of consistently across these groups is that people are often showing up with a part of themselves that has been denied, pushed aside, suppressed, labelled, whether it's with disease, a symptom, a social construct that isn't allowed. I keep on witnessing multiple people that all of their body is not fully allowed to be present in dancing, for whatever reason, whether it is labelled with a disease, or whether they have a part in their subconscious that they want to hide. Or because they're queer or trans and have one name that they use

with their peers and still have to use their birthname with their family and they're living this paradox. So all of this tension that comes with not being allowed to bring your full body into dance or into conversation or into society, going back to your question about "How do healthy people confront this?"... I mean, we're playing the same game, we're doing the same thing, you know? There is a large part of ourselves that we chop and say: "Not allowed into the room for conversation". And I feel like that's the practice, and that's the role that dance conserves. It's through embodied practice and dance practice that you create a deep listening to those parts of oneself. And when more empathy is built to oneself around that - like Yasmeen's solo of practicing empathy with oneself -, when you cultivate that capacity to invite all of you into the conversation or into the encounter with others, you're going to evaluate more in others as well, to support that, facilitate that and bring that. So, call them practices of care, call them practices of wellbeing, call it empathy, for me it's all working towards the same goal which takes us to the activism and human rights discussion. For me it's very connected, but I won't go there right now.

PC: Probably it will be the conclusion of my thesis.

MG: Yeah

PC: Yeah, but great. All the insights that you're giving…

MG: I'm feeling I'm opening way too many boxes for you, so I hope I'm making sense on some level and not moving too much.

PC: That's what I also ask myself everyday, because I find many things and then I start questioning whether I'm following the right path and if I really need all this knowledge to be pushed in only one thesis that is basically "how can society live in a healthier way through dance?". So that's the main question, but then when I listen to you, I also understand that I really need all that kind of insight also from what I'm reading, because it's everything inside this big box. So let's see what happens.

MG: I think this movement of the self to the other is one that has to continuously have to be reanalysed. Because very often we orient either too much on one or the other, you know? It's very ego-driven, but very cerebral also, not the deeply feeling part of the body, which is where the dancing practice has huge value. But I think this constant flow between deeply listening to oneself and the capacity to deeply listen to others and then having that deep capacity to reflect it onto oneself. But I feel it all gets practiced throughout the body, and that is for me why the dance. It's because we can know it, understand it, practice it, feel it on an integral level through the body practice.

PC: And I have two other questions. One has just come to my mind right now and is how important do you think music is in this process?

MG: For me, it completely depends on the context. I mean, for Parkinson's it's great because it can organize the movement or the rhythm of it. A strong rhythm or a strong base can bring the body into a new organization which is disorganized through the symptoms of the disease. So it conserves a very particular role, but I work sometimes completely in silence, while some others I work with music. I have no hierarchy with the music, I use it all or I don't use it all.

PC: And the last is more related to this precise historical period, that of the Covid pandemic. Also Yasmeen told me that she felt that people had the necessity on one side to be more engaged in activities and experiences, but that on the other there have been as well people that felt the opposite need, that of disengaging, maybe even more during the second wave of Covid. How have you perceived this kind of situation?

MG: I mean, it happened on so many levels. The first layer, the existential fear of work. "How can I keep working when jobs and performances are cancelled?". Once that aspect was kind of released or addressed in whatever way on the financial and assistential level, then I think I felt it on myself but also on many peers, that there was this kind of opening up to what can be newly discovered, invented or learned because of it, a sort of more openness. It's the classic: once your fear has dropped

away, there's less fear and you can open up to change. So I feel for me actually, within a few months, I was lucky enough to have a lot more opportunities because suddenly there was a lot of problem solving, trying to understand how else can we keep going together… I guess actually the main thing that I perceived was that in the first few months of the pandemic I discovered that a lot of my colleagues needed types of encounters that included all the practice that I had developed for community based works. So all the skills and tools and ways that many of my colleagues and peers were approaching with community based works, which is a totally different frame that has been established. Like, how to create the room for supporting encounters. Many tools inside of that, were suddenly being needed within the performing arts field. I don't know how to explain it, but all our facing work, all that outreach, exactly the wellbeing questions, suddenly it was like "Oh gosh, we need to inreach. Everyone's in panic, everyone doesn't know how to solve this situation. We don't know our futures, there's big emotions and lack of social connection", and suddenly all this outreach work was turning into the profession, or at least this is what I witnessed and it's because with my colleagues we were sharing a lot of values around this. For me this kicked off a big, maybe to go back to one of the words you mentioned in the beginning: participation. What is participation? When we ask the public to participate in projects, how are we actually participating in these practices? One of the most important things that I've tried to build inside participatory projects is to build trust, safe spaces, all emotions are allowed, everything is welcomed, all expressions of the body and the feelings that are going on, we never cultivate that inside of the dance field, you know? It's like there is a rhythm, and a pace and professionals and there's codes, but suddenly there is "Wait a minute, wait a minute: what if we bring those tools inside our meetings and encounters?". So that's where the wellbeing comes into on a professional level and how each person privately or personally brings it forward and advocates for it. So yes, we're often talking about safe spaces or trust building or space for deep feelings or emotions to enter the professional world. We also… too often the piece that has disability inside it and the disabled artist on stage gets programmed, but how often are the practices needed for disabled people to enter the workforce addressed inside of an organization? It might be a star piece, but that's literally programmed, to speak about inclusion. But how much are the practices built inside our everyday

