

# Rehearsing Sustainable Futures

*A qualitative study of embodying affect through dance*

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the questions around how dance can contribute to the growing climate crisis through its potential in altering the transformational sensibilities by appealing to an embodiment of affect. Framing climate transformation through embodiment is a response to a call from human geographers, to draw attention to the creative, experiential, and imaginative capabilities of the arts in addressing climate change awareness. Reflecting feminist scholarship, the potential of dance as a medium is through its *poetic space*, emphasising the semiotic importance of movements and images. From this position, and helped by posthuman theories, the thesis explores sustainable futures by viewing the body as a site for knowledge generation, and studies how experimental dance produces different affects through a performance-project called GRIEF. It formulates the stage as a place for change, and it frames the research to investigate *can climate challenges be understood in new ways through experimental dance?*

GRIEF was a transformative dance *praxis* where eight students at Solbakken Folkehøgskole rehearsed sustainable futures through aesthetical reflections in a period over five weeks. They were directly involved with a participatory practice that was meant to nurture creativity and imagination as a practice located *in* and *through* the body. It explored the importance of individual agency vis-à-vis collective agency, and it emphasised embodied and affective relations to environmental challenges to challenge a binary understanding of the *society-nature nexus*. However, how can imagination and creativity contribute towards socio-nature challenges? In the creation of GRIEF, I call for a Relational Choreography that facilitated new ways of performing; an artistic experience for what it *does* and not what it shows, potentially influencing how the students see their place in the world. Opening contradictory spaces for reflections, it produced *affective uncertainties* via the body that reflects both current environmental realities and the inherent uncertainties in making and performing experimental dance. Acknowledging multiple knowledges, and operating in the category of emergent transformations, GRIEF was a place that created the conditions for transformability through a *felt* individual and collective empowerment in a climate changing world through a *relation listening* to other bodies or materialities moving in time and space.

## Acknowledgements

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

*It was during a term in Human Geography at Blindern in the beginning of the pandemic 2020 I realised that dance not necessarily only could change one's worldview, but the body itself can produce knowledge and be a site for debate. After having been "shopping" for inspiration around social change in my career as dancer, choreographer, and pedagogue elsewhere but the body, I could finally relate my experience, knowledge, and wishes for the future in a bodily engagement. Instead of exploring my work separately with different preconditions, I realised then that the body itself can be a premise in understanding the actual world I live in or wish to live in, not always having to fit the body into the ideas or contexts of others. Consequently, I am now trying to move in alternating ways between my skeleton, my "meat and blood", my skin, and my thoughts and feelings in meeting with other bodies. These bodies could be other dancers, an audience, the everyday society, academic texts, or imaginary bodies. In this way, I engage my body practically, politically, and personally in my dance. It is a paradox that I had to find the tactility in my dancing through the drier academia. However, that's the way it is.*

(Fieldnotes 02.04.2022)

Climate scientists are currently encouraging the need for the narrative they have been proposing through objective, numerical, and factual data to also embrace a cultural turn that implicates social scientific research into human emotions, attitudes, and responses associated with the forthcoming crisis predicted by scientific models that dominate in contemporary discourse. Despite a general understanding of this social and scientific collaboration, art is continuously a forgotten aspect and is left out in scientific reports (Kagan, 2010).

Consequently, my thesis explores whether art can be a driver for social change, playing a role in the development of transformational sensibilities by appealing to an embodiment of affect through dance. Framing climate transformation through embodiment is a response to a call from human geographers (Nightingale et al., 2021; Vogel & O'Brien, 2022; Sultana, 2022; Feola, 2015), and to draw attention to the creative, experiential, and imaginative capabilities of the arts in addressing climate change awareness (O'Brien, 2018; Routledge, 2018; Galafassi et al, 2018; Bentz, 2021; Tosca, 2019).



In my profession as a dancer, choreographer, and teacher, I have been creating and performing dance internationally for the last twenty years. In recent years, I have been using societal issues as strategies for creating dance and choreography to try to *do* something around my concerns from my position as an artist. This ongoing process of figuring out what my art can or cannot do, both in terms of the practice itself and the event of performing publicly in front of an audience, is a daunting task. The repercussions of artistic work and practices are difficult to measure on an overall societal level. However, my engagement with dance over the years has provided me with an embodied understanding that combines the different realities between the rehearsal space of making a dance performance, and the space of negotiating everyday life. Current environmental issues have particularly provided a fertile ground to combine dance and climate change in investigating the body as an apparatus for debating these issues.

What dance can set in motion in terms of engaging with climate change is the motivation for this thesis. While existing literature combines art and climate change, much of it seems to define art as instrumental to societal change, rather than having the capacities for transformation within its own practices. In contrast, feminist literature uses semiotics analytically to explore climate change in new ways, e.g., through experimental art. I believe the potential of dance as a medium is through its *poetic space*, rather than through its representations and deconstructions, which highlights the semiotic importance of movements and images. From this position, I will explore sustainable futures by viewing the body as a site for knowledge generation and see how experimental dance produces different affects through its practices.

The study's focal point is centred around the dance-performance GRIEF with a group of eight students from Solbakken Folkehøgskole. It explores the importance of individual agency vis-à-vis collective agency, emphasising embodied and affective relations and their possible engagements with environmental challenges. Although GRIEF offers no cure for sustainable transformations, the thesis studies the dance-project as a rehearsal space for future sustainable scenarios. As an artistic practice it reflects the historical importance of art and the inherent capacities of opening new political horizons, providing spaces for reflexivity and experimentation, and potentially shifting the students' worldviews.

## 1.1 Can We Afford Dancing?

Instead of portraying or questioning the devastating consequences of global warming as looming in the future horizon, this thesis proposes that we acknowledge climate change as a contemporary fact. So then, how can we afford to do contemporary dancing? Judith Butler (2021a) argues in an online event that feminist thinking is an activity only people in the Global North can afford. Contrary, the current focus in the Global South is mainly to lift people out of poverty and to upgrade their living standards, thus the use of energy is necessary to meet the demands for making this happen. This is a contentious topic, too extensive for this thesis to fathom. Nevertheless, in the Global North where 20% of global population live, but where 70% of global pollution emanates, and proportionality should therefore be held accountable to a larger extent. Further, she claims that our euro-centric academia creates gaps in the literature, in a very competitive market where academics are pressurised to work for free, thus creating institutional poverty. It also presupposes what is considered as valid scholarship, with the result that creative writing, craft, or in this case, contemporary dance and the body as text or knowledge are ignored. Butler argues that we need to implement new political regulations to implement craft and creativity into the fabric of academic institutions. Although this thesis is not an attempt to implement these political goals, it is an attempt to contribute towards the creative and practical research much needed to fill the academic gaps.

So, what do we in the West do? This thesis considers the transformative strategies of changing culture from the angle of aesthetics. This can aid perspectives on the historical socio-nature divide in addition to exposing the blurred lines between aesthetics and political economy, thus providing a framework to explore the notion of *nowtopias*, where the abstraction of art potentially can translate into *walk the talk* (Demaria et al., 2019). Nowtopias are in this project represented by imagined scenarios where the students rehearse and can act out social struggles in *the here and now* on the dance floor. They highlight how cultural practices are formed by any given view of the world, with a particular focus on how experimental dance can affect the students view on the socio-natural world, reflecting geographers who call for centring affect in transformative change to skew our human-centeredness/anthropocentrism (Nightingale et al., 2021; O'Brien 2018; Sultana, 2018).

This study is thus contextualised within a euro-centric environmental position, attempting to expose our normative postulations of human beings to be superior to all other beings or forms of life on this planet. However, like the common critique of posthumanism, this thesis struggles to balance who or what can have agency, or more specifically, the moral and ethical considerations on who is and can take responsibilities for our climate future. Nevertheless, it elucidates the *practice* of anthropocentrism that permeates our society, particularly with the current emphasis on the techno-managerial paradigm and planetary boundaries, trusting in technology to “save us” or asking us to eat less meat, use less plastic, to plant more trees so to balance the CO2 budget within the required planetary targets. These practices of anthropocentrism “is one of the most deep-seated and pervasive features of modern culture and of ourselves as products and reproducers of that culture” (Vetlesen, 2019, p. 2).

Further, the thesis argues that aesthetics can give attention to the role of agency and meaning making through our “aesthetic sensibilities, capacities, and practices” (Alexander, 2017, p. 2) and their relation to economic, political, ecological, and cultural dimensions. Potentially, such a focus can challenge the anthropocentric notions of culture and nature, predominantly seen as a static and fixed relation that constitute two separate domains of reality. In short, the work of GRIEF challenges the “active” and reserved human rights to moral and agency in our constitution of culture by acting on the “passive” nature (Vetlesen, 2019), recognising the many agents and agencies in materialities other than humans, to see humans as a part of nature, not apart from it. This view might expose humans ongoing exploitation and destruction of nature that not only reveals the precarious situation for nonhumans, but also for the human species, situating the human point of view as one of many.

## 1.2 Entering the Stage

Inspired by geographers like Karen O’Brien, Paul Routledge, and feminist writer Donna Haraway, emphasising *creativity* and *imagination* in their challenge of hegemonic ideas in society, this experimental dance-praxis elucidates the physical conceptual realm the students were introduced to in GRIEF, which is a development of my academic work in combination

with my choreographic strategies. It is an attempt to engage the students with change, as well as introducing the reader of this thesis to the actual challenges the students were faced with.

GRIEF was a transformative *praxis* and a social space where the students rehearsed sustainable futures through aesthetical reflections. They were directly involved with a participatory practice that was meant to nurture creativity and imagination through an embodied experience. The form of GRIEF goes under the term of post-dramatic theatre, with an emphasis on collage, montage, and fragments, where the performance parameters light, sound, space, and movements have equal weighing or dramaturgical significance as text (Hans-Thies Lehmann, 1999), referred in this thesis to as *decentralised dramaturgy*. The praxis potentially creates a strong sense of affinity, perhaps even identity, through embracing a kincentric ontological perspective. Although the work of GRIEF could be seen as a detached and singular nowtopia, occurring in the rarefied setting of boarding school in a rural south-eastern Norway, this work should engender a strong sense that they are participating in something of relevance and that challenges societal norms of behaviour that could upset the established status quo.

The dance-project is contradictory, in that the rhythm is less hurried than the supposed urgency needed for direct action to prevent the dire climate futures. However, the time and attention given to GRIEF and future engagement with the arts is scaling down the anticipation of change; to a *metamorphosis of being* and thus within reach for the students. According to Heikkurinen (2018), this position does not involve being either passive or active but serves as an antidote to the logic of capitalism. This notion of “retreat and of an unproductive expenditure of surplus” (Demaria et al., 2019, p. 444) reflects the artistic rhythm in GRIEF, where the “willing not to will” or “letting go” is an important part of its practice.

How can imagination and creativity contribute towards socio-nature or socio-political challenges? My strategy in making GRIEF was to “push” the students into a space of perception where I encouraged them to an embodied reflection around ethical and political issues on socio-natures. By inventing experimental dance work, I intended to facilitate new ways of performing that “opens up multiple, nuanced and often contradictory spaces for consideration and reflection” (Grehan, 2009, p. 2), merging the roles for the students of being a doer, a spectator, and being done to. Producing *affective uncertainties*, it reflects both

current environmental realities and the project, and the attempt of GRIEF is “to get beyond the potential paralysis of the contemporary moment” (p. 22), to prevent an apathy towards a climate future and to activate an engagement on a micro-level. The praxis of GRIEF moves away from deconstructions, representations, the utopian, and the prescriptive to combine epistemology and ontology through semiotics in a relational aesthetics, to a poetic space.

To help us convey the notion of the nonhuman and change, Haraway (2006, p. 117) claims that “liberation rests on the construction of consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility”. In a similar way that Haraway (1991) utilises a cyborg metaphor as a body/technology splice to communicate social reality as a world-changing fiction that shape our social relations, I argue for the possibility to suspend time and disbelief in an artistic dance praxis as a temporal cleavage (Bakker & Bridge, 2006). Although not following a technological or a transhuman direction, I believe our imaginative capacities are useful as an analytical device to construct embodied emancipatory futures including nonhumans. Accordingly, the artistic daily dance practice in GRIEF represented an alternative ontology consisting of both an imaginative and a material reality.

GRIEF recognises the diversity of subjectivities as an important site for conflicts and creativity in addition to reflecting the historical importance of art with its innate capacities to open up for new sustainable horizons. Important in this research is to emphasise my attempt to contain dissonance in the daily dance-practice, thus contrasting ideologies that focus on instrumental readings of art and collective activity, accordingly, not overlooking individuality, ethnographic actualities, and place of context (Sultana, 2018; Brand, 2016). Thus, this investigation explores the potential for more than rational ways knowing and creating. With its interests for open-ended explorations, it becomes a practice of “staying with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016) to circumvent finished results or tangible goals, and a praxis to promote universal solidarity and equality according to convivialism (Illich, 1971; Sultana, 2022; Adloff & Neckel, 2019). Consequently, the premise of this work conceptualise transformation as a normative outcome through processes and desired relations that can enable change, rather than desired states (Nightingale et al., 2021).



Photo 1: The students performing GRIEF. Photo: Stephen Hutton.

### 1.3 Research Questions

My main objective in this study has been to examine how the students at Solbakken Folkehøgskole act upon their embodied experiences and (the uncertainties of) affect in a dance-project. Using the making of GRIEF as a pivotal point of study, my research has been guided by a principal and open-ended research question:

*Can climate challenges be understood in new ways through experimental dance?*

Based on this question, I have formulated three empirical questions to support the leading research question:

- 1) *Can knowledge produced through the body be a driver for a sustainable future?*
- 2) *How does affective uncertainty in experimental dance offer openings for transformation?*
- 3) *What are the potentials and limitations for dance as a transformative praxis?*

## 1.4 The Structure of the Thesis

This research is an entangled part of my artistic and pedagogical profession. So, how do I engage in a writing process when the concept and the phenomenon is bodily in its essence, and the act of our dancing is defined by its emerging fluidity? Consequently, this thesis cannot totally be a written representation of the work of GRIEF or my practices. However, it can reveal liminal spaces, in which mine and the students' identities fertilise and infiltrate each other, in addition to provoke and evoke each other. Writing this paper by *being in motion* is like my and the students' movements and transformations we undergo in our everyday dance practice, thus becoming in relationality with the world. In this ongoing questioning and search about how to convey the students' artistic experiment, the structure of the thesis aims to lead the reader through a similar aesthetical experience. I am attempting to make the text and the concepts affect many senses of the reader, thus making the analysis an embodied reading experience. Therefore, this study moves between ideas from different perspectives to bring together concepts that hopefully expresses more fully what the students experienced while embodying their new dance-world. The investigation lets ideas and practices fade away accordingly with the fluidity of this work, aligning with the thesis theoretical framework, thus positioning this study between a human and a posthuman analytical landscape.

In what follows, I will provide a contextual backdrop for climate change in current society, the relevance for young adults, and its place within the aesthetics. In chapter 3 I define my theoretical framework that draws on feminist and posthuman theories to see how the students as individuals and as a collective can affect or be affected through their bodies, thus creating knowledge about the world. By using the imagination as an alternative bodily horizon to a critical, the chapter also elucidates how the theories conceptually set the stage for the experimental dance-project as relational geography and its potential for transformative learning and thus a cultural shift. In chapter 4 I present my choice of research methods that discusses my theory of knowledge through an embodied perspective with its feminist scholarship. Chapter 5, 6, and 7 are empirical chapters where I analyse my findings. Chapter 5 primarily deals with the epistemological potentials of embodiment, chapter 6 discusses the uncertainty of affect as critical, and chapter 7 builds partly on 5 and 6 to discuss ontological potentials of GRIEF as a transformative praxis. The concluding chapter combines empirical findings with the proposed theoretical framework.

## 2 THE CASE IN CONTEXT

Climate issues are increasingly present on the global political agenda as climate change is impacting many aspects of people's lives due to tangible alterations in the weather and visible changes in the local habitat. Due to this elevated political status, climate change has been recognised as a structural global problem that calls for the implementation of collective measures and responsibilities to adapt for a sustainable future (Nightingale et al., 2021; Vogel & O'Brien, 2022; Sultana; 2022). So far, the main response has been techno-managerial, meaning that the issue is a problem for so-called experts to fix within an economic growth paradigm. Following a techno-managerial perspective, the narrative of climate change argues that the human subject is a rational, autonomous, free, and active agent, equipped with agency and reason, thus marking an opposition to nonhuman matter which is defined as passive, inert, inanimate substance without agency, and can only move if assisted by an external force (Latour, 1993). This linear narrative, supported by hegemonic models of projecting a dystopian future, is failing to account for the nonlinear or alternative rationalities which challenges the status quo (Leichenko & O'Brien, 2019).

The dramaturgies of dance and theatre, which are the theories and practices of dramatic composition, are similarly divided in these two main directions (Gade, 2010). The linear revolves around the notion of interactions between human agents using text, which I refer to in this study as *conventional* theatre and dance, whereas nonlinear post-dramatic theatre views other stage elements, such as space, sound, light, and movements equally in its dramaturgy. Contrary to a male dramaturgy and linear logic, post-dramatic theatre considers diffusion or standstill of actions, thus it challenges the beliefs we have in dialogue and human interaction to solve problems with reason, language, and communication. Nonlinear theatre is consequently associated with a feminist and a post-modern agenda, resisting the status quo, which I have in this thesis chosen to call a decentralised dramaturgy. Moving between a macro and a micro dramaturgy, it offers up a tool in which to contextualise and analyse GRIEF artistically and as human geography. The emphasis in this research is on the micro dramaturgy, reflecting the production of the work of GRIEF and what can be understood on a human scale. However, the work comes alive through its interactions within the group of students, and the larger scales outside the sphere of the production.



The interaction between the macro and the micro dramaturgy is the very core in my attempt to bring dialectic and relational qualities to the project. The temporal ecological and the political situation create a context in which the students encounter the experimental dance; meaning their experience on the dancefloor relates to a wider context in overlapping processes, reviving “a politics of the senses and speaks to a networked and imbricated body politic” (Eckersall, 2018, pp. 242-243). Ultimately, this understanding of dramaturgy “is feeding the ongoing conversation on the work, it is taking care of the reflexive potential as well as of the poetic force of the creation” (van Kerkhoven, 2009, p. 11). The poetic force in GRIEF is guided by the role of *imagination* and *creativity*.

Therefore, I call for a decentralised dramaturgy in the creation of GRIEF to see whether it can hold a critical potential that can deal with the current climate challenges and a life in the Anthropocene. Hopefully, it can aid the students, individually or as a group, to act on the behalf of the violent and visceral changed circumstances they experience due to climate change and the adherent notions of loss and grief, as they potentially feel they are given no space to manoeuvre their agency due to the techno-managerial focus. Based on this perceived apathy towards climate change and reluctance towards changing the economic status quo, my interest lies in exploring how dance as an artistic everyday practice can have the potential to affect individuals *and* collectives to embody change, thus creating space to initiate transformations that can *move* our society towards a more sustainable future. It is a response to the call to go beyond technical fixes by centring affective adaptations (Nightingale et al., 2021), changing the narrative of climate change (Vogel & O’Brien, 2022), and to “learn from the embodied emotional geographies of climate” (Sultana, 2022, p. 10).

The point of departure for this materialism has no *a priori*, which implies no pre-existing origin or sense, thus sees the world as contingent (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1997; Latour, 1993). In a nutshell, this project is to remove humans from our positing of ourselves “as superior over all other beings in every important regard” (Vetlesen, 2019, p. 250). Practically, it provides a conceptual understanding for the students of how through dancing to shape or form their own body, how to position themselves or relate to the bodies of their peers in space, and how to invite or relate to the bodies of the nonhuman.

Aware of the critique of posthumanism for being abstract, relativistic, failing to provide a plausible alternative to current climate situation, and a fetishistic (thus capitalistic) attribution of agency to living and non-living entities (Ingold, 2011; Malm, 2018; Vetlesen, 2019), GRIEF is rather inspired by Latour's (2017) pronounced connection *between* human and nonhuman agencies and the unpredictability and danger it entails. The thesis discusses what *is* peculiar about human species, thus reflecting on the (required) accountability and responsibility from human subjects.

GRIEF emphasises dance to be more than a trivial distraction from reality (Jordan, 2020), particularly as the unknown in GRIEF produces uncomfortable and affective disorientation (Ngai, 2005), leading the students to a state between shock and fatigue called *stuplimity*. In exploring the critical potential of this affective uncertainty of doing and being done to, I was curious to find what elements of environmental issues the making and performing are rising, and whether the affective uncertainty can offer relevant contributions towards future climate trajectories. In what follows, the thesis elucidates the students' meeting with the different ideas and proposals behind GRIEF in a combination of academic and practical insights, which is the foundation in the generation of the empirical data in this thesis. It explores the relation between art and the political to examine the innate aesthetic aspects to politics and the revolutionary potential of art as social and cultural practices. These processual approaches serve both as common ground for learning as well as a place to explore the experiential dimensions of the process, thus establishing a *praxis*.

## 2.1 Sustainability and Transformation

Sustainability is the normative governing paradigm that currently is driving the idea for societal change for social movements, organisations, companies, and states. However, there is a dissonance between sustainability as an unescapable trajectory for developments in the future, and the absence of consensus over visions and targets for the future in relation to this concept. Geographers like Nightingale (2019) and Adloff & Neckel (2019) explain the reason for this is to be found in contested and dissimilar imaginaries for future transformations, as these are competing to define future narratives. On one side, the "green economy" holds pro-

growth as an imperative for sustainable development, on the other degrowth claims economic growth contradicts sustainability and believes in a fundamental societal transformation. However, they all emphasise the importance of imagination, recognising that a collective or individual understanding of the world not only is a linguistic or a cognitive manifestation, but “images, ideas, moods, emotions, and narratives also significantly shape human thought and action” (Adloff & Neckel, 2019, p. 1017).

Similarly, there is seemingly no singular theoretical understanding of transformation from which to frame a conceptual basis, accordingly, how we transform is difficult to prove both in the theoretical and practical sense (Feola, 2015). As with sustainability, transformation is used to promote different positions or visions, the main tendencies being either cultivating the status quo or suggesting radical societal changes, thus transformation does not have an innate democratic or normative character. Nevertheless, transformation provides a common ground when applied as a metaphor to elucidate the concept of “fundamental, systematic or radical change” (p. 379), commonly accepted as a structural change in teleological or nonlinear processes (p. 381). To study GRIEF, my thesis uses the everyday dance practice as a metaphor: as a rehearsal space for creating scenarios of sustainable futures (Tyszsuk & Smith, 2017, p. 57).

Moore et al. (2014, p. 3) argues that “transformations generally begin with a perturbation or crisis that serves as an opportunity”. This turbulence or unrest could be both ecological or social, exemplified by climate change or election cycles. Furthermore, social movement theory proves how such a disruption can be intentionally initiated by groups in developing new practices that can build a shared identity or a collective awareness with potential transformative trajectories (p. 54). Although GRIEF is not in itself “the transformation”, it can operate in the category of *emergent transformations*, which is a concept where a reconfiguration of social practices is taking place (Feola, 2015, p. 380). Thus, the dance practice of GRIEF is a place or situation that creates the conditions for transformability through an empowerment of the individual students or the group in a climate changing world.

## 2.2 Climate Diagnostic

Climate grief, climate anxiety, eco-anxiety, eco-distress, or climate-trauma are terms currently being discussed across society due to our warming planet (Sultana, 2022; Senanayake, 2019; Butler, 2021b; Head, 2016). People suffering from these states are typically concerned with coral reefs, ice caps melting and bush fires. Some experience feelings akin to a rug pulled from under their feet; that they are enjoying a life that ultimately is ruining the world. Particularly young people are frightened about their future, feeling betrayed and abandoned by both adults and government in failing to respond adequately to the dire climate trajectories, potentially creating chronic stressors and negative mental health implications for future generations. However, a study by Hickman et al., (2021) is clear in that psychological distress around climate change exists, impacting affective, cognitive, and behavioural aspects. The emotional states are feelings as varied as fear, guilt, loss, shame, betrayal, abandonment, helplessness, as well as hope. In their vast scientific study on climate anxiety and young people between 16 and 25, similar age of my informants, they found that 6 out of 10 were very or extremely worried about climate breakdown. The rapport argues:

[A]lthough painful and distressing, climate anxiety is rational and does not imply mental illness. It can be seen as a “practical anxiety” which sometimes leads people to reassess their behaviour in order to respond adequately to threats including uncertainty (Hickman et al., 2021, p. 3).

Consequently, climate anxiety is fundamentally constructive, thus the thesis can explore the practical dimensions of the anxiety. Without getting into the pathological aspects or claiming the experience of GRIEF is a therapy for climate anxiety, which is beyond the scope of this thesis, it looks to see whether an embodiment of the worry or anxiety through dance can provoke a respond to the *uncertain* climate futures.

Judith Butler (2016, 2021b) suggests that grief brings about a *precariousness* that places grief in the intersection between individual psychology, economy, and ecology. She explores that some lives are grievable and some are not, and asks whether ecological grief puts us all in the

same proverbial boat? Different from grief during wartimes, ecological grief is not shared equally. She emphasises that it is not only a matter of the grief of human beings, people the subject or the object of that grief, and asks the pertinent question: “[...] what about insects, animals and other living organisms? [...] What of lakes, glaciers or trees? Surely, they can be mourned, and they can, as material realities, conduct the work of mourning as well” (2021b, p. 76). Reflecting the critique of anthropocentrism, geographers like Nightingale et al., (2021), Vogel & O’Brien (2022), Sultana (2022), Singh (2017), and Senanayake (2019) have already made these connections, critiquing individualism, which is a part of a broader capitalist and a masculinist understanding of who we are as selves. This way of understanding denies the interdependencies of humans and nonhumans, and they rather emphasise the engagement and *relationality* with other living processes while identifying humans as individuals reproducing the status quo. Consequently, ecological grief can be seen either as an individual responsibility, in line with capitalism, or as a critique of the system of capitalism, where humans are in the centre for decisions and decision-makings.

In any case, the work of GRIEF is calling for a grieving or mourning experience for the students, so that they can start to understand what it means to live on a damaged planet. Although the experimental dance project is inspired by posthumanism, it tries to avoid the proliferation of agencies earlier mentioned and “the collapsing and levelling of agent-specific differences” (Vetlesen, 2019, p. 18), so the students can explore the real effects of the powerful human initiated practices by letting *grief to be their companion* (Head, 2016).

### 2.3 Dance as a Transformative Space

Through recent history, people have used art as a place to go in times of emergencies, hence its capacities to activate imagination (Galafassi et al., 2018; Milkoreit, 2017). Looking at art as a spectacle or a practice in relation to environmental challenges can therefore elucidate different ways of seeing and experiencing the world. It can include and give voice to alternative ways and perspectives in the endeavour of the transformations needed to meet the criteria according to the Paris Agreement of 2015. According to Katz (2004), it is in the fabric of everyday life that the potential for rupture and change can occur. Although the climate

crises might have structural underlying causes, it is the body that experiences and makes sense of the impact through everyday practices and behaviours (Katz, 2004). In this respect, dance seems to be a valid vantage point to study the changing climate and the role of imagination and affect, as its practice is located *in* and *through* the body. Thus, GRIEF is presented as a platform in which for the students to explore the felt and lived climate implications upon them as individuals and as a collective, perhaps generating valid responses to curb the dire climate trajectories through a change of their (stage) culture.

While not dismissing techno-managerial responses to climate change, this study contributes towards the growing body of literature that focuses on the possibilities for agential manoeuvre in climate related issues (O'Brien, 2018; Nightingale, 2019; Sultana 2022; Routledge, 2019; Singh, 2017). However, it situates itself more specifically to the less explored roles of *embodiment and affect*, with the help of *imagination*, and their potential and importance for agency and societal change. According to Nightingale et al. (2021), Milkoreit (2017), and Leichenko & O'Brien (2019) current alternatives are consistent with our failures to imagine and create a shared vision that compels us to envision an alternative future as a catalyst for social transformations. Therefore, the study seeks not only to inspire and give hope to the participants involved in this research through art, but also offer a way to envision an alternative way of living to support a sustainable future that counters the dominant initiatives proposed by mainstream economic and political bodies. GRIEF as an everyday dance practice invites the students to an alternative space to live, behave, and imagine sustainable futures.

### 2.3.1 *Setting the stage*

GRIEF was designed as an everyday artistic practice over the period of five weeks for eight students, aged between 18-20, as an experiential and reflexive process for embodying a sustainable future through dance, in the end facilitating a platform for transformative learning. The focal point was on the relationships between the individual body, the collective body, and the body of other whilst moving, singing, and dancing in the creation of GRIEF. The inquiries and the reflections in this thesis are particularly helpful in developing insights into individual and shared embodiments of affects, in addition to challenging normative assumptions around beliefs, values and worldviews. Due to the students' living situation at Solbakken

Folkehøgskole, which is a boarding school for young adults, a focus on self-identifying or collective behavioural changes outside of the dance studio were not possible to assess and therefore outside the scope of this thesis. Consequently, no information was made on how direct practical actions can influence or be influenced by larger structures (e.g., consumption, energy, transportation) vis-à-vis sustainability.

However, the thesis explores the systems of culture (e.g., social norms, institutions) to which they are subjected on a personal, political, and practical level through the medium of dance, thus explores “the complex interplay between individual change and cultural change” (O’Brien et al., 2019, p. 276). In other words, the students were encouraged to evaluate how the role of their own beliefs and assumptions are products of pressure from culture and social norms, how they can influence others and how they potentially can impact societal change processes.

The work of GRIEF involves *listening* with your own body to the other bodies moving in time and space. In this thesis, listening represents the idea of utilising all senses, including both sensory and cognitive ones. The work attempts to remove a hierarchal positioning from the dance making practice, and further tries to skew a dance methodology centred around the “I”, which often is premised on individual mastery. Inherently, the projects questions whether it is possible to make environmental art that is non-anthropocentric. In fact, it shares similar principles of community and its notion of convivialism (Illich, 1971). Geographers like Singh (2018) and Adloff & Neckel (2019) have later expanded on this notion to include the reciprocity of an ecosystem. Thus, practising and making GRIEF can be an effective indoors method for developing the listening skills needed for an empathetic ecological dance making that can develop perceptive outdoor relationships, potentially facilitating a platform for climate engagements.

### 2.3.2 *What GRIEF does - not looks like*

Giving attention to the aesthetic dimension of climate change attracts an understandable scepticism, hence its obvious lack of direct action or the seemingly absence of a radical potential needed to transcend the acute environmental prospects. Nevertheless, the aesthetic potentials of art and its imaginative capacities provide useful insights for climate engagers to

overcome an attached aesthetic obstacle (Jordan, 2020). Expanding our future imaginaries by addressing complex societal issues through art practices, we can possibly transform our society (Bentz, 2020; Boal, 2000). To be involved with climate related art has the potential to create an affective space for reconciliation and grief so to renew human consciousness (Galafassi, 2018, p. 73), which in turn can facilitate support and a “felt need” for sustainable transitions.