existence within the field? So for me the way we work has to turn inward and that's the reason why wellbeing actually becomes about activism, in my opinion.

PC: But on the side of people that were attending your classes and your workshops, how did you perceive that willingness to join after... in September, when some classes started again in person and then stopped again?

MG: Some people were capable of it, some others were not, so they couldn't go back to the digital context after. I mean, one time digital, then in person, and then back to digital. There's a lot of different ages and I think it's this constant play between accepting and respecting each persons' understanding of their own ability to manage the digital. Both accepting that, but also not forgetting about finding other avenues, finding other ways. Within our Parkinson's group, it's a progressive disease anyways, and they had a decline during Covid, because they didn't have access to all of their programs that they had access to, because the social level dropped so strongly. Several of our dancers ended up in care homes or wheelchairs more quickly than before, and it's sad to see, there's no doubt about it and we have to rework and rethink other ways to still reach people that can't no longer come to the dance class, but that's a very specific context.

PC: But yes, from my point of view I also dance and I think it also happened the same thing. So before there was this first wave, and we were all excited about trying to find out a way to perceive a sort of wellbeing in ourselves. Then we started the classes in person, and with the second wave we started to progressively abandon them. Also because we were working online, studying online, and I really felt the need to spend time away from the screen and I was like "How can I think that something that should bring some benefit to my mind is just annoying me?"

MG: But it's interesting that in that moment… I think that what you have just described is wellbeing though. You were talking about participating in online dance classes but at that moment in which you said "Actually right now my system can't do this anymore, I'll bring the practice inside my body and maybe go out in nature and dance, I'll do something differently in my room". That tuning into listening to

what your body needs and your system is saying “This is unhealthy right now”. You’re not losing the dance just because you’re not taking a class on the screen, but turning back to your body is what you’re doing at that moment, you know? So the next step is: what does my body need and what can I do for it to continue my practice in a tangible and felt way and not to the screen? I think that tuning and listening is the practice of the wellbeing.

PC: I think it was the best way to finish.

MG: To turn away from the screen. But thank you for this, it would be great if we finally would meet in person again. Tomorrow I will take a train to join Yasmeen for *Practicing Empathy* in Düsseldorf.

PC: I’m going to take a plane tomorrow to come to Düsseldorf.

MG: No way, really?

PC: Yes, I told her and she knows I’m coming!

MG: Then we’ll meet in person!

PC: Yes!

MG: Amazing, beautiful! That’s the best way to end the conversation!

PC: So I see you tomorrow.

MG: See you tomorrow, beautiful! Ciao!

PC: Ciao, have a nice day!

Interview with Yasmeen Godder

PC: Good morning Yasmeen, thank you for being here and for having found time for me.

YG: Hi Paola. Yeah, sure.

PC: Actually this is also my first English interview. I already apologize if I will make some mistakes.

YG: It's ok, I understand. And you are doing this research in the context of which bigger project?

PC: It's a Master's Degree at Ca' Foscari University of Venice and Professor Susanne Franco was one of my professors last year. She told me that there was this interesting field of research that was getting developed about dance and wellbeing, and then I decided to follow it, but taking a specific path. Also to try to answer your doubt about what is the connection between empathy and wellbeing, I've thought that my associations can make sense, but for sure you could help me understand if they actually make sense.

YG: Yes, I mean, it's not that I don't see any connection. This is important for me to say. I could see a connection, but I just want to make sure that there is clarity and that we're not taking it to places that are different from what I intended. You know, *empathy* in general it's a word that brings up a lot of questioning and resistance and people have different understandings and opinions about it. So I just sometimes want to make sure that it's taken into consideration that it could be questioned or that it could be thought about. Is it really wellbeing connected? Of course it is, but I also want to make sure that it is not taken as an automatic perception.