Contextualising GRIEF with Julia Bentz’s (2020) notion on how art engages *in*, *with*, or *through* art, it attempted to foster deep engagements with the students *through* art “which conceptualizes art as a means of transformation” (p. 1597), associating with co-creational and open-ended processes. The project might have failed in operating on such a profound and transformative level; however, the students engaged *with* the art project, thus serving “as a medium to facilitate dialogue and express learning” (ibid.) (see chapter 6 and 7). The embodied ambiguity and the uncertainties in the creation of GRIEF were helpful in addressing the relational aspects to both a micro -and macro understanding of global environmental contexts. I believe the dance project went beyond a superficial level of engagements *in* art, where the aesthetics “is used as a platform for introducing or communicating the issue” (ibid.), hence avoiding representational and instrumental strategies in the creation of GRIEF.

In my academic endeavours, I have in mostly encountered climate related artistic experiments concerning representations and deconstructions, seemingly only considering the instrumental aspects of the arts. The examples of using photographic inspirations for moving the body or having a single person to walk across stage to represent mass-movement are, in my understanding, exercises or tabloids with desired and known outcomes, not leaving out any uncertainties for the performers. Therefore, I refrained from giving the students explicit inspirations directly connected to the theme of climate change. I tried instead to set up concepts with inherent transforming capacities as to do something to them rather than explain and show through representation or deconstruction. Following the encouragement from artist Hito Steyerl (2020), I tried to steer away from politics that is happening elsewhere outside of the stage, but rather see how politics can be integrated in the way we do, experience, and engage with the making of GRIEF. In other words, GRIEF’s aim is an artistic experience of what it *does* and not what it shows, thus bringing the notion of uncertainty into the students’ performative experience.



### 2.3.3 Praxis – a space for transformative learning

GRIEF is thus an attempt to go beyond mere representation and deconstruction, and to challenge the students' imaginations and preconceptions by allowing for destabilisations and reconfigurations through the artistic experience. Hence the ongoing character of the work, the students processing the impacts during and after rehearsing and performing, the work is implicitly political and ethical. However, to categorically divide the political and the ethical is difficult in "the messiness of the experimental" (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 30) as the student's individual process is immersed in a *drama of contingency*, making this process "an ethics, which is at once a politics" (p. 559). Thus, the expanded experience of performing and making GRIEF is chaotic and confusing, where thoughts, ideas, affects, emotions, and memories are *meshed* in an affective, aesthetic and ethic-political experience (Serpell, 2014, p. 26). Helen Nicholson (2005) explains how knowledge can be produced through this performance practice the students endured by sharing reflexive and creative processes, referring to the theatre practice as a *praxis*:

As a practice, it is generally understood that knowledge in drama is embodied, culturally located and socially distributed. This means that knowledge is produced through interaction with others, and that this reciprocity between participants generates new forms of social and cultural capital. [...] Applied to drama, praxis does not denote a linear model of learning, but a cyclical process in which practice generates new insights and where, reciprocally, theoretical ideas are interrogated, created and embodied in practice. Praxis, therefore, is built on a circularity of thought, feeling and action (p. 39).

The description of the cyclic nature of *praxis* is transferrable to the process of GRIEF and the five weeks' period I spent with the students, as well as reflecting the iterative and reflexive analytical process of my grounded theory approach. The experimental exploration consisted of collective and individual actions and insights, thus widening the experiential dimension of exploring thoughts, affects and emotions through the body. Consequently, the praxis elucidated potential social and cultural changes, thus a space for transformative learning.

## 2.4 The Work of GRIEF

I recognise that the notions of embodiment and affect in the work of GRIEF have epistemological, ontological, and critical potentials. Accordingly, the thesis adopts an analytical strategy inspired by Sara Ahmed's (2014) approach to *feel your way* in combination with Judith Butler's (2016) dynamic notion on vulnerability, ultimately making GRIEF an embodied processual experience that offers an alternative view on climate transformations; as "relational, uncertain, and performative" (Nightingale et al., 2021, p. 1). In the students' endeavour with this socially and politically engaged dance-work, they were met with challenges stretching beyond the here and now as the work resonated with them over the course of the process, thus producing an affective, emotional, and cognitive impact. The everyday dance practice of operating mostly in the unknown potentially widened their space of perception through their bodies, but at the same time it generated an affective disorientation (Ngai, 2005) as the work does not offer any solutions or answers to the problem of climate change nor how to make, understand, and perform GRIEF. In other words, GRIEF produces a variation of embodied uncertainties, both in the sense of the students as political subjects as well as GRIEF as an aesthetic object.

This project explores the students' affective encounters that are difficult to categorise into either positive or negative experiences. Instead of trying to make a distinction between "good" and "bad" affects, or value happiness and joy as "affective value as social goods" (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 30) above the more negative connotations, this thesis highlights the dynamic qualities of affective dissonance in the students' engagements with GRIEF. I interpret affective dissonance by reflecting on the notion of vulnerability in Butler (2016), the new materialism theories of Karen Barad and Bruno Latour, geographers Karen O'Brien's work and Nightingale et al.'s (2021) review on affect, and the affect theories of Silvan Tomkins and Brian Massumi, seeing this precarious situation as dynamic. Such a position encompasses for the students having the ability to affect or to be affected, potentially leading to creative and solution-oriented capacities of (stage) behaviour in the world, or the possibility for withdrawals due to the overwhelming and demanding work for the students, an apathetic and dystopic prospect often portrayed in contemporary films and literature. Consequently, the challenge for the students is to endure these processes of uncertainties to

see what affective values they produce and whether they challenge a static notion of positive and negative affects, thus with a potential to change their views of the world.

#### *2.4.1 The role of the student*

I base my analysis on the students as non-professionals, both in their capacities as performers and as an audience, hence their age and experience. This approach with unqualified experiences might shed light on understanding the value and impacts of cultural experiences, rather than a detailed academic contextualisation of dance and theatre with professionals and their potential agendas. I propose that the students as spectators in this thesis are not referred to in a traditional audience-performer relation, where the spectator is normally placed outside the designated area for actions as an observer. I suggest the students have the capacity of spectating and experiencing the process through the everyday practice with an inside view, reflecting Haraway's (1988) notion on situated knowledge, and echoing Jacques Rancier's (2009) notion of the *emancipated spectator*; that an audience member has the capacity of being an active interpreter rather than being pacified. Ultimately, the potential for the students in working with GRIEF is in doing and being a thing done to (Taylor, 2016), in addition of being able to spectate and assess their own activity during the performance work.

The students are sharing the same uncertainties as a durational mode, it does something to them over time, thus making it an ethic-political, aesthetical, and affective process in relation to the world (Serpell, 2014, p. 8) and not a segregated one-time event. Consequently, rehearsing and performing GRIEF is a cultural practice of "world making" (Duggan, 2017, p. 41), at least on a micro -and a personal level, and facilitates for an analysis of the heterogeneity assembled in the students and their varied emotions.

#### *2.4.2 The role of GRIEF*

The project of GRIEF is not limited by the singular event of the performance but attempts to be an expanded notion of a theatrical happening that includes the pre-performance and post-

performance processes, described as an *eventness* by William Sauter (2008). This spacious definition includes what happens before and after the shared experience between the students and their audiences in an extended timeframe. Consequently, when I refer to GRIEF as a research object in my methodological approach, I am interested in the dramaturgical and aesthetical strategies that produce affect via the body throughout the project. The ephemeral and transient “here-and-now” qualities in a singular event could potentially explore an anti-capitalistic understanding of the live-element in the performing arts, as “performance clogs the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary to the circulation of capital” (Phelan, 1993, p.148). However, this ontological disappearance and ideological dimension by resisting reproduction (p. 146) is beyond the scope of this thesis. The notion of performance as disappearance and its ontological perspective needs different scientific research questions.

In other words, GRIEF bases its scientific perspective on the embodiment and affect that are produced and experienced over time as a “form of knowing and understanding the world” (Taylor, 2016, p. 36) through the body. The analysis uses the students’ individual and collective experiences and processes as empirical references, thus the starting point of the first part of the thesis focuses more on the phenomenological and epistemological aspects, rather than the ontological, as the experiences are bodily and sensory meetings with the world that continues to work in the students after rehearsing and performing GRIEF. However, the analysis will elucidate whether the empirical references produce knowledge through the body, or how and if the physical approach impacts the way the students think about the world, hence a shift of *worldview* and thus an ontological discovery.

As we will see with Merleau-Ponty (1962), embodiment is alternating sensory and cognitive processes shaping our perception, consequently making the notion of affect in this thesis a social construct and a form of “stickiness”, later expanded on by Sara Ahmed (2014; 2010). Consequently, GRIEF might contribute to shedding light on the potential longitudinal impacts of cultural events and how transformation of culture can contribute towards a sustainable future. Ultimately, it is inspired by affect theory and the emphasis on encounters between bodies for an embodied way of knowing, recognising “uncertainty and unpredictability as *part of transformative processes*” (Nightingale et al., 2021, p. 1, original italics).

### 2.4.3 *Uncertainty in GRIEF*

Uncertainties might produce uncomfortable positions and situations, often having the negative connotations of doubt, instability, disorientation, and dissonance, thus impacting the affective and cognitive modus (NAOB, Svenkerud, 1982, p. 80). Although uncertainty is mainly considered as problematic, Nightingale et al. (2021) considers the element important in producing “affects (action) and emotional commitment to shared human and more than human relations in action, projects, and policies” (p. 1), and directs analytical attention to the processual, rather than outcomes. Taking the position of uncertainty as open and explorational, this thesis can unearth how climate change can be understood in new ways through experimental dance.

The making of GRIEF reflects literature theorists Carla Serpell’s (2014) book *Seven Modes of Uncertainty*: “[W]e can view literary uncertainty not as an end in itself but as a set of ongoing engagements that shift between knowing and not knowing” (p. 20). Like the notion of emergence in new materialism, uncertainty contrasts here a passive notion to that of an active and ongoing navigation, and in the case of GRIEF, of embodied explorations. Further, and reflecting the semiotic approach of GRIEF, she metaphorically describes uncertainty like a “hum”: “the idea that aesthetics, affect, and ethics are all experiential – rather than mimetic, representational, or emulative – grounds this resonance” (p. 26). These thoughts are echoed in Nightingale et al.’s (2021) notion on affect as a conceptual resource of *thinking through affect*, thus shifting away from an instrumental adaptation analysis. The thesis mobilises an emphasis on the nonlinearity of affective relations, opening a space for transformation that make it possible to view GRIEF as a “political deliberation across actors and scales” (p. 3).

The dance-project GRIEF invites to an aesthetical exploration in an everyday artistic practice of the potential capacities given to both the subject (the students), and the object (the dance-performance), shifting the uncertainty of the making of GRIEF to the uncertainty of our lives in a climate changing world. It questions whether the body can produce knowledge, and thus a driver for a sustainable future, and explores its affective uncertainties with the potential for transformation through experimental dance.

### 3 THEORY

My thesis is situated in a feminist geography tradition with a posthuman science accent that ultimately operates in what is labelled as *a geography of affect* (Cresswell, 2013). If anything, the research encourages a less cognitive reflexive learning in favour of a more embodied and automated agency. Critical feminist and posthuman theoretical frameworks help me to problematise body/cognition and nature/society dualisms found in the typical scientific desire to maintain and produce simple categorisations and causal explanations. This thinking opens to a construction of reality beyond anthropocentric relations between the students by acknowledging nature and things to have agency, and this emergent and plural ontology makes the foundation for the empirical knowledge-production in this thesis. Karen Barad (2007) uses the term “onto-epistemology” for this pluralistic ontological positionality of the scientist, underlining my being as a researcher that cannot be detached from my scientific field of interest, which again reflects the critical notion of the scientist positionality found in Donna Haraway’s (1998) “Situated Knowledges”.

Through a speculative and embodied dance, GRIEF promotes meaning making through affective activity, rather than a cognitive representation of reality. Together with Doreen Massey (2005), who argues that space and place is constituted through social relations, the thesis insists that the rehearsal space in GRIEF is active and in a continuous process of being made, remade, and unmade, implying cross-scalar nodal interrelations: from the body to the global, and back again. Thus, this fundamental relational epistemology proposes “a human geography without scale” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 223), which introduces the notion of a flat ontology. Although this notion may at best be an imaginary exercise, this metaphorical collapse of space has geographical consequences in that individual student can be “glocal” agents with enhanced agency for societal changes, implicating climate challenges to be local, hence a consideration for everybody.

However, to frame *can climate challenges be understood in new ways through experimental dance* in GRIEF, I use the abstract and imaginary concept of *nowtopia*, that can translate the abstraction into concrete and physical spaces that can invent a futuristic alternative today (Burkhart et al., 2020). Particularly in our time of the climate crisis, they can be a place for

suspension to construct a liminal stage, where the emergence of *new social imageries* can come about (Demaria et al., 2019). Relevant for this thesis is the attempt to horizontally organise the artistic endeavour of GRIEF, which can be treated as material to design an open and convivial space (Jordan, 2020, p. 61). Thus, nowtopia will be further explored as a rehearsal space for temporal experience of “being-with” and for re-assertion of agency with attention to two forms of “crises”: on a personal level to address the need for the students’ role in the event of climate crises, and on a social level assigning a political context in which the students can demonstrate solidarity (Demaria et al., 2019).

Therefore, concerning what our bodies can do is explicit in this conceptualisation and in the embodiment of the everyday dance practice in GRIEF. I particularly think the notion of *affect* is helpful in discussing the collective feeling of *doing something*, creating a momentum of enthusiasm that can inspire hope and collective action. This view is particularly helpful in elucidating affect as flow between the students and their shaping of a collective (Nightingale, 2013; Massumi, 2003; Tomkins, 1995), and can elucidate the contingent consequences of the encounters between the students and the imaginative other (Anderson, 2009). The thesis explores ala Tomkins (1995) how affect can be viewed relationally between individual “inner worlds” and shared experiences, though aware of the ambiguity between affective and emotional responses, and that some reject that the notion of affect “cannot be brought into consciousness through reflection and observation” (Nightingale et al., 2021, p. 6). To my mind, it is precisely in the ambiguity we can avoid directing in advance what (theatre or) climate transformation ought to be or look like, thus remaining *unsettled* both analytically and practically. In helping to further the critical dimension in this art-project, the thesis adopts Sara Ahmed’s (2014) notion of sticky affect. She explains that affect and emotions are not inherent qualities within humans, but they come about as a relational process with an object, represented in this thesis by GRIEF as an aesthetical piece of art.

My thesis recognises different ways of “seeing” climate change transformations by adopting a situated knowledge position (Haraway, 1988). It limits its focus to consider the students’ personal aspects of GRIEF, which was embodied through the body in affective and imaginative experiences. Thus, it opens for a more visceral analysis that sees scale relationally (Nielsen & Sejersen, 2012), and that invites nonhumans into the process. It challenges traditional theories, arguing for a partial relativistic perspective on the society-

nature nexus by explaining that society and nature are relationally produced (Cronon, 1996; Ahmed, 2014; Haraway, 1998; O'Brien, 2018, Nightingale 2014, Siamanta, 2020). In other words, it promotes a social construction of nature that is historically, culturally, and politically specific, which means we can in a non-deterministic way unpack the idea or conception of nature for other possibilities. The understanding of our environment and nature is then experienced through and between our bodies, and not a detached and singular entity. This perspective allows us to have the capacity to change depending on our worldviews.