PC: Yes, sure. So, in a few words, I start my thesis by trying to define what wellbeing is and what the perception of wellbeing today is. What I've found out with this initial

research, is that wellbeing is more connected to the social and cultural context than what I thought. In the beginning I thought that this concept could be intended more as a physical or mental one, but then I figured out that it was also much related to the social fabric. And from that kind of understanding I moved my research in social and community wellbeing, meaning how can we live well together, so to say. And this is what I'm trying to understand through the performing arts. If there is something that we, as citizens, can do through the performing arts to live in a healthier society and to live better collectively. For example, in the first case study I analyze the context of Bassano del Grappa and Centro per la Scena Contemporanea, that is more like a system, and how it can bring to the city and citizens of Bassano itself a form of wellbeing. Then there is your case study, that is more a research project-performance and in this case I'm really interested in how the audience is involved in the precise moment of the performance and also afterwards. So how does the audience go back home, how people feel and how can that feeling be brought again into the society and empower it, so to say.

YG: Just to add, in relation to your question, I think that we can also talk about previous works of mine that led me to this research, if you would like. I started out about six years ago because of different projects that I did - and I can tell you about them - to shift a bit my way of working, to work differently on what I'm interested in doing and to start to understand and to question the societal impact of what I'm doing, if it has a meaning at all. What happens during this time that we spend together in the theater? Can it really influence the way people then go in the world or the time that they take out of their daily lives to meet with other people in space? How am I defining that time, how am I formatting that time? I am interested not just in dealing with how my work is influencing someone else, but to also see the duality of the meeting. And I can tell you a bit about that history if you want and how I got there.

PC: Yes.

YG: So, in 2015 I was invited by Monica Gillette - you probably know her maybe through Bassano - to take part in this bigger project called *Störung/Hafra'ah*, you

can find it on my website. It means something that disrupts and it was like a triangular project that involved people living with Parkinson's disease, scientists and artists, dance artists. It was like a triangular research and throughout this year of research we had conferences, but generally I basically opened up my door to start weekly classes with people with Parkinson's disease. I had no previous idea about this, because I had never worked with this particular disease and with the older generation. In general, what was happening in the studio was for people who were dancers. But opening up the studio doors to people of different ages, with different physical situations, and also to scientists who were coming from different schools of thought, we kind of started this common research together. It was a common sharing of knowledge and cross pollination that has been a very big shift in my understanding of what is the potential of dance, what is the potential of having a dance company and a studio, but also understanding more about the impact of dance as a form: what are the tools that we have beyond showing what we have to do, to create meetings between people, to create interaction, to create situations, to influence environments. And this was a big shock. For me now it sounds obvious because now we still have classes for people living with Parkinson's, because we decided to keep going and we found fundings. But you know, I'm an independent choreographer, my work is still quite cutting edge and it wasn't a work that was necessarily aimed at wider communities. So I think that this door opening first is an action, it was a big action, because as long as you are in your bubble and you're just meeting people that are in a way similar to you… I was exploring a lot of different themes and trying to research deep things and I did it, it's not that I didn't. But I think that when I opened that door on that day I realized how limited the information in the group up until that point was. It was maybe people between 20 and 40 who were fit in a way, who chose a career as dancers, and it's not a bad thing, it's a wonderful thing, but it creates a very specific kind of life experience that you're drawing from. And of course every individual is a world and there's so much, it's very rich as it is, and I was always interested in that, but at some point, opening up the door to other bodies, to other fields of thought, to people who were not trained dancers, brought to a lot of new experiences, information, emotions and also a lot of my company members started to explore other aspects of themselves. We as a group opened up in a new way to new information, because I guess that when you go about making a

dance work, as I did in the past as a choreographer, you bring a theme and you research it together, but in that context we were all living the same experience together, trying to learn something new. In a way that is always true about every research, but there was something about this that put us all on a more similar plane, together. Less hierarchy, less like "I have this vision and now I'm gonna research this vision", and I think that since then, there has been a shift in the way I think when making works. I just want to say that previously there was another work that I made called *Climax*, which was right before this project. It was done in a museum and basically it was a retrospective work of pieces of my different works. I really wanted to take parts and pieces of different things that I had done and place them together but in proximity with the audience. So there wouldn't be the stage and it wouldn't be clear where to sit or where to stand and everybody could look at it how they wanted and could exit and come back and there's a lot to be said about this piece, but one thing that started there already, was also this quality of letting go some of the control that I had over how people look at what I do. I mean, they can choose how to look, when to look and their expression is also exposed: if they like what they see, or if they walk away, or if they want to engage… but also there, there was something that slowly we understood: that people in the space were also creating choreography and whoever was coming to this performance was making choices, and their choices were impacting how we were experiencing the work. So already then there was this questioning. As we're proposing this moment in time for people to come to a theater or a performance, we were actually also allowing them to have an impact, to change, to shift the show, to be engaged in their own way. This was in 2014 and smartphones were becoming very big… and I think I started to become more intensely concerned with what is the experience that I want to invite people for. Because of course the shows start, we stand on stage, the light goes down and you see people: you see the light of people with their mobile phones. And you question: "What is this time? What is this time that we share? Can it really be something different than the usual "this bores me, so I can just go on Facebook"?. Whereas in the past you were committed, you could walk out but you were committed to something. I almost felt like the level of sensations had to be stronger, the sensorial engagement had to be stronger, both the being present in a space for the performers, but also the audience had to be more substantial. And then after I

did the project with the parkinsonian people and then we started to have Parkinson's classes and I think that the next show that I made was called *Common Emotions*, because I was drawn by this idea that with very simple dance proposals, things that we do everyday in the dance studio such as throw our shoes in the corner, lay on the floor and start rolling, just simple things that are so basic in dance like partnering, things that we don't consider like skills or we don't consider to be something that it's very complex, are in reality huge tools for other people to connect to themselves, to connect to their bodies, to find wellbeing sometimes, you know, in a social situation as you are researching. So in *Common Emotions* the performers dance but every once in a while they invite people to meet them in the back of the stage: so the dance continues in the front, but once in a while somebody goes on the back and behind the screen they offer different workshops for the audiences and eventually the piece becomes more and more interactive in the sense that what is happening on the stage is more and more influenced by what is happening behind the scenes and eventually it becomes like one big workshop of the whole space. And it is about common emotions and about the possibility to connect emotionally to each other, because in the theater in a way you always connect, I mean that's part of what the theater wants to offer to the audiences, that they feel what is happening on stage. You can also sit in the audience and you can feel the others' emotions around you and this influences you. For example if people laugh, you are more likely to laugh. So I was inspired by this kind of infectiousness, emotional infectiousness, that is also present in the theater, but I wanted to make it more obvious. Instead of being in the dark, I wanted this infectiousness to be present in the theater as part of the shows. So that was *Common Emotions*, and then I had another work after that was called *Simple Action* which I did in Bassano. Both of these I did in Bassano actually. This one was basically like a ritual. The audience was all around the space and the performers one at the time approached the audience. They put out their hand, they held their hands and invited people in, and they asked them if it was ok that they took their weight. Then they took their weight and they slowly lowered them to the floor. So it's like a practice of care, but I guess it's very much like a dance practice as well, because they were carrying the weight of someone else and you need to learn how to do that. But at the same time we all know how to do it because it's connected to taking care of children, parents, or people who need your support and this is the

whole thing. It's 50 minutes of this, where slowly the performers offer other people to hold them, and then the audience holds the performers and slowly it becomes like a ritual of one action that everybody is doing together. It was a commission by Roberto Casarotto and the commission was about Stabat Mater. We didn't use the music but we used the original text from the Middle Ages and I worked with a musician called Tomer Damsky who basically did this very hypnotic version of it, in which you don't understand the Latin words but it puts you in this state where you can just let it go. We did it in a church in Bassano that is no longer active as a church, so it was very ritualistic. This impacted people very strongly, because first of all we all wanted someone to be carried by, you know. It's part of the need that I think many people have. This caused a general need of caring, of taking care and it touched people in many different ways about parenthood and about taking care of parents, for example. At the time we premiered it in Italy, people had an image: it was right after the big earthquake and there were a lot of these images on television. Other people have talked to me about war, but there was also this kind of social affect. For example we performed this a lot of times in Germany. You know, we are mostly Jewish, not all of us, but most of us are coming from Israel and we were carrying the bodies of Germans, and they were carrying us. It has this kind of healing effect maybe, touching upon the ability to meet other people in a different way. And then following this, one of the responses I got from this piece was empathy. And I started to research this word because I knew what it meant, but I didn't really know, because it's a tricky word, it really is, and I feel like the more I work with it, the more I am confused. Because on the one hand, the idea of it is about curiosity, about being curious about someone else's emotions and staying open to look, experience and take someone else's emotions or state. But it's not necessarily about the fulfillment, it's not necessarily about the ability to really be able to do something and of course the challenge of empathy is that people say that if you're more empathic, you intuitively think people will like you. And then how you practice empathy, how you work on being empathic to things that are different from us or that challenge us or that are not comfortable, so I think this is why I'm curious about this word. I'm curious about it because it's not just this nice thing, it's not just this. It's about finding this ability, but knowing that it's also hard, that it's also difficult. So I decided to do a research project called *Practicing Empathy* and because of these responses that I