So, how do we relate to an uncertain climate future through dance and its relation to the predicted future by statistics represented by empirical science? In this chapter, I explore how the body can be a place for producing knowledge through an embodied and imaginative understanding of the world. Then it turns to the more “abstract” dimensions of uncertainty through the notion of affect, which is embodied in the students’ artistic everyday praxis, contrasting the accumulated and factual science represented by numbers, graphs, and analysis. However, the hard science might reflect some aspects of this thesis’ interests, as our daily lives are not separated from the impacts of news, mass-media, and human encounters. In my climate literature inquiry, I mostly found what embodiment and affect produces and not so much about the mechanisms. Therefore, I will in the following expand on the notions of embodiment and affect that draws on theory from psychology, cultural studies, and aesthetics, to see how they are interlinked and how they convey the possibility for a sustainable future.

### 3.1 Embodiment

I aspire to make a case for a thinking through the body as corporeality (Bakker & Bridge, 2006; Ahmed, 2014; Massey, 2005; Nightingale et al., 2021): the body as site and place for debate. Knowledge through the body or embodiment contradicts the position of causal and rational arguments, hence we are involved with other ways of knowing that goes beyond the use of language. Sensing, hearing, touching, feeling, smelling, and perceiving are aspects that the body knows how to manage, however, how do we explore these sensitivities without turning the body into an object? Thus, can the daily dance-practice in the creation of GRIEF be an effective way of communicating the climate challenges ahead? Building on my own experiences as a dancer, I understand the students’ dance practice to be an artistic undertaking



as well as a practice, accordingly I refer to the concept of dance not merely as bodily movements but considering it as an artistic everyday practice and a way of life.

Important in this research is to challenge a binary understanding of the *society-nature nexus*, as it has implications in how the students see their or humanity's place in the world. A binary understanding means defining society in opposition and separate from nature in line with a positivistic research perspective (Nightingale, 2014; Nightingale et al., 2021; Vogel & O'Brien, 2022; Sultana, 2022; Siamanta, 2020; Feola, 2015, Haraway, 1998; Cronon, 1996). The consequence of such a position views the environment as merely a set of biophysical processes, independent and separate from societal processes, that can be observable with neutral objectivity. Such a deterministic and realistic position not only is empirically inaccurate, as the world is clearly modified by human activity, but this position is likewise theoretically limiting. Nightingale et al. (2021) claim that too much attention is given to biophysical and infrastructural responses to regulate human behaviours and impacts for an effective transformative change. Accordingly, there is a need to embrace a cultural turn involving social scientific research into the embodied and affective responses associated with the looming climate crisis predicted by contemporary scientific models.

In order to unpack the idea about the body, I am inspired by the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) in questioning the somatophobic trends in academia. Similarly, I aim to locate the lived body as the central study for the student's individual experience, thus expanding on the notion of what is recognised as knowledge. He claims that the understanding and experience of the world happens through an embodied entwinement and interfusion of the body and mind that replaces Cartesian dualisms with a conception of the world through our personal relations, as "body-subjects". He proposes that our bodies "incarnate" our subjectivity embedding ourselves in the "flesh" of the world. In other words, our bodies are "always contingent and in process" (Simonsen, 2013, p. 16). However, Merleau-Ponty is criticized for viewing the body abstractly and from a male perspective, as he provides for a universal framework of the body in line with "essentialism, idealism, and voluntarism" (Simonsen, 2013, p. 15), thus ignoring the notion of power and individual differences. As a response, feminists are focusing on re-establishing the bodily connection to conceptions of subjectivity and knowing, which has established a base for a critical

phenomenology (Barbour, 2004). Later in the thesis, Sara Ahmed includes a feminist position in her notion on “sticky affect”, evolving on Merleau-Ponty’s fleshiness.

### *3.1.1 Imagination as a bodily horizon*

The work of GRIEF attempts to suspend the notion of historical structures in favour of one that calls for more imagination through the mentioned nowtopia, thus substituting critical (phenomenological) bodily horizons. This is a response to the absence of impact these horizons have made on climate challenges for the last decades, requesting rather a cultural turn that can guide further analysis in “the silences and gaps between data sets” (Nightingale, 2016, p. 45), thus allowing for new understandings to emerge in the relation between societal change and agency. Although GRIEF tries to place a focus on knowledge making practices that open the students’ imagination, it understands that the body is implicated in socio-material-technical processes and not detached from cultural, economic, and political aspects (Haraway, 1997). It rather promotes imagination as a cultural means to envisage a shared narrative that can guide the students’ collective conception of social reality, thus paving way for a communal sense of belonging (Kerschner et al., 2018).

Using the imagination to combine the notion of nonhuman and the collective, in their relation to climate change, can imply a rethink on how to be humans. Our imagination offers a way to visualise, feel, and therefore affectively invest in real or fantastical situations. This thesis moves between imagination in the sense of fantasy as a way in for the students to “invite” other onto stage, and as a creative force grounded in reality; as a rational supplement to produce imagination (Piper, 1991, p. 733). Through this reflexive rationality we can try to understand our temporal environmental situation, though realising we are not able to understand and know everything, however, it is through our imagination that empathy with other(s) can happen. In particular, the thesis emphasises the notion of modal imagination, which “is intended to remind us of our capacity to envision what is possible in addition to what is actual” (p. 726). In other words, through modal imagination and the situation we know, we can imagine and embody the past, the future, the feelings of others, and empathise

with other realities. Consequently, imagination, affective investment, and empathy are relational and interrelated, thus implying scalar dimensions.

Broadening the students' notion of an interdependence with other might urge them to apply an "ethics of care for, and affective relationship with" (Siamanta, 2020, p. 56) humans and nonhumans in their social praxis of dancing. Thus, it brings an awareness of co-residence and a culture to be affected with and by humans and nonhumans, going beyond an anthropocentric view which opens for the students to a "stage world" without humans as necessarily the sole protagonists. It is important for students in the work of GRIEF to rethink the assumed relationships and meanings between nature and culture, to grant the development of a political ecology that incorporates pluriversality (Kothari et al., 2018). Consequently, the students can improvise with multiple ontologies in their dancing, questioning the subject/object dichotomy, so they can "articulate different worlds than those of imperial capitalism and colonialism" (Siamanta, 2020, p. 57). Thus, GRIEF can challenge asymmetric power relations with an emphasis on the potential of agency, conditioning a kincentric ontological perspective.

Nicholson (2005) separates the notion of creativity into two understandings. The first aligns with the idea of an inner quality within the individual, known as the *artistic genius*, paralleled with the glorifications of entrepreneurs within innovative industry or business (Nightingale, 2013). This project is built upon the alternative perspective, where creativity is thought of as a responsive and reflexive processes where one combines own processual experiences with the perspectives, contexts, and histories of others. Consequently, the making of GRIEF creates a foundation for a social and ethical practice; a *praxis* around environmental concerns, where imagination and creativity are the process in which the explorative work is reflected.

### *3.1.2 Training the relational muscle*

I believe a posthuman theoretical landscape together with Nicholas Bourriaud's (2002) *Relational Aesthetics* is useful to conceptually understand and create the world of GRIEF. My attempt in creating a conceptual framework for the dance is precisely for the students to grasp Bruno Latour's (1993) critique of the divide between humans and nature, the separation of

our consciousness from the body, and to include an artistic praxis that offers a “space partly protected from the uniformity of behavioural patterns” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 9): a space potentially escaping the claws of capitalism. In this artistic realm, the students are “learning to inhabit the world in a better way, instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived idea of historical evolution” (p. 13), dancing within the existing reality moving between a macro - and micro scale. In other words, GRIEF extends into everyday life, thus making their dancing a realm of social interrelations rather than a private and independent symbolic space.

GRIEF as an experiment opens thus the students to a posthuman perspective that recognises that “the self” is coextensive with nonhumans. Expressing a sensitivity to nonhumans by asking questions about how to include the needs, claims, and agencies of other living habitats, creatures, and ecosystems, the students can themselves become the sensors of who can bring about change. It is an ambitious perspective, however, a concept like this “allows for a place for the force of things” (Müller, 2015, p. 34) and an attempt to “describe a more *distributive* agency” (Bennett, 2010, ix, original italics). By realising that we are made up from same material as nonhumans, perhaps then the students can give up the idea of the autonomous man and to see their place *in, of, and with* the world? Particularly, it highlights the social contract in theatre, where the students at Solbakken are brought together through dancing, which produces a specific sociability that can create social openings for interpretations. This is a contrast to the individual space of consuming literature or the cinema, where there is no occasion to improvise or manoeuvre in real-time. It is an attempt to stand up to the trajectory of the spectacular representations in conventional art (Debord, 1967); to continue the constitution of convivial relations.

To develop the notion of subject/object and to expand on the society-nature nexus, it is useful to include Karen Barad’s (2007) notion of *actor*, so the students can see themselves as embedded in complex ecological systems of *intra-connections*, rather than standing outside of nature. The notion of intra-action opposes the usual interaction with its assumptions of bodies or matter existing independently, accordingly challenging classical ontology (Anderson, 2009; Nightingale et al., 2021; Barad, 2007). This breaks from the perceived entitlement or right of man to re-configure matter and challenges a modern inclination of what we imagine matter to be (Latour, 1993). Accordingly, this is moving away from the capitalistic ideologies and teleological narratives in contemporary society, the students can be perceived through

intra-action as interconnected with other materialities. More specifically, an alternative ontology is cultivated where students are not thought of as ontologically other than matter, but rather a part of it (Coole & Frost, 2010). Thus, this new materialism tries to rethink the role of human beings solely as exploiting and controlling matter, whether it is nature, species, plants, or other. Consequently, in a relational ontology the students become part of a larger network where all sorts of materialities can affect and can be affected by one another, including stage lights, costumes, and scenography.

Ultimately, it means that humans are not seen as the only species having the capacity to act independently and to make choices, being equipped with agency. This “conceptualisation of the world as made by and composed of dynamic relations” (Nightingale et al., 2021, p. 3) implies that all matter is agential, and it captures the world as emerging through a constant state of becoming in human and nonhuman relations (Haraway, 1997; Bennett, 2010; Barad, 2007; Latour, 1993). Coined *agential realism*, agency is “a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has” (Barad, 2007, p. 178). Although Barad critiques both Butler and Foucault for including only human social practices in their processes, missing out on matter’s dynamism, the philosopher Vetlesen (2020) critiques Barad’s agential realism for being “in a state of philosophical vagueness; radical and suggestive, to be sure, but very hard to pinpoint, to get a firm analytical grasp on” (p. 137). Additionally, the emphasis on co-constitution and interaction suggests some sort of reciprocity and symmetry that is, according to Vetlesen (2020, p. 143), simply misleading as to how the current human-nature regime in fact is. Therefore, to achieve a further understanding of a critical potential of the body and embodiment, Judith Butler’s (1997) notion of subjectivity can aid a nuanced comprehension, that like Barad, proposes “that (human) identity not be understood as an essence but as a doing” (Vetlesen, 2020, p. 135).

### *3.1.3 Subjectivity*

Subjectivity aids an understanding of the operation of power, according to Butler (1997, pp. 14-15), being a more powerful analytical tool than agency via its focus on both effect of a prior power and the more hopeful condition of possibility. In particular, the configuration of

bodily subjectivity including social markers like age, class, and gender, the notion of subjectivity aids our understanding of the everyday body as performative, as “there are always only specific types of body” (Grosz, 1994, p. 19). Usually, the performative body does not relate to a performance activity. However, as the conceptualisation of the experimental dance in GRIEF demonstrate, it allows for a suspension of social markers by utilising imagination, thus the students can potentially pretend to be and relate to another concrete or a fantastical subject.

The topic of difference creates the core of this notion, as a crossing between a social and a biological body. In other words, the body is not fixed or inert, but rather being formed and shaped in lively (Haraway, 1997), interactive and continuous productive processes, influenced by social and cultural practices as well as having the capacity to resist bodily and socio-cultural norms. Consequently, power is not viewed as only being imposed from “outside”, but also as a subjectification from “inside”. Relating subjectivity to the case of GRIEF means that the affective uncertainties the students went through as not necessarily as negative experiences, but the aleatory dynamics can rather be conceived as having the ability to affect or to be affected (Butler, 2009; Nightingale et al., 2021). Similarly with Cote & Nightingale (2012), who argue that environmental change is always an unsettling context exposing social inequalities, the work of GRIEF is an empirical work that can shed light on the potential for engaging in complex processes regarding ecological decision making.

This vision gives the students in GRIEF a reflexive capacity to construct through their dancing ambiguous objects simultaneously as they are being constructed by objects (Hennion, 2007), which is an alternative to a critical vision of constructing individuals socially. These processes of “becoming-with” (Haraway, 2016) takes place in networks of alternating dissolving and emerging social ties, and outside an externally organised structure. Thus, the work of GRIEF can appear as an “event”, in addition to the earlier described “eventness”, that binds the materials present and invented ones to other materials both desired and external. This can result in new forms of subjectivity, creating surprises, pleasures, and new feelings, where both the students and GRIEF co-produce and affect each other, thus the students get more out of GRIEF and with that more subjectivity.

### 3.1.4 *The body as scale – Relational Choreography*

In GRIEF, I look for a transformative learning platform for the students that resists individualism and fixed outcomes as products to be considered “the right” dances, and I look for a transformation of collaboration rather than competition. Inspired by Karen O’Brien’s (2018) heuristic, “Three Spheres of Transformation”, and Donna Haraway’s (2016) science fiction book, “Staying with the Trouble”, I have suggested a daily artistic practice for the students to see how we can embody the societal changes necessary for a sustainable future. In the following, I will elucidate how the dance is organised through practical, political, and personal spheres, and the *scalar implication* of the rehearsal space is seen as a set of processes, thus relational through actions and interactions, which makes thinking or imagining spatially through the body political (Massey, 2005).

Following the theoretical discussion so far, we thus need to pay attention to how we construct our social reality in our dancing through subconscious and rational symbols, combining epistemology and ontology, so to understand how we can conceptualise nature and its future possibilities (Haraway, 1997). Taking inspiration from Bakker & Bridge’s (2006) examination on the body as “a way to express how subjectivities are shaped by the experience of acting in, on and through the body” (p. 6), and further expanded on as a “marker of a temporal cleavage” (p. 16), the thesis follows the new materialist direction explored above to reclaim the materiality of the body and its sensuous capacities. It does so by exploring the practice of dance as corporeality and thus as an analytical device. In this feminist political ecology tradition, we can better understand the body as embodied and affected in everyday aspects of society-nature relations through a critical self-reflexive awareness, in addition to introducing the *body as scale* (Sultana, 2018). In an extension, this thesis includes Senanayake (2019) notions of sensuous perplexity. Her case demonstrates that our bodies have the potential to register environmental pathology, as her informants became receptors and barometers that detected levels of chemical exposure in their drinking water caused by climate change. Not only does this revitalise people’s lives to the scale of climate change (Nielsen & Sejersen, 2012), it also challenges the politics of scale, as her informants stopped buying the contaminated water. Although the students did not experience such a direct link with changing circumstances, the embodiment and the affective uncertainty in this thesis

shows a shift: how they scale their experience on the dancefloor to a wider sense of social connection.