received from my works, I thought that it would be really interesting to do a series of pieces that would have touched upon this. And the first one was about the performers trying to practice empathy with each other, so like really internal, almost like a group therapy, and a lot of it is vocal. They're using their voices to express and to respond. And then I thought that number two would have been the performers connecting to audiences. I realized that we were researching empathy, so we were starting internally, but it was the time to go out, thus we did a workshop. Here I'm part of a community in Jaffa, of the Arab and Jewish schools, so I invited the Arab and Jewish mothers from the schools to join a workshop about practicing empathy and we researched different practices. We also worked with the Parkinson's group. We also did, as a Company, a kind of month long research with them and then we went to Germany and we worked with immigrant women and with youth groups, but also with senior citizens, and again with the Parkinson's groups there, to research empathy. Then we came back to Israel and it was February 2020: we built a whole structure of a piece where basically we wanted to bring people in, and we offered these different practices that are really about breathing together and holding each other. There were a lot of different kinds of practices that we had accumulated from different research with different communities and then Coronavirus started. Everything was shut down and everything that we thought of doing in this piece was not possible. Not to touch people, not to be close, not to exchange with them. Everything was wrong, everything that we did was exactly what was not allowed and I think for me it's really interesting to think that my work, which became more and more about touch and proximity, it then turned to be the big *no-nos* of this period. Both touch and proximity became dangerous and even this word, "infectiousness", which I found so interesting in my research up until that moment. It is the idea of how we get infected about each other emotionally, also in a negative way sometimes, and not always positively, because sometimes there is negative emotional infectiousness that also leads to nationalism and fascism and things that are scary. But I found this to be very very interesting, that this was a moment that was cut. And then we had the first shutdown and in between the first and the second shutdowns I created *Practicing Empathy #2by2*, as a result of this. It is basically two dancers with two audience members at two meters distance. It is about the two meters you're allowed to be distanced from another person. It's like to take this for

an act that we're expected to do in the public sphere and to use it as an act of intimacy. This was super interesting because we took some ideas that we worked on from before with the communities, I mean all the research that we did was with touch and everything, but it was interesting that these two meters actually created a kind of safe place for people. Somehow I think that for some people this allowed even for a kind of intimacy, and so we created *Practicing Empathy #2by2*. While now I just premiered in July my solo, *Practicing Empathy #3*, which basically I started out as a way to deal with the fact that I wasn't able to work with people. This was a very specific moment in time in which I closed into myself after many years. I've always been very much involved with a lot of people, in my Company and in communities, and suddenly I found myself alone in the studio again after years and then I started questioning: "How can I practice empathy like this, when I'm not meeting people?". And then I started to go into research and found that there is also this thing called "self empathy" and I found it interesting that the work evolved into this theme, from practicing empathy to practicing empathy alone. So that's kind of the process over the last few years in a nutshell.

PC: Yes, basically you answered many of my questions already.

YG: I know, I know, but we can still go through some of them. But I think I've been questioning all of these things. I'm a choreographer, I've been doing this for twenty-something years since I was in my 20s, and I ask myself more and more what is the potential of meeting with people. People take time in their lives and they come to see a show or to have an experience and... if I go back to *Climax*, the first piece, I realize that people want to be engaged. I was surprised to be honest, because as a viewer, I often enjoy sitting in my place, but I also understand the desire to take part in something, to give your body also an expression, not just the body of the people who are performing. I started to understand that the performers are agents that have a particular specific information that could be also influenced by other information. I feel that it's also extending the spectrum of the performers being influenced, because we are always influenced by performing, in a way. If people laugh then I take it to a more comic place. If it's very quiet, there is a tension, and that informs me as a performer. But can this, the presence of these emotions, have a

bigger place? Could it be more influential? So it's shifting the amount, you know, and not the percentage of influence and not what's there, it's all there in performance; empathy is there in performance. People empathize with what they see. There are mirror neurons and people have the ability to imagine themselves in the bodies of people performing, so that exists anyways. It's more about acknowledging. I'm curious about the acknowledgment of what I'm going through right now as an audience member and how to always be aware of that as I'm creating a work: what is the environment that people are entering into, what is the experience. And it's challenging, some people feel threatened by the proposals, it puts some people at discomfort. It's not intentional, I'm not trying to put people in an uncomfortable place, the opposite. I work a lot with the performers on creating a place in which people feel that whatever it is that they experience is ok and whatever it is that they feel is ok. And that's a huge thing because I think that *Practicing Empathy* is not just about teaching others, it's also about being able to be in that place as a performer. If I'm standing in *#2by2* performing in front of another body, how am I allowing those other persons and bodies to feel at ease with themselves as I watch them and they watch me? It is a complex thing, it's not so easy and it takes a lot of personal work to be able to accept also what is there and the meeting with another person. On stage it is a safe place. I do my thing and if there is someone there who looks at me in a strange way I can avoid it and I can always take my eyes to someone else. I mean it's hard. But in *#2by2* there is this real dealing with meeting with another person and being with them for half an hour. So I think that it's a huge thing for the performers. It's also extending their abilities, it's not just about giving and sharing, but it's also a lot about self-work, about working on myself and working on ourselves to get there. We call it *generous leadership* because there is leadership, since you are leading other people, but there is a generosity in it, so you're always taking into consideration the other person. It's a lot, I know it's a lot. I have put it all, but it's connected to everything that you questioned.

PC: Yes. Actually I have some questions, but it's more about some considerations of the last five minutes in which you were talking. I would ask you to tell me what you think about this: do you think that now, after and during Covid, people feel the need to be more engaged, even then before?

YG: I think it's going in both ways, like two extremes. I know that here in my community in Israel, I found myself… you know, after years of touring, after years of always looking out, in which I was saying "Ok, I'm based here, but my work is all over Europe'', the locality became very important, the energy into the locality. As I already told you, I did this collaboration with a Palestinian artist, choreographer Nur Garabli, and I created a workshop for Arab and Jewish women to meet throuh dance. So for example, if that would have been during another time, I wouldn't have had the energy or the time. This has always been important for me, but the fact that I was here and I couldn't travel, made me be aware, or not only aware, but made me put more energy into the locality. So I think I'm not alone, I volunteer to give meals and I did a lot of this kind of communal work… I just want to add that I did another piece during Covid which is called *I'm Here* and it's a piece that basically was part of a festival that happened here at the end of the first shutdown and they called it *Exit Strategies*. Basically we sent out to different people who signed up, a packet with cloth and paint with a video and invited them to paint their bodies and create a stamp of their body on this cloth and then hang it as a flag so to say "I'm here, I'm in this place, my body is here". Later we hung it all in a small park in the center of Tel-Aviv and it was like a meeting. 50 people signed up, so we had 50 flags of people's bodies: within 24 hours we didn't have any kits left. So it felt like people wanted to engage and also take the chance to be involved in another way, in a very direct way, very quickly. So I'm just saying this because I feel that it made me think differently about what I'm proposing to people. So you're asking if Covid made a change here. There were many protests, I mean every Saturday people were protesting against the government. There was a big protest every single Saturday. Eventually the Prime Minister who was then, is now not in the government. We managed to get him out. So I think there was a lot more grassroots, a kind of engagement of people, both socially and politically. Specifically in Israel, there was also war which made things much more extreme and almost created even civil war here. So I don't know, I think it made things more extreme in many ways, both to engagement, both in people's need to… You know, I guess because life was stopped… and suddenly you see other things, you have time to notice other things and you realize that there is an impact to your voice, there is an impact to what it is that we choose to do and maybe the fact that we're just not in this capitalistic race, of just going on and on and just

responding to our professions and the heteronormative lifestyle, but that there is this ability to step out and to be engaged. But I also feel on the other hand that it created a need for disengagement. Maybe because it, and I don't know if to call it also sometimes a result of depression or people's inability to deal with this shift and change. And I think it is a lot of what I see in young generations, but also in these meeting places that are so important, for example our classes for people with Parkinson's. I can say that the Zoom opened up something because it created accessibility, but also as soon as the shutdowns ended nobody wanted to go back to the Zoom from my classes, because for them the meeting is important, the meeting and the engagement with each other, so it became even stronger this need to get out of the house to be there in the class. So to your question I think yes, for sure I saw much more engagement, politically and socially, but I also feel like it has a cause that is taking also to other places, that is making it difficult. I've seen people and I know people who had a very very very hard time as a result of it, and actually had stepped away from society and from normal interaction. I don't know if to call it normal, but kind of social, more like social interaction that exists in everyday life.

PC: Now that you were talking also about wars, I know what happened also in Israel not a long time ago. And I wanted to ask you how it feels to be and to practice your job, your profession there and to bring it also to other countries that maybe can have a different mentality and approach to reality.