Climate change is usually conceptualised as a global problem; however, the framing of change is often located at smaller scales (Nightingale et al., 2021). While such an attention to local knowledges can positively include the body as a basis for transformations, it might be problematic to make people responsible for change processes locally, without including wider scale political strategies. Aware that individual action contains aspects of ambiguity and uncertainties that might be disconnected from cross-scalar processes, this thesis argues for embodied processes to move beyond individual traits to include “the collective subjectivities necessary for triggering widespread change and affects that flow from such collective action” (p. 5). However, what is still unknown is *the potentials and limitations for dance as a transformative praxis?*

This thesis suggests that GRIEF as a democratic alternative can better be explained by expanding the notion of Bourriauds (2002) Relational Aesthetic to include Latour’s (1993) actor-network theory. As a part of “rematerializing geography”, Latour furthers this concept by including the social, making GRIEF an expression of co-constitution between the students and other materialities, an idea which is particularly useful in this thesis’ examination of power in this relationship. Although actor-network theory *and* relational aesthetics have been criticized for a singular focus on intersubjectivity that leaves out power differentials, social contexts, and how humans, contrary to things, have the capacity to go after interests, the conceptualisation of mediated power is a meaningful complement to the historical materialism assumptions on power (Müller, 2015, p. 33). In this sense, GRIEF articulated the working of power, rather than assuming it emerged from deterministic and uneven structural relations. With this as a backdrop and inspiration, an attempt was made to create a precarious atmosphere in the rehearsal space in exploring the interplay between tactile and imaginary *textures*. GRIEF suggests that we need to learn to live with climate-grief as a lifelong companion and how to inherit the earth without denial and to stay with the trouble of a damaged reality. The work suggests that together we can come to terms with loss and come to appreciate what it means, reflecting on how we must change and renew our relationships if we are to move forward:



*Visible texture:*

Practical Sphere: Organising the Body – Dance.

The starting point for this dancing is to endure the struggle involved, despite the discomfort. On one side, to remain in physical struggle is exhausting, however, it demands of the students to learn to stay completely in the present, thus a technique to circumvent potential apathy towards climate futures. On the other, drawing on Butler’s notion of vulnerability and Ahmed’s notion on how social norms form us, the temporal aspects in the social engagements with GRIEF includes the past, the present, and the future, furthered by the imaginative aspect discussed above. Ultimately, the dancing promotes a method of becoming-with, rather than the more singular development of becoming, as it emphasises relations to other natures, cultures, subjects, and objects, so to “stay with the trouble”.



Photo 2: Joakim and Lena “Staying with the Trouble”. Photo: Stephen Hutton.

The students’ task is to stay with the uncertainties of not knowing. It challenges the habits of the dancers as the movements are ever moving, thus never “land”, so they can never rest in what they know or to remain in a “flow”. It is a dance-technique inspired by a sped-up version of humus, thus a process of letting movements live and die in perpetual making and

unmaking. It potentially creates both a beautiful and violent experience, both for the performers and the spectators, and it is an attempt to stretch the notion of the physical body as a momentarily present into a timeless one. The movement vocabulary consists of different timescales of creations and devastations, so the movements can be stretched out over time or have quick timespans.

The movement vocabulary is organised organically, in that the audience can witness and comprehend the developments as natural. A contrast would be a creative way of moving, like the *genius dancer* discussed above, the dancer makes up their movements from intuition or personal choices, rather than following the natural physical constructions of the body. The attempt is for the mover and the audience to experience the movements at the same time. It is an alternative to the traditional pre-rehearsed and codified dance, normally associated with the compartmentalised thinking found in capitalism. At best, the watcher can experience the dance ahead of the mover, as the dancer perpetually is letting go of the movement trajectory, the watcher is sensing the movements never executed, thus hopefully making it an engaging and an embodied experience for the watcher. Consequently, it makes the experience relational, it needs a dual relationship between the mover and the watcher, and not a dance to be performed on your own.

### Political Sphere: Organising Bodies – Choreography.

The students organise their bodies in relation to each other(s), which inspired by actor-network theory in new materialist thinking, aiming to make space for a reality that is open, plural, uneven, contingent, complex, and relational. Thus, it promotes a horizontal organisation of bodies, earlier mentioned as decentralised dramaturgy, which is a structure that contradicts a vertical and hierarchical that confirms current status quo, thus representing an *alternative democracy*. In other words, the students were encouraged to avoid pre-rehearsing a set choreography with a clear intentionality or a mastery of a specific or “spectacular” skill, but rather let the organisations between their bodies constantly search for new ways of organising themselves without quite knowing how to.

This flat ontology or decentralised dramaturgy leaves out pre-determined hierarchies or a single organising principle, giving both the students and other matter the same ontological status, ordered as heterogenous entities working together for a certain time (Müller, 2015, p. 28). The contingent and ephemeral qualities create a relational understanding that gives certain autonomy to the students *and* to the exteriority of the rehearsal space. In an open and emerging co-production, they are constantly creating, mutating, and transforming space, which in turn creates new behaviours, expressions, organisations, actors, realities, eschewing the nature-society divide and includes animals, things, and ideas to have agency, thus providing the concept a corporeal element. This collapse of space means that the dancer can, through a scalar lens, metaphorically invite the global (personal) in and onto the dance floor, both locally (practical) in their own dancing bodies and socially (political) with each other or the audience, thus utilising this relational choreographic tool to zoom in and out of micro, - and macro realities. In this way, the movement material can dramaturgically move between local, social, and global perspectives, depending on the dancers' physical texture and/or intention.

*Invisible texture:*

Personal Sphere: Organising Other – Imagination.

*Future-Creature:*

The students were encouraged to imagine their bodies extending beyond the limits of their skin or physical composition, by thinking they have additional or long reaching limbs, in a sense suggesting that their bodies can occupy more physical space than the observable. Other ways of entering a world of other and difference could be to take inspiration from nature and the physical world of fungi and its long-reaching and interconnected capacities, or imagining a futuristic human creature composed with animalistic characteristics or multiple genders. In addition, they could also use external artifacts to enhance this sense, exemplified by using a red stage light as a “third eye”, furthering the debate of who and what has agency.



Photo 3: August in “Future-Creature and the third eye”. Photo: Stephen Hutton.

*Cosmic Hoover:*

To invite for apocalyptic thinking that makes climate change human instead of the alienating scientific models, the students were using their voices to express an apocalyptic scenario in their performance. The voice was used constantly on the in -and out breath, and it could be transformed to sound like a backing-singer out of tune, a last breath, or a primal scream. The mouth is shaped as a (black) hole, the situation appears as a fight for the oxygen in the performance space, at the same time it suggests a connection with the space beyond.



Photo 4: “Cosmic Hoover”. Photo: Stephen Hutton.

Summarising, GRIEF is not trying to create a utopia or a state of bliss, but contrary promoting failing as a part of staying with the trouble, which becomes a practice of undoing rather than doing. So, the event or the eventness is a path of undoing what the systems have locked us into and to disrupt a capitalist mode of production – the status quo. I believe the necessity of the *relational choreography* is to give the students an alternative to the traditionally pre-choreographed performances, where the spectator and the dancer experience movements in different time scales, the dancer in process and the audience during the performance. It encourages the students to an active participation in the executions of the movements, thus potentially stimulating to a strengthening of agency and engagement (for the environment).

## 3.2 Affect

Inspired by the transformative and relational affective framework by Nightingale et al. (2021), this thesis expands on other ways of knowing by including the emotional and affective relations that potentially can form a foundation for action. Affect can be understood as being less structured and articulated than emotions (Ngai, 2005, p. 27), the latter often linked with the cognitive, pointing towards that affect concerns our senses rather than being something expressed with words. This project mixes theoretical perspectives, using theory on affect as socially constructed and situated as well as nonrepresentational. It explores the inner processes of the students that are registered through their shared embodiments of GRIEF, thus via their affected bodies available for an experiential analysis.

When I discuss collective emotions in this thesis, I partly do so, referring to a shared feeling or affect in the students' experiences linked to group psychology. However, the thesis mainly follows Sara Ahmed's (2014) explanation of collective shared emotions that are not about feeling in common or sharing the same feelings, but how emotions are linked to common and shared objects. Here the object is GRIEF and its specific dramaturgical and aesthetic strategies; "Such objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (p. 11). Consequently, the compositional aspects of emotions consist of an individual and a social tension.

GRIEF provides alternative ontologies and epistemologies with its uncomfortable and less prestigious negative affects, coined *ugly feelings* by Sianne Ngai (2005). The ugly feelings bring about an ambivalence and ambiguity that *mesh* the individual and social tensions in the project, that are, particularly useful in relation to the focus group interviews and my fieldnotes, as these empirical foundations do not necessarily separate what is experienced individually or collectively; they were intertwined and relational. The feedback sessions became an alternation between these aspects, as they were asked to share their personal affects, emotions and thoughts vis-à-vis the community that was created. A divide between an individual and social tension would be more useful if a *normal* audience had been included scientifically in an empirical perception research, or if I had conducted post-performance interviews or exercises with the students. Nevertheless, the social dimensions of theatre are

deliberated through the students' affective relations to the work, thus reflecting an ethical *and* social space (Skogli, 2022, p. 143).

The analytical focus is directed towards the processual rather than concrete outcomes, recognising aleatory dimensions as important in processes of change. Ultimately, the uncomfortable affective uncertainties in GRIEF might help the students in generating affective and emotional connections and commitments to shared human and nonhuman relations in their experimental and embodied dance project. However, the question that the needs to be asked is: *how does affective uncertainty in experimental dance offer openings for transformation?*

### 3.2.1 *Two concepts of affect*

There are many attempts in theory to define affect, often making a distinction between the notions of affect and emotions, but “as has often been noted, it is hopeless to assume that a single conceptual perspective [...] could cover the domain of affectivity exhaustively and find universal acceptance” (Slaby & von Scheve, 2020, p. 16). Nevertheless, there seems to be two main directions in conceptualising the divide, based on the psychologist Silvan Tomkins and the social theorist Brian Massumi:

Whilst Massumi's interest in affect lies in its autonomy from language and culture, the Tomkins School sees a larger value of affect when being discursive; hence not separated from feelings and emotions (Fiksdal, 2018, p. 178).

In other words, Massumi places affect in relation between the body and the world, meaning that affect is precognitive and thus nonrepresentational (Anderson, 2012), whereas Tomkins promotes an inner quality, placing it in close relation with emotions and thoughts. However, the two perspectives are not completely incompatible, particularly in the context of this thesis as Massumi (2003, p. 217) explains “[...] that affect is thinking, bodily – consciously but vaguely, in the sense that it is not yet a thought. It's a movement of thought, or a thinking movement”. He further describes how affect offers a duality, in that you register *and* experience the affective movement; an experience of the experience (p. 213).

Massumi builds much of his notion of affect on the work of Deleuze and Spinoza, famously differentiating emotion from affect:

When you affect something, you are opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before. You have made a transition, however slight. You have stepped over a threshold. Affect *is* this passing of a threshold seen from the point of view of the change in capacity (Massumi, 2003, p. 212, original italics).

Consequently, the students in GRIEF are potentially open to be changed (affected) when they are changing their relation to the outside world (affecting). In this perspective, affect comes to be between the students as an intensity, not *in* the individual, hence an *in-betweenness*. The common experience of passing of the threshold, or transforming, is not synonymous with experiencing the same, but offers a different position of *togetherness*. Thus, togetherness does not necessarily bring uniformity: “There is no sameness of affect. There is affective difference in the same event, a collective individuation” (Massumi, 2003, p. 103). Further, this affect has an emerging quality, in that the intensity can potentially impact something to happen:

*Affect is simply a body movement looked at from the point of view of its potential – its capacity to come to be, or better, to come to do* (Massumi, 2003, p. 215, original italics).

This idea of togetherness and affect is thus symbiotic, meaning that it puts us in processes of participation reaching beyond ourselves “[W]ith intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life - a heightened sense of belonging, with other people and other places” (Massumi, 2003, p.110). On a micro-political level, it allows for the students *to be moved*, to challenge their normative positions and the capacity to endure open-ended processes:

Affective politics, understood as aesthetic politics, is dissensual, in the sense that it holds contrasting alternatives together without immediately demanding that one alternative eventuate, and the others evaporate. It makes thought-felt different capacities for existence, different life potentials, different forms of life, without immediately imposing a choice between them. The political question, then, is not how



to find a resolution. It's not how to impose a solution. It's how to keep the intensity in what comes next (Massumi, 2019, p. 68).

Expanding on the symbiotic notion, the Tomkins school claims that the intensity *does* impact us individually, exploring the particularities of affects:

[...] while affect in the Deleuzian sense is asubjective and anti-representational, operating across the boundary between the organic and the nonorganic, Tomkins's affect theory enables the specification of the energetic dimension of affect in very precise ways (Gibbs, 2010, p. 188).

Tomkins differentiates psychological and neurological affects by bringing out the experiential particularities, contributing in how we understand, think about, and behave in the world (1995, p. 51), thus he acknowledges affect to be both subjective *and* collective.

### 3.2.2 *Sticky affect*

My interest in exploring how experimental aesthetic strategies affected the students, to capture uncertainty as affect, revealed limitations of Massumi and Tomkins. However, Sara Ahmed (2014; 2010) insights on affect comes from a cultural horizon, thus more supportive to my case. She operates within the notion of affect as not existing exclusively in the individual nor the object, but in an interaction between them. She is interested in how affect is associated with different social and cultural contexts, and how affect can be politicised. Particularly interesting for this thesis is her argument that affect can be a response to social (or theatrical) norms, meaning that our experiences are based on what others have told us or asked us to expect. Relating affect as socially constructed in close relationship with the emotional and the cognitive seems appropriate in this thesis, as GRIEF is contextualised with environmental concerns and in a theatrical tradition, as an everyday dance practice:

While you can separate an affective response from an emotion that is attributed as such (the bodily sensations from the feeling of being afraid), this does not mean that in practice, or in everyday life, they are separate. In fact, they are contagious; they slide

into each other; they stick and cohere, even when they are separated (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 231).

In practice, then, the affect and cognition experienced by the students are never really separable in the making of GRIEF, “if for no other reason than that thought is itself a body, embodied” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 3). Consequently, affect needs to be understood in this thesis as discursive, concerning both the senses as well as how affects are socially situated and produced, thus avoiding the sharp divides between emotions, affect and thoughts (Ahmed, 2014; Ngai, 2005; Sharma & Tygstrup, 2015), and that affect is necessary to a body’s constant becoming- “webbed in its relations” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 3). The notion of affect is useful in studying the formation of the students’ feelings in their process of having current meanings and values (Williams, 2001). More than anything, affect creates transitions and coherence between their thoughts, values, and feelings, impacting their memories and habits: “Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 29). This sticky affect sheds light on how the students can contribute to micro-changes in their everyday struggle with societal and environmental challenges, both as individuals and as a collective.

Ahmed (2010b) warns against a Cartesian divide of positive and negative affects by bringing to our attention how feelings of joy and happiness are typically attributed with progressive and positive connotations whereas negative affects are associated with the past. She explores the insecurities around *what* and *why* a subject feel, and thus encourages for uncomfortable dimensions of affect to be included in affect theory. Similarly, Clare Hemmings’ (2015) notion on *affective dissonance* argues that discomfort might have transformative capacities, as a subject can “be creatively engaged or transformed so that the world could be seen and inhabited differently” (2015, section 9). However, the “the one who has experienced affective dissonance may retreat into a taciturn non-acceptance, protective of self [...] and so on” (section 11). This suggests that in their involvement with the production of GRIEF, students can, as Hemmings anticipates, end up not accepting the challenge of their normative positions and presumptions, but rather a strengthening of own position in the (theatre) world:

[E]motions are ‘sticky’, and even when we challenge our investments, we might get stuck. There is hope, of course, as things can get unstuck (Ahmed, 2014, p. 16).

### 3.2.3 Ugly feelings and stuplimity

GRIEF explores the affects of angst, irritation, bewilderment, ambiguity, and ambivalence, as lacking structure and intentionality, thus contrasting the conventionally attractive good qualities of joy and happiness, and the cathartic feelings of anger or rage. It is a response to Sianne Ngai's (2005) call for a new theory of affect that includes ambiguous feelings, precisely because our current societal diagnosis has moved beyond the traditional political feelings, thus arguing for an aesthetics to include "ugly feelings" to investigate the blind spots in the arts and cultural criticism. The blind spot particularly interesting for the thesis is in how the ugly feelings in GRIEF can be a site to see whether these non-cathartic feelings can lead to action as an alternative to the grandiose feelings traditionally promoted in politics, or the traditional conception of beauty being a pleasurable experience in the arts. Experiencing ugly feelings can create a combined feeling of shock and fatigue, and leads to what Ngai (2005) calls stuplimity:

[C]oncatenation of boredom and astonishment – a bringing together of what 'dulls' and what 'irritates' or agitates; of sharp, sudden excitation and prolonged desensitization, exhaustion, or fatigue (p. 271).

Her work makes a political point of promoting ambiguity. In her use of the term – stuplimity – she expresses what other theoreticians on political theatre call *unsettled* (Grehan 2009, Duggan, 2017), or reflecting climate literature postulating that "environmental change is always a context for the unsettling" (Nightingale et al., 2021, p. 4). Accordingly, the ugly feelings strength in GRIEF is to be found in the ambivalent and its diagnostic capacity, despite the fact that they exclude an immediate release for the students and are less likely to engender a strong climate response like those due to anger and fear. In other words, ugly feelings are less strategic in their targeting than traditional feelings, both when it comes to the arts or politics, as they are more difficult to attach to defined objectives. Where traditional political feelings have clear definitions and intentionality, the ugly feelings are ambiguous with less intentionality (Ngai, 2005, p. 27).

Anxiety is one of Ngai's (2015) ugly feelings that potentially has a critical potential. She describes anxiety as a feeling with its own temporality, primarily being forward-looking, thus linked to *uncertainty* as they both neither can predict the future nor necessarily relate to things

that already exists. Together with hope and fear, anxiety are “expectant emotions” (pp. 209-212), both in terms of optimism and pessimism, they are oriented towards an uncertain future with expectations. The contrasting feelings of greed and envy are “filled emotions” relate to already existing objects, thus implying less anticipatory character and critical potential.

Hope seems a naive response to the complexity of climate change. Nevertheless, according to Marissa Fragkou (2019), the notion of hope *is* complex, and she combines hope together with uncertainty and imagination: “In this sense, hope belongs to the terrain of uncertainty and imagination and allows us to reconfigure ways to reanimate life” (p. 184). Similarly, Rebecca Solnit (2016) argues that hope relates to “coming to terms with the risk involved in not knowing what comes next, which is more demanding than despair and, in a way, more frightening” (p. 7). These utterings resemble the important psychological recognition in geographer Kari Norgaard’s (2011) work, claiming that climate-grief must be acknowledged, so we can move on, and to Ngai’s (2005) forward looking *expectant emotion*. Further, theatre is a place for a suspension of disbelief, thus we can imagine alternative ways of being and living by intervening into social discourses, thus mobilising affects, such as uncertainty and hope (Fragkou, 2019).

The slow reaction to the immanent climate crisis through dance might seem contradictory, seemingly avoiding urgency and heartfelt commitment. Nevertheless, Hili Razinksky (2017, p. 9) reflects positively on ambivalence in relation to the grander emotions:

[A]mbivalence can be more integrated and integrative than wholehearted attitudes [...] and one’s ambivalence can develop such as to constitute a direction in one’s life, a meaningful course of living that transcends the pair of attitudes as well as the mere fact that one is ambivalent between them. But this is not all. The opposed attitudes can be better (richer, more sincere, more appropriate, more sensitive) for their opposition.

Summarising, the theory so far demonstrates how unreleased feelings can be applied in a critical affective practice, particularly relevant in this thesis and the work of GRIEF, as it attempts to combine the diagnostics of young people in a climate changing reality with the practice of experimental dance.

### 3.3 Analytical Strategies and Relational Transformation

I have in the above outlined the interconnection between affect, emotions, thoughts, and embodiment. Although affect is described as “other than conscious knowing” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1), in the attempt to verbalise the affective uncertainty a necessary process takes place:

To be affected by something is to evaluate that thing. Evaluations are expressed in how bodies turn toward things. To give value to things is to shape what is near us (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 31).

Thus, affect can initiate movement that in return leads to thoughts and an expansion of them in overlapping, sticky, and messy components of experience. I refer to this cognitive and physical processes of affect expressed by Ahmed (2014, p. 12) as “feel your way”, and is adopted in this thesis as a strategy for the analysis and structures the students embodied “world making”. This reflexive process sheds light on what affective uncertainty does to the students as well as its embodied and critical potential.

The aspects of a relational geography and democratic struggle are incorporated into the conceptual understanding on how systems actually change in GRIEF, reminding us that “transformation must operate from the scale of the body to the scale of the body politic if it is to succeed in changing not only human-environment relations, but also in producing more equitable social relations in the face of climatic change” (Nightingale et al., 2021, p. 11). Consequently, the subject-object dynamics are challenged in the making of GRIEF when the students are introduced to conceptual dance exercises inspired by new materialist writings and the notion of *collapsed space*. This can establish a new understanding of group dynamics, thus creating a “centre of gravity” that goes beyond the individual focus, described by Schlitz et al. (2010, p. 21) as “the level of explicit awareness a person has of being part of a larger whole”, thus social consciousness incorporates “being aware of how one is influenced by others and how one’s actions affect others can be an important catalyst for worldview transformations” (O’Brien et al., 2019, p. 271).

With this awareness, new theatrical norms can be established and a potential for a transformation of their theatrical/world view. More specifically, the work of GRIEF exposes some of the aspects around collective enthusiasm, created by an atmosphere of expectations due to the notion of co-productional dimensions in the dance exercises. These moments of effervescent, the dance co-ordinating emotions, are important in creating solidarity; by experiencing deep connections to other humans or non-humans we are enabling to put something at stake together, which is an important aspect of (social) movements, necessary in discovering own sources to hope and action. Additionally, GRIEF can potentially reflect the future, as a promise about something to happen, dreams and hopes that might or might not be redeemed, like small glimpses of possible futures, keeping promises of another reality alive.

In my findings I approach embodiment and affect holistically on a micro-level, in that I see affect being interwoven by emotions and thoughts in how the student individually and as a group felt and thought about the working on GRIEF. The macro-level of embodiment and affect, with its manifestations in public discourses, political communications, or mass-media is not supported by this thesis' empirical evidence, and consequently left out of its scope. However, the ripple effects from the micro-level leads to a speculative exploration on grander scales with its potential impact on embodied cultural transformations.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

My main objective in this qualitative study has been to examine how the students act upon their embodied experiences and the uncertainties of affect in the climate-art dance-project GRIEF. Therefore, I followed qualitative research methods that guided me in exploring the students' situated knowledges (Haraway, 1998) of their everyday dance practice, as these methods are appropriate for investigating how the students feel, think, and behave in their particular situation of doing experimental dance located inside the four walls of the school (Winchester & Rolfe, 2016). The methodological vantage point is inspired by *grounded theory*. Its flexible guidelines helped me to conceptually understand the emergent and interactive parallels between the data collection and analysis (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012); a way to understanding the interplay between the students' subjective experiences and the experimental praxis, hence enabling me to capture the affective aspects.

Accordingly, I consciously formulated the open-ended research questions presented in chapter 1.3 in a grounded theory fashion to assist in carving out realistic strategies to collect and analyse data. The questions generated subjective descriptions of how the students' experienced GRIEF in relation to societal and environmental challenges, thus it established insights on what produced the changes in the students and their contexts. Consequently, it constituted GRIEF as an intensive study of a single case potentially relevant to relatable fields of inquiry, as the thesis constructed relational and causal dimensions that explored "in-depth nuances of the phenomenon and the contextual influences on and explanations of that phenomenon" (Baxter, 2016, p. 130). I conducted a case study that can be of value in its singularity (p. 131), making no assumptions on universal "laws", and thus produced relative knowledge and a plurality of truths (Blaikie, 2007, p. 24). I rather seek to illustrate how dance can be a space and a place for hope and imagination, accordingly, producing knowledge that is situated and contingent according to a feminist position.

In this chapter I will present my epistemological premise. It is important in guiding the research design of choice and the methodological decisions at various stages of the project, thus elucidating the relations between empirical, theoretical, and methodological aspects and the adherent justifications for its analysis strategies and data collection.

## 4.1 Situated Knowledges as Epistemology

In a feminist tradition, this thesis tries to contribute towards making sense of subjective experiences in people's everyday lived life by shedding light on the potential for agential manoeuvre and the societal processes of change needed to meet future climate challenges. Its framing within academia is to secure diverse positionalities (Sultana, 2018) that challenges epistemological assumptions and promotes relational ontologies, thus viewing the moving everyday body as important. The issue of climate change transformation is a topical example to engage with the complexities of the plural epistemologies that now covers a broad spectrum of analytical entry points: conventionally seen only as a biophysical phenomenon, this also currently includes the social-political and the personal (Nightingale, 2016).

Reflecting my ontological commitments in the previous chapter, the departure for this research is discussing embodied ways of knowing as an alternative epistemological strategy to mainstream research, guiding my desire to transcend the nature-society divide and the body as a locus of knowing.

The modern aspect of casting man as master of the universe, and the mind superior to the body, is illustrated by Descartes' famous quote: "I think therefore I am". Historically, the body was mainly of interest as a corpse for medical examinations, not considered important as a subject of study in everyday life (Barbour, 2004). Grosz (1994) argues this developed from a state of "somatophobia"; a profound ignorance and fear of the body that associated the body with the irrational and feminine other (Rose, 1993). Consequently, this masculine heritage sees knowledge through the body or embodiment contradictory to the position of causal or rational arguments.

Reflecting on my own experiences as a mover in a climate changing world, I question the mistrust of validating the body in research as we all *have* and *are* bodies. Particularly as our bodies are the containers embedded in time and place from which we experience our lives *in* and *through* (Engelsrud, 2006). Accordingly, I challenge current epistemology and the affiliated dualisms linked to the development of Western science. I have found support in feminist and phenomenologist theory, that considers that knowledge production can derive from lived and personal experiences, thus this thesis challenges the politics of "[w]ho are knowers, what can be known, and what is valued as knowable" (Moss, 2002, p. 7).



Outside of the phenomenological and feminist contributions, lived experiences are generally not recognised to be a reliable or valuable way for knowledge production in the sciences to establish truths, a view shared with the field of human geography (Rose, 1993). The notion of embodiment in the messiness of everyday life, being interpreted as knowledge that can be produced in, through and by the body, is often overlooked and undervalued by the conventional body-mind dualism in how researchers in human geography engage with knowledge production.

Donna Haraway (1988) opens for a more relational theoretical approach to the historical dualisms by promoting a *situated knowledge* research stemming from an embodied perspective. She questions the notion of objectivity in science, contending knowledge can only ever offer a perspective that is partial. Her insistence that there are no innocent positions has been taken up by feminist geographers to argue that we must include our own biases, positions, and values in our partial perspective so to situate an objective and embodied knowledge; a view from *somewhere* “that is different from the disembodied rational objectivity of enlightenment science” (McDowell, 1993, p. 312). Accordingly, it challenges masculine ideals for universal truths and rational arguments that argue an objective truth is out there (Rose, 1993). It further questions how researchers can presume that they can detach themselves from their bodies, “emotions, values, past experiences and so on” (p. 7), which is, at a personal level, difficult to accept, as I have embodied and navigating most of my life through dance and choreography.

In feminist social research, one of the aims is to let voices not often heard come to the forefront so to increase visibility of marginalised groupings (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011). The students in my research could be seen as marginalised hence their young age, however, they are more than capable to express their voices using their social network or through social media. More importantly is their contribution to speak on behalf of other: How can they potentially give voice to the voiceless, or include other in their production of knowledge? Consequently, my research’s aim is through the conceptual dance-framework *Relational Choreography* (chapter 3.1.4) to produce empirical data that brings the co-production and becoming with other into focus, thus avoiding labelling other as passive.

## 4.2 Situating Myself in Participatory Research

GRIEF entailed a collaborative effort undertaken by me and the students at Solbakken. This so-called participatory research is with and for the participants who are the subjects, where the rehearsal period at the school promised means of making real, through dance related practices. Accordingly, it facilitated a space for an emancipatory potential for individuals “to highlight and act on their own concerns” (Pain, 2003, p. 653). GRIEF represented a liminal space where the participants could take a step out of the ordinary by using their bodies and imagination and thus be encouraged to reflect upon their own societal situations, together or in front of an audience. It is a hopeful experience that might lead to an empowerment and an increased awareness around current climate challenge (Goss & Leinbach, 1996).

### *4.2.1 Dialogical Action, Integral Theory, and Self-Determination Theory*

In my position as a teacher, I was inspired by Paulo Freire’s (1970) deconstruction of the teacher-student nexus in education. By utilising his critical pedagogy, Dialogical Action Theory, I could question the conventional role of the teacher to “feed” knowledge into students. Ultimately, his inclusive theory rather supports a co-production of knowledge in a feministic tradition, i.e., to problematise present situation to gain both a critical awareness and taking on responsibilities for current reality. With this approach, the attempt of GRIEF is to see the relationship between me and the students not as a static one, but as a dynamic reality which is “in the process of transformation” (p. 12). This also implies for me to be aware of how “echo chambers” (d’Ancona, 2017) can be a destructive force for cultural transformation, in that the students might want to replicate my proposed system of stage behaviour, thus taking the frames of references I introduce to them for granted. I’d rather wish for them to establish viewpoints and stage norms that are freed from my position of influence or from the power of the wider (theatrical) society. Informing the culture of GRIEF, Dialogical Action Theory is important in establishing a dialogue that opens to a “critical consciousness for transformative learning and change” (O’Brien et al., 2019, p. 275). In practical terms, it implies that I needed to introduce the students to emancipatory exercises that make them name the world, thus making them authors of change.

However, as the process unfolded, I needed to step up my role as a facilitator due to the abstract concept of GRIEF that initially bewildered and confused the students from making progress in their dancing. Recognising this perspective of stupidity, I was inspired by Ken Wilbur's (2000) notions on Integral Theory, that spurred me on to theories on self-motivation, which includes three core needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, in an attempt to move the students towards agency and empowerment. Thus, GRIEF needed to be supportive in giving the students a feeling of choice, mastery, and a social context in which they can act their actions out, the latter aspect important for agency and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) on the way towards sustainability thinking. The theory then suggests that my role as a teacher is crucial in keeping the intrinsic motivation going for the students. Too much control on my part might be a hindrance to the students' need for autonomy, potentially undermining each individual or the group's sense of agency. Accordingly, Self-Determination Theory describes how intrinsic motivation for the students is more likely to thrive given a context where they feel secure and sense of relatedness.

#### *4.2.2 Triple position*

During the process of GRIEF, I fulfilled three main roles, implying asymmetrical power relations. Although I tried to minimise my impact, I held the roles as their pedagogic and artistic facilitator along with being a researcher. I have been a visiting teacher at Solbakken for the last ten years, and thus built up a relationship with the school as well having a reputation of introducing and being something "different". I have also held a position in the performing arts in Norway and abroad for two decades, mainly made my living from making and performing contemporary dance, including paying other artists from national grants I have received over the years. Accordingly, this has put me in a position of power, potentially being a gatekeeper to the professional art-scene in and outside of Norway. In the specific situation of making GRIEF, I also held the role of being an expert with experience and know-how to share. One could argue the danger in creating a situation for the students where they felt the need to provide me with "good" results, hence the uneven distributed power. However, this pitfall concerns any qualitative research project. This case specifically demonstrates this dilemma in that I performed three positions of power: the teacher, the artist, and the researcher.

In meeting this challenge, I explained to the students, early in the project, the experimental and the explorative methodological approach of the project, clarifying there were no right or wrong materialities, e.g., dance vocabulary. The materialities would be discovered as emerging in the duration of both making and performing GRIEF, in a process where all of us ideally perform the roles of researchers. This directs an attention to Haraway's (1998) "feminist objectivity" in recognising all our subjective values and partial experiences, particularly emphasising my researcher positionality to *include* my social positioning and worldviews to influence my research process and outcomes. I explained that I did not research the students as performers, but rather how GRIEF generated empirical material in the way it affected them individually and as a group. I believe this is an important separation, particularly as my aesthetic preferences probably guided the outcome of the performance in a significant way. In other words, my artistic vision impacted the way GRIEF looked, though, not necessarily what it did to the students and thus may have resulting in it having less impact on the outcome of the empirical data. Additionally, I did not evaluate their work in accordance with a grading scale, as this kind of school have no exams or grades.

Daily we would together discuss what worked or not in the tasks or exercises, reflecting over the emergence of materialities, or the discovery of new or recurring perspectives. The students were aware of my struggle in facilitating this research, as I openly discussed all the aspects of making and researching. Consequently, the students were encouraged to actively take part in shaping the content of GRIEF and thus how it generated meaning and affect. On one hand, the students' contributions to the form and shape of GRIEF were minimal, hence the nature of the relative abstract project and due to their little experience with experimental dance. On the other hand, this absence of contribution impacted the generation of the empirical material important to the thesis, as the students felt lost in this new world of avant-garde dance and accordingly strongly affected them (and me) in their everyday life.

My position as an artist, researcher, and facilitator were on multiple occasions altered due to the processual aspects of the project. By letting the uncertainties affect me in line with the students, I was from a feminist research perspective more able to do my research with the students, instead of on and about them, hence making my fieldnotes and analysis speak with the students from within, rather than for the students (Winchester & Rofe, 2016). In addition,

and prior to this project, I had endured the same uncertainties through my own performance of *grief will be our companion*:



Photo 5: Jake Ingram-Dodd and Geir Hytten performing *grief will be our companion*, Dansens Hus, October 2021. Photo: Antro Hein.

The initial skewed power relations were over time renegotiated throughout the process, and thus challenging the hierarchies of how knowledge is produced to a certain extent:

*A question late in the process from a student describes the overall process of GRIEF. He wondered: “how did you know that it would work?”. He was particularly interested how I complied with another student’s wish of making use of a stage light as an extension to his dancing, which he found effective and poetic. I replied that I did not know that it would work, but rather my emphasis was on facilitating a processual experience for both me and the students. Like the student, who “eventually had to let go of the control”, I initially allowed the process to emerge over time with a wish to*

*let the uncertainty affect me and the students personally, so to stay with the trouble.*  
(Fieldnotes 06.12.2021).

Consequently, the epistemology addresses my relationship as a researcher with my social phenomenon of investigation, placing me as a subjective inside learner (Blaikie, 2007). This gave me an active role in creating meaning in my engagement with the students.

### 4.3 Research Methods

Although there are not defined feminist or posthuman methods of inquiries (Winchester & Rofe, 2016), my intention with the thesis was to explore a redefinition of knowledge construction, accordingly this implicates the way I conducted my research. Without being guided by a unique research approach for the thesis, the ontological assumptions are already embedded in the theoretical ideas that guided my strategies and methods (Blaikie, 2007, p. 14), and I consequently define social systems as open, complex, and reflexive. In other words, the students have subjectivity, expanded on by new materialism to also include GRIEF as an artwork capable of having intentionality. They function as contemplating and anticipating agents, including wants and desires, and can accordingly adapt behaviour relating to how they interpret contexts they are in, and from this knowledge being capable of learning. Contrasting the more closed systems in conventional and positivistic perspectives to collect data, my empirical data produced by the project stems from transcribed focus group interviews, supplemented with my own field notes, thus providing a rich foundation for the analysis with a plurality of voices regarding the experience of learning, embodiment, and affect. Consequently, it challenges masculine and objective truths from *nowhere* (Haraway, 1998; Rose, 1993), in addition to critically consider the relationship between who are the knowers and what counts as knowledge (Moss, 2002).

The focus for my thesis is thus to see the social realities of the students within social science as *ideal*, and not *real*: the realities exist as ideas that contrasts an independent existence from human observation (Blaikie, 2007). My thesis is therefore an exploration of how I as a researcher give meaning to the realities of the students through a constructionist research approach, not a constructivist, as I tried to make sense of the intersubjectively shared

knowledge in the everyday lives of the students, and not the individual cognitive processes (p. 22).

My research explored whether the students generated embodied responses to the environmental challenges through physical and cognitive experiments, hence I invited the students to “a real-world laboratory” where they could potentially play out their “sociability” (Goss & Leinbach, 1996). Accordingly, focus groups seemed an appropriate interview technique for the experiment of GRIEF, as this reflexive technique emphasises the interaction between the informants and the composition of controlled group discussions (Cameron, 2016, p. 204).

#### *4.3.1 Focus group*

To make the research feasible, I was looking for a group of less than ten people that could form the making of GRIEF. Informed by my research questions, I believe the group should be compatible, friends or colleagues, as the event required bodily contact and discussions of personal and intimate character. They should also be acquainted with the setting and the subsequent experimentation, as theatre goers or practitioners, thus not feeling “out of place” (Cameron, 2016), however, acknowledging a potential echo chamber effect. There was luckily an opening at Solbakken Folkehøgskole that fitted the criteria, thus enabling the research.

Important for this case study has been the access to the focus group consisting of eight second years students at Solbakken Folkehøgskole. They represent both homogeneous and heterogenous aspects in its composition. First, they are all around twenty years old with an interest in dance and theatre, speaking the same language and currently living under the same roof. I define the students as “ordinary” theatregoers, in line with Freshwater’s (2009, pp. 3-4) different parameters, such as education within the field of theatre, frequency of attendance to performances or a professional relation the sector of stage craft, as they have limited but some experience within these aspects. Secondly, they are seven women and three men, where two of the women are from families with a minority background, thus representing different genders and cultural backgrounds. They are Maia, August, Marianna, Isak, Oda, Lena, Joakim, and Mari.

Inspired by the guidelines of Cameron (2016), I repeated the focus group only one out of the three planned times due to the emerging quality of the research (further discussed in chapter 4.4). I prepared an interview guide to structure the event (see appendix), and I explained the purpose of the experiment and their relation to it by introducing my project as research. I retreated gradually and moderated the discussions according to a conscious procedure, recognising that different questions and timings generated contrasting effects on the conversation. Like the overall effect of the project, the students would eventually initiate the conversations that led them into topics different from my interview guide.

The sessions were recorded and transcribed, which I reflected upon in hindsight through written memos that enhanced my learning experience as well as how I moderated the group. I conducted the discussions in combining funnel and pyramid structures, where I started out with general and broad questions, thus creating a non-threatening environment. I further increased the complexities with opinionated and personal questions that opened for abstract ideas around climate change (Dunn, 2016). I argue combining these interview techniques followed a grounded theory logic of “[balancing] hearing the participant’s story in its fullness while probing for the analytical properties and implications of major processes” (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 350).

Operating within the creative flexibility in grounded theory, working forth and back between data collection and analysis, I learned about the students’ concerns and experiences that I successively developed into my interview guide from the data and from my emerging analysis of these data (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 348). Thus, I tried to ensure rigour in the relation of data collection and the students (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016, p. 126). I should mention that all the quotes from the students are translated from Norwegian to English by me, and I must consider that some of the nuances are incorrect. However, as I was immersed in the project and affected by the process like the students, my embodied experiences are potentially strengthening or expanding on what might be lost in translations, hence my situated knowledge.



#### 4.4 Empirical Processing

Aiding my case in achieving rigorous research I turned to the interpretive community affiliated with my thesis. The interpretive community is constituted by existing research, established theories, and concepts (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016, p. 118), and I positioned my research consciously in relation to what is recognised as significant. Thus, it improved my thesis' trustworthiness (p. 126), and its potential for theoretical transferability (Baxter, 2016, p. 142). Based on intensive research explored earlier, which is a "research typically of small agents or small groups, involving semi-standardized or unstructured methods" (Hay, 2016, p. 446), I attempted to conduct my case study in an unstructured manner, according to grounded theory.

It seemed appropriate for the students to undertake a self-reflective study to explore anecdotal and personal experiences in form of autoethnography, which is literary writing, to connect "the emotions, experiences, contradictions, and inconsistencies in our research journeys" (Mansvelt & Berg, 2016, p. 414) to societal and environmental dimensions. According to Charmaz & Belgrave (2016, p. 354), grounded theory has "much in common with ethnographic methods, in which researchers adapt their data collection techniques to the nuances of the emerging observation". Apart from highlighting its iterative character, ethnographic practices discuss the lack of representation (Watson & Till, 2016), thus GRIEF tried to address a potential for involving the students and "other" in decision-making processes, which is conventionally the preserve of experts or other authorities (Müller, 2015, p. 31).

However, in my initial wish for the students to be autonomous in their work and to document their experiences through autoethnography, I needed to step up my role as a facilitator to guide the students in their work due to the nature of experimental theatre. Reflecting the difficulty of verbalising over their experiences, I did not receive any written data from the students. Consequently, I structured the research in a semi-structured manner and, thus straying away from a strict grounded theory approach:

*The students appeared timid in their responses to my inquiries. I believe they found it difficult or felt stupid to verbalise over such an abstract concept, particularly in their*

*lack of possessing knowledge regarding both the theoretical and practical aspects of the project. However, they might purposely have avoided to hurt my feelings to maintain a continuation in the early stages of the work or to uphold my status as a teacher, evidentially being very outspoken at the end of the process. Regardless of the reasons, we were all intimidated over the daunting tasks ahead of us; me leading the project and them performing the work. (Fieldnotes 11.11.2021)*

The experience spurred me on to change the formatting of the interview scenarios, straying shortly away from group interviews to make questionnaires they would individually prepare in advance of a group meeting. Instead of helping the matter, they all found the questions difficult and limiting in expressing their thoughts around the project. The specificity in the questionnaire prevented a collective process of letting themes arrive emergingly, in addition in hindering conversations with a relational character. Therefore, I let the precarious and uncertain character of the work also to permeate my approach in retrieving data for my analysis, letting it emerge over time. Consequently, my empirical data stems from a broad range of sources: fieldnotes, sporadic comments, students referring to conversations among themselves, in addition to my daily talk-back sessions and the planned focus groups.

Finally, by cyclically returning to the research field, known as theoretical sampling (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012), I was able to pursue new directions for exploration in my research, as the process was in a state of becoming (-with). As the thesis will demonstrate, the directions stretched me into multiple directions. This implies visits to the fields of psychology, philosophy, cultural studies and so on, thus adhering to the “magpie” tradition in human geography: stealing from everywhere. Although this approach is generally in science looked upon as a theoretical weakness of the subject, it also allows for a creative synthesis of frameworks to be made, which means that my ontology and epistemology in this thesis might not necessarily line up, but rather creating an analytical scaffolding. I used the findings to inform my interview guide and the subsequent data collection, thus it generated “focused data” (p. 348) that informed, extended, and refined my emerging analytical categories, through the process of coding.

#### 4.4.1 Coding

Coding as a tool helped me in developing a coherent strategy for analysing and organising the collected data. It incrementally moved me “from description toward conceptualising that description” (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 355), and subsequently helped me to identify qualitative patterns that “stood out”.

As an inductive data driven method (Cope, 2016, p. 377), grounded theory implies having no predetermined codes and hardly any *a priori*. Thus, I could only create codes when I identified new patterns retrieved from my transcribed and textual data. Contrary to adopting a seemingly passive research attitude, the coding approach required an active engagement on my part, as it refers to the process of constructing and assigning specific segments of data into codes that give meaning. For example, a phrase from the transcribed group interviews with a sentence from my fieldnotes in GRIEF created a single code that captured the essence of my data (Cope, 2016). It became important to balance what was embedded in the data itself and the alleged “sensitizing concepts” (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012) in my pursuit of identifying patterns related to the topics in my research and in the development of my theoretical comprehension towards the phenomena in GRIEF. In my moving simultaneously between memo and literary writing, the data collection and analysis, my challenge became trying to avoid compelling the data into fixed categories. I let the sensitizing concepts initiate ideas for coding, otherwise I dropped them if they were irrelevant to the analysis as I always asked what the data was a case of (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 355). Particularly problematic in my case were the sensitizing concepts being “embodiment”, “imagination”, “social practice”, “other”, “emergence”, and so on.

While aware of the existing theory, I started coding my emergent fieldnotes into preliminary analytical themes. I divided them into feelings, artistic practices, spatially and temporal aspects, process vis-à-vis product, staying with the trouble, organisation of body(s) and a section where I put what did not fit the other categories. Although I tried to make precise descriptive and analytical codes, I more than often had to go back to redefine the meaning of every code. Originally planning to use the software NVivo to guide my understanding of how the various codes related, I ended instead up making mind maps or longer literary texts that gradually helped me navigating through my material. During the process, I also kept my own

praxis going as a professional performer. These processes made my data more tangible and visceral, and as a mover, these dimensions resonated with me in my every day. Thus, coding depended on my personal attributes, including my theoretical positions and my skills as a grounded theorist (Saldana, 2009, pp. 28-29). This position is seemingly contrary to the inductive qualitative research found in grounded theory. However, contrasting an objectivist grounded theory, my constructive position “assumes that researchers already possess theoretical and research knowledge concerning their substantive field” (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 355). In other words, existing theory guided both my coding and analysis processes, in particular the theory in relation to my case study added nuances when I used it.

#### 4.5 Ethical Considerations

While aware of external ethical norms according to The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), this thesis addresses the internal ethical norms found in the general universal academic ideals (NESH). The interrelations between me as a teacher/artist/researcher, the researched project GRIEF and societal dimensions are of critical significance, as they permeated every phase and use of methods. Hence, I followed the notion of “critical reflexivity” (Dowling, 2016) that deals with the social nature of my research that informed my practical and ethical considerations. In protecting their exposure of sensitive and personal information, I obtained an informed consent that explained the nature of the project and giving them an opportunity to withdraw from the research at any point.

The critical reflexivity perspective guided me in a process of continuous self-examinations, constantly examining my positionality as a researcher and the associated challenges of interpreting my and the students’ experiences, my subjective bias, and social structures that contextualised GRIEF (Dowling, 2016). Reflecting previous chapters, I contested an objective epistemology and a universal knowledge production, hence avoiding what Haraway (1988) refers to as “the God trick”. Thus, my study emphasises a reflexive and critical relation to us and “other” that promotes the body as an apparatus for knowledge production. In other words, my research envisions a “pluriversal world” with empowering methodologies (Johnson & Madge, 2016).

Additionally, my research recognises the significant capacities of uncertainty, both in a manner of not trying to prove analytical certainty and that the research is partly beyond my control. Such a position has been accused of being too formal (inductivist positivism) or too relativistic. However, Bailey et al. (1999) have argued that critical reflexivity is built in to grounded theory, hence its continuous and open-ended logic. Because of the innate creative capacity, it highlights that every qualitative research project must be evaluated on its own terms, accordingly it embraces that the fallibilities and uncertainties are necessary in the evaluation and in the ethics of the research. In guiding me to secure this rigour, I used a research diary as a practical tool that helped me balancing rational and creative thinking (Dowling, 2016; Bailey et al., 1999).

The main ethical challenge in this project was to care for the potential of an altering of students' perception of their own (theatrical -and) social world (Dowling, 2016, p 29). This points towards the emancipating and the transforming capacities within the art-project GRIEF and the focus groups I conducted. Constantly challenging their approaches and views on dance and the wider world, they were on multiple occasions confused or made upset, as it was contradicting the (theatrical) world they knew, sending them into an uncomfortable state of ambivalence. Thus, as mentioned above, I stepped into my role as a facilitator and guided them according to a more conventional teacher-student relation, and perhaps helping to secure the validity and rigour of the project.

My understanding of the power relations in GRIEF is close to horizontal when taking the reciprocal relationships, the partial voluntary dimension, and the equal benefits for the students into consideration (Dowling, 2016, p. 36). A concern is that the students in GRIEF are somehow potentially part of my artistic and social future-sphere, that maybe prompted them to tell me what they thought I want to hear to achieve a "successful" research project, instead of depicting what they actually believed. However, I hope I established a close rapport with the students, so that our communal collection and interpretation of data is likely to be of high validity, particularly because of the intersubjective character of the project: me being an insider, hence we established similar outlooks on the world (p. 40).

## 4.6 Reflections

On the outset, the empirical material I was looking for concerned the students' potential engagement with environmental issues, explaining to the students the project as mainly political in its structure and that I was exploring how the process could enhance an understanding and commitment to the pressing problems of climate change. The notions of affective uncertainty and transformative learning were not introduced in the beginning as the themes emerged in the process of analysis. Consequently, the students did not receive direct information on the subject matters of what I ended up with in my research, thus avoiding controlling the students experience during the timeframe of GRIEF as well securing "good" empirical data without impacting its production to a large extent.

The project could probably benefit from a prepared audience questionnaire after the GRIEF performances, and maybe followed up with in-depth interviews, thus better elucidating GRIEF's aesthetic and affective effect on the audiences along with strengthening the rigour of the research through triangulation (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016, p. 127). However, Covid-19 imposed a challenge for audiences to attend the performances, due to social distancing rules, thus I did not prepare for such an undertaking, and these aspects are therefore not included as data. Nevertheless, Rancier's (2009) notion on the false aesthetic dichotomy discourse, where he critiques a traditional understanding of the spectator as passive, inspires me to define the students as spectators in their own work, and they can potentially be emancipated and given agency hence the social contract implicit in theatre. Additionally, I also have since performed my own work that GRIEF is based on, called *grief will be our companion*, and the response from this audience, myself, and my co-creators will elucidate the missing data in my research as well as taking my thesis into the "missing gaps" of what affect and embodiment *did not* produce within the students.

## 5 KNOWING THE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH DANCE

Maia: I have a tendency to underestimate the body. Mine, anyway. I think I can't do it, and then I lose my motivation when given a task. Particularly when I see the other ones are manging so well. I will be failing because I don't believe in my body and what it can do.

Mari: [...] I didn't think very much during the performances, I stuck to the practical tasks. It's difficult to analyse and to get an impression while performing. But, eventually in the stomping part and the Future-Creature, I didn't necessarily think about the environment or eco-grief, but I thought about our group as humans and as a society. We are so dependent on each other. We live on top of each other, and we need a closeness, at the same time we retract, and we want to be alone. We create together. Some of us take up a big space and others smaller, some go together and other breaks through alone. Something happens *together*, without me necessarily being able to verbalise it. This I feel is telling something about society.  
(14.12.2021)

The quotes from Maia and Mari reflect much of the experience in which the students went through in the work of GRIEF. Analytically, it questions the body as an everyday asset and its place within academia, and it identifies characteristics of embodiment as being practical and in “the here and now” through participatory physicality. The experience affected them in ways, without quite knowing how, and this uncertainty reflects the contingent aspects of the project as well as climate change. Mari's different understandings on the formations of groups or individual initiative elucidate how they organised themselves as a collective that gave space to perform their subjectivities. Implicitly, her response raises questions *around* society and the collective in the making of GRIEF, whereas Maia's response questions the body's place *in* society, thus reflecting the embodied experiences of the dance-project addressing: *can knowledge produced through the body be a driver for a sustainable future?*

To challenge a rationalisation of our world and to continuously re-situate “ourselves as spontaneously responsive, embodied beings, immersed within a somewhat “fluid” reality” (Shotter, 2014, p. 308), the thesis turns to consider more the subjective side of the Cartesian divide in the analysis of GRIEF by viewing the dance practice as space to rehearse possible “scenarios of climate-changed futures” (Tyszsuk & Smith, 2017, p. 57). It is a study of how

the students embodied their felt experiences. It frames affective and emotional ways of knowing climate change as necessary to shift our current unsustainable ways of living, thus rejecting climate change as an innate external threat. To prevent an ontological “lock-in” (Joronen & Häckli, 2017), accordingly, a weak leverage point (Meadow, 1999), GRIEF represents a platform and a site to explore through the body socio-nature implications, opposing rational and singular truths. By implementing the speculative concept of Relational Choreography, the thesis questions if a transformation of attitude towards matter really is the direction towards a sustainable future, and elucidates whether embodiment and affect can produce knowledge for societal change. This chapter will first explore the students’ bodily experiences in the rehearsal space, looking at how they learned through their physicality. Then, it moves into the role of the collective to see whether being offered the chance to find their own individual solutions is preferred over one based on finding a more common purpose based on similarity or identity.

## 5.1 Embodied Witnessing

We started this project as if it was something completely different from our previous experiences. But the more we worked on the project the clearer became the similarities. The difference was the language, but the mechanisms were the same. What this project emphasises is the importance of listening to each other.  
(Oda, 14.12.2021)

The experience of Oda reflects how new situations can trigger automated responses about how to deal with them. She, and her peers, looked outside of their individual control to find solutions for their dancing, thus sticking to the status quo of dealing with things by asking me, as their choreographer, teacher, and facilitator, for directions. Similarly, environmental scholars are currently directing attention to a technocratic focus that appears to have taken the social sciences out of the transformational path in the contemporary epistemology of sustainability, thus making the problem “out there” that requires artifacts or expertise that minimises the needs for direct human agency. However, like Oda, new ways of thinking pay attention to how the body can be a site where we can *listen* to each other; a place where we can produce knowledge through an *embodied witnessing*.



An articulation of an epistemological position that constructs knowledge through the body is demonstrated through a repeated dance practice the students went through called *flocking* - a flock of starlings being the metaphor. The flocking exercise elucidates a possible epistemology in how sustainable leadership can emerge. All the students have the potential to step up and take a leading role, or as it is handed over to them while moving in formation. This exercise explores dance as a space to walk the talk, promoting the overlooked kinesthetic sense in discussions of the senses, conventionally favouring the sense of vision (Barbour, 2004), and a testing ground to explore my concerns for linking affect with transformation. According to phenomenologist Sheets-Johnstone (1999), a kinesthetic sense is superior to that of vision, arguing that movement is “the originating ground of our sense-makings” (p. 161), signifying that human’s initial learning processes about themselves and others happen through moving the body. Thus, she encourages the kinesthetic sense to be a way to move beyond the optical register within academic scrutiny which reduces the cognitive privilege accorded to sight.

In flocking, the students continuously adapted to the changing circumstances and directions, as the moving group of individual students constantly changed formations and rhythms, depending on the “understood” initiatives within the group. The initiatives could be either an individual response, thus the group had to adjust according to the idea of a flock of birds, or the group could “feel” *together* the increase or decrease of timing and spacing, the group of students appearing to have no leader(s). This resulted in a higher tolerance towards complexities and ambiguity, and therefore an exercise in dealing with the affective uncertainties of not knowing. Eventually, by integrating a felt intuition and learning from and sharing with the other students, the students increased their flexibility in their approach to producing knowledge in the exercise, as they were having to construct and reconstruct their frames of reference (Belenky et al., 1986). This bodily world of sharing a tangible intensity between them meant that they always had to physically react from the changing formations from their sensory sensations (eyes, ears, skin, smell, kinesthetics). Eventually, by accepting being affected by the changing circumstances by moving their bodies accordingly to the changing patterns *and* having the capacity to affect the patterns in return, this transition or transformation permeated the process as a whole:

Joakim: [...] but the other parts are similar to the flocking exercise. One takes the focus or is given it by the group. We don't fight over the focus, but often one is always leading.

Oda: [I]t can't be compared to earlier performances, when the choreography was set, and you knew when to go on. In GRIEF you needed to pay attention to what was happening on stage and go on stage from an impulse and not from a specific cue, so you could not rest on the side when not being on. Now I thought of all the scenes as mine, although I was not in focus.

(14.12.2021)

Joakim experienced that his body learned how to engage with the changing circumstances by using a “change of focus” to navigate through time and space and in relation to his peers’ moving bodies, thus exercising an understanding for when to take command and when to hand over responsibilities. Similarly, Oda’s attentive body demonstrates how their bodies were affected as a relation between them and the (dance) world they were inhabiting, according to the *a priori* or precognitive affect discussed with Massumi, reflecting nonrepresentational theory (Anderson, 2009; Nightingale et al., 2021). Thus, flocking is an exercise that contradicts a conventional leadership perspective in the “real” world out there that focuses on individuals having exceptional capacity to steer change through complex systems (Kuenkel, 2019), thus questioning the trust in the individual (entrepreneur). It removes the choreographer in the rehearsal space, it takes the “genius” out of the dancer on stage, and it lets the students’ feelings, moods, physical energy, wishes, and wants to be decisive in the organisation of the group. Although the exercise is relatively straight forward, the experiences within the individual varied daily, depending on how they performed their subjectivities. Consequently, this form of collective leadership places people, not artifacts or fixed plans, as the foundation for (sustainable) transformations, thus emphasising a focus on the processual on the transformational path, rather than concrete directions. It also created a collective space with social relations, making room for the individual in a chaotic and non-linear exercise, thus questioning stable categories and unitary meanings and sees the world as fragmented, with a potential to obliterate the relation between subject and object.

Oda's awareness of her and other bodies show how ownership is diffused differently among the students, recognising social dissimilarities and differences. These aspects do not imply an even sharing of responsibilities but subscribes to an unevenness welcomed in new materialism and feminist thinking. The students changed their stage behaviour according to how they felt on that day, or to the particular formations or actions within the group. This resulted in their dancing to change between lurking around in the outskirts of the dancefloor or doing minimalistic movement centre stage, to attempt physical demanding and complex choreographies according to where and when they in the moment automatically reacted (or thought). Consequently, in the formation of their group, this understanding takes differences into consideration when discussing how they contributed, so that individual differences are not a problem when it comes to having or taking place within their group. It facilitated for all "kinds of bodies" in a sustainable fashion, potentially giving space to voices not often heard, within what seems closer to a convivial and sustainable collective leadership. It also brings an attention to how through performing their subjectivity, it eventually produced knowledge automatically, from an embodied perspective:

After a while we did things automatically. Even without thinking much about it, we discovered that we had learned without realising. We were given or developed tools that the body remembered.  
(Marianna, 14.12.2021)

In one way, Marianna's automated physical learning process constitutes reality a priori. Attending to her bodily sensations of movement gave her information and a relationship to her dancing, the objects in the performance space, her rucksack on her back, but also lights, the walls, and sound, in addition to the space given or taken between the bodies in the group, and the duration of various actions or formations. Particularly in the opening scene, she demonstrated different variations on the same choreography, responding to her environment seemingly different each time when she either with her eyes welcomed the audience implicitly by simply starring at them, the way she laid down on her back to bash her rucksack towards the floor with alternating rhythms, or the time spent touching her hand on the backwall to emphasise and to recognise the different elements in the space. On a simple level, she learned through kinesthetics how to calculate distance through navigating her body in the performance space, without the need to explain it verbally, causally, or rationally. On a more complex level, explaining how she also could understand through these moving practices

what constitutes herself or others, is difficult to state from her above quote. However, interpreting her quote to include a development of critical concepts of understanding the world depends on whether a cognitive dimension in her understanding of what entails “body memory” was present. I believe her reference to her discovery of learning supports this development.



Photo 6: Marianna and her “Rucksack”. Photo: Stephen Hutton.

Nevertheless, Oda’s perception of the group in her description below, moves the body from a strictly kinesthetic embodied phenomenon to have scalar implications, indication how her perception shifted through the dance into a *widescreen body*:

It felt like watching an ensemble on a widescreen, which differs from other shows where the individual is often brought attention to.  
(Oda, 06.12.2021)

Thus, the compositional aspects of flocking bring about different points of view – from the body. In my opinion, flocking moves beyond an instrumental exercise to include a processual

dimension of relating to other bodies and situations, suggesting through its experimentation in participation alternative forms of dialoguing and communication. Rather than looking for a concrete solution or outcome, one needs to, like Oda, soften the focus without “hunting” for a place to rest the eyes upon: “[It] is the physical state in which we allow the eyes to soften and relax so that, rather than looking at one or two things in sharp focus, they can now take in many [...]. It develops a global perception” (Bogart & Landau, 2005, pp. 31-32). Flocking and its’ transferrable qualities to the rest of the production also helps placing GRIEF outside politics (understood as actualised power in governments, institutions etc., reflecting vertical organisations), but rather within the political. This means that an immanent power existed within the student group with GRIEF’s bottom-up strategies, placed in the fabric of their everyday dancing-life, thus giving increased subjectivity to the students as individuals or as a collective. The thesis turns now to discuss this latter aspect.

## 5.2 The Collective Body

Mari: I felt the most on my own in «Let the Sunshine in”. Then I go into a bubble of my own, because I *know* we are all doing the same thing. In the other sequences you need to be listening more and being presence *for* and *with* the others.

Joakim: We are mostly together in “Let the...”, then we are a group as a whole.

Marianna: You don’t have to think of what’s suitable or what to do in “Let the Sunshine in” as everything is pre-arranged. Therefore, the listening must be turned on, and the feeling of community is present.

(14.12.2021)

The conversation above demonstrates the different understandings of the students’ feelings of a collective. It tells us something about the students’ *felt* attraction in their participation of this collective work, which came to be an interactive physical process that alternated between an individual and a collective focus.

Through a sort of an eco-grief ritual, the students together or alone stomped their feet towards the ground, they sang songs whilst executing choreography, they opened their mouths to let a sound out that bare resemblance to a sick dog or gasping for air, and they tried to their best ability to re-think their approach to their stage craft. Changing their moving -and dancing

focus to include or leave out stage lights, a stage curtain, rubber boots filled with water, a glitter-ball, finding new ways of moving their bodies according to a three-dimensional understanding of space, and “surviving” a 20-minute sequence of having to dance in the unknown, was an exhausting exercise as they were encouraged to make decisions in the moment based on the concept of Relational Choreography (described in chapter 3). Moving between a performance that was pre-rehearsed and operating together in the uncertainties of this relational choreography, with its visible and invisible physical textures, the students experienced affects differently. Guided by the affect theories of Massumi and Tomkins, we can understand their individual and their collective feelings in relation to a psychological understanding of their group dynamics. However, the psychological aspect deserves a separate exploration and is partly outside the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, the dynamic situations are significant here, where their bodily affective capacities are discussed throughout. The momentarily meetings between the students’ bodies can in a simplified version elucidate: did the students see their activity as an expression of one identity/collective or subjectivities within a collective from their embodied experiences? Or can the meetings reflect on a more complex level Nightingale et al.’s (2021, p. 3) notion on affective adaptation, “that changes