YG: I mean, you know, at this moment of the war, it feels empty. I want to believe that what I do can have an impact and I believe it does, because I believe in concentric circles. I know that the classes, first of all the dancers with the dancing community… I think that the fact that they are working through bodies in certain themes, expressing themselves, has an impact on their families. So it has this impact. And again with the people with Parkinson's it's like a life-rope sometimes to come to a dance class, and this impacts their families. And also the classes for women who were Arab and Jewish… During the war there was a lot of tension and people took it very differently. There was a lot of fear, there was a lot of things that were happening first of all, there were missiles on us, on all of us, so there were missiles coming, but also there was a lot of hate crimes against Arab-Israeli, against Jewish people, so

there was a lot of hate, hate, hate, hate and everybody was very afraid. This was very inspiring for me: that within our group of women we had to stop the classes and when I wrote "I'm sorry, but we cannot have classes because the centre is closed" because it was dangerous, many of the women wrote "Oh my God, the first thing that I want to do right know is to meet all of you and dance, this would be for me a relief of what's happening". And many from both sides, both from the Palestinian-Arab side and from the Jewish side women said this, that this would be a relief for them, to meet and dance togehter. And I think, so it has an impact but it also feels sometimes… When something like this happens, I realize and I question deeply the importance of what I do. I know it's important to keep going and I believe in the arts as a healing form, but it stops everything. And in relation to your question of going out to other countries and other situations, I think it's very inherent in who I am because I grew up here and I grew up in the US and my family, my background is also very mixed, like my ethic background. So I've always been interested in not being in this kind of homogenous situation, like I want to be sharing thoughts and ideas with different people and different societies and I want the work to also have a friction with different cultures, so I think for me it's very exciting always to have this kind of meetings of what I proposed. It brings new ways for myself to look at what I'm doing, often through perspectives of different countries and cultures. So I love it and I think it's important, I think it's very much deepening my research.

PC: Now for example, in this last part, you said that you've seen an impact especially on people who were suffering from Parkinson's disease and also on women in that kind of specific situation, but do you think that also the broader audience, when coming to one of your performances or one of your choreographic projects, do you think that there is a kind of impact also in that specific moment?

YG: Definitely yes, an impact for sure. I wouldn't have been doing what I'm doing if I didn't see an impact. I think that is also what's filling my work more and more, this idea that this has an impact, that people are moved, that people are touched, that people need it, that people go away with a shifting feeling. As I've said before, with *Simple Action* actually there was a woman… Many people talked to me, but one woman wrote to me on Facebook, an audience member, and she said: "I went back

to the world, on the street, after the show. I exited the theater and I went to the streets feeling like I had the ability to practice empathy". And I think that she, with her response, was really the inspiration for this new series of works, because I thought "Wow, this work, this thing, really changed the way in which she approaches seeing things and approaches conceiving how she is experiencing being outside in society". And that meant a lot to me. And I get a lot of feelings shared actually with people that said that this did something to them in a way that resonated within them. This is really my fuel, I guess, for making work. That's what I want, I want people to take away from it and to have a shift and to feel themselves differently and to give something like a gift to give to others. This is really what's pushing me.

PC: And can you also think of your works, of your performative works as co-created processes or as an immersive process in which you as an artist create the meaning and the art piece with the audience together, or also immersion in the sense that… I think yes, because you also mentioned the necessity of feeling involved in a more sensorial way, so I think that is immersion.

YG: Yeah. It's an interesting word *co-creation*. I don't know what I think about that, because there is this aspect that we are depending on others to do it with us. But we come with ideas, we come with a structure. And that's always a question, like people say: "Ok, so you have this practice or this particular thing that you're giving, but how free is it? How open is it?". So I think I invite people into something that I've structured, that I've created, but I leave it open enough to take into consideration their choices and their desires inside of it. Because otherwise I feel it's so open that maybe they don't… First of all I don't know how safe it is, I take responsibility. I feel that a lot of these works have a sense of responsibility, they have to take care of these people. Because otherwise, if for example somebody just wants to throw him- or herself on the floor, I don't know… Or if they want to do something, it has to be held. I feel like it's like a hug, it has to be held but that's always the issue of how much you are letting go, how much you are giving a sense of independence inside of these proposals while you're also caring. I feel like I'm caring, I like to feel like I'm being carried sometimes. I enter and it's not about me, it's about someone else's proposals, but it gives me a chance to be inside of that proposal. So that's why I think that co-

creation is a tricky thing. Immersion I can definitely connect more because yes, it works with all the senses. I definitely like this idea of let people enter with themselves, with their bodies, with more sensorial aspects of their being in my solo, because it was created during this period of Covid and there was not this ability to do anything with any kind of touch, even of an object, everything has to be away from others. I have a section where I actually invite people to go into a kind of meditation and they enter with themselves into this kind of images and it's almost like a practice of taking care of something in the body and being aware of a place that's asking for attention. And then I take it to this image of ourselves inside of our bodies. So there's a moment that is not about watching Yasmeen and what do I think about her, but it's more about what's happening to me right now, what's happening to my body, and again you don't have to, you can stay with your eyes open, you can reject it, you can say whatever you want and that's also always important for me, the ability of people of not participating if they don't want. It's always a thing that is important. You were talking about the senses, of how you take in, but I think it's also important how you create internal space of the imagination and play so that's almost another layer.

PC: Ok. And maybe the last thing that I wanted to ask you again is, after having thought and created this project, what have you understood more about empathy, how has your perception of this term changed?

YG: Well, when we started I talked a little about it, but I think empathy obviously has two qualities. Sometimes you feel it very intuitively: it happens, and it happens very naturally and sometimes we need to work at it. It's like you need to be aware of how to engage yourself with something that you're not identifying, that you don't understand, or is difficult for you, or you even have an internal rejection. I think empathy is also interesting as a practice, but that has become a big theme and empathy can also be painful. I mean, in a way it's not always this good feeling. Sometimes to empathize is, I don't know if to call it dangerous even, because as you were talking about self care and wellbeing, I was wondering if sometimes empathy is dangerous. Because I was also reading this interesting research from a woman who has sent it to me, about these Palestinian-Arab doctors from Israel who were

living in Israel and went to volunteer in Greece for the ships that were coming from Siria to help the refugees. And the research was about empathy: they wanted to help these refugees because they could empathize with them through their identity and by feeling a connection to their situation, but that created a lot of emotional difficulty, stress and trauma, and this was a lot about how empathy could be also traumatizing, you know. So I think this is also interesting for me, because also in my first piece for the group, *Practicing Empathy #1*, sometimes it can seem harsh when people see it. And I think that is a big part of it. Sometimes the expression of the other person you're trying to connect to, it's not an easy expression, it takes something from within you to be able to be with it, to acknowledge it. That's one thing that's interesting. Another thing that's interesting is this idea of empathy which is about staying curious. I like this idea, because I think that as long as you're curious, you don't shut down. It's key to not shutting down, to stay open.

PC: Ok, I think I realized that basically what I can focus on are these two starting points that are the same, but then take two different paths: one is that of empathy and its manifold aspects. Also because of what I've read when trying to understand what empathy was. Because I'm also used to this superficial meaning that we all share, so to say, but there is much more, such as this connection with aesthetics and art and the fact that one was putting him or herself into the art piece in order to give it his or her personality and not the contrary, which is what we now intend with empathy, so to put the other in ourselves. And also the fact that for example, if we watch a performance that wants to convey some meanings that are not really good, if we empathize with that performance, we can create a sort of "wrong environment" in us. It's difficult for me to explain it.

YG: No, I understand what you mean.

PC: So the performer can also have the "power" to leave you some bad feelings about the reality, some things that you don't really need to have in yourself, and this also connects with what you were saying about the trauma. So I think that there is that kind of way to follow, but also the other of impact and of beneficial impact that performance and choreography can generally have, and in particular in your work.

YG: Or in-knowledgement, to understand that this time that people give you has… I don't want to sound simplistic, but it's heavy, it's heavy how you use this time. It's not just about dealing with aesthetics, with something nice. I don't know if to call it just aesthetics, but appreciation, to be appreciative of what you see. That's one thing, but there is another aspect. I think even more so today. The other, with whom we sit quietly, what is the ritual that brings us together and what is the content that we come around together? This is something that has become more essential for me, thinking about performance. Yeah, but great, thank you for this. I enjoyed talking and actually I was wondering, do you think you can send me the recording?

PC: Yes, sure. I hope it will be of a good quality, but yeah. Yes, for sure.

YG: I just think it's good for me, because sometimes when I talk it's a good way for some of the texts to get to them, it just gives me a good perspective of some things that I'm dealing with. It also opens up something for me.

PC: Yes, sure. So, I hope to see you in two weeks, because I'm going to come to Düsseldorf.

YG: Ah, great! I'm so happy! But can you sign up for *Practicing Empathy #2by2*?

PC: Yes, I hope to manage to do it.

YG: Great, great.

PC: Thank you very much again.

YG: And if it's possible send me the recording! There was something that I wanted to remember and I didn't document it. Take care.

PC: Thank you very much for your time, take care too.

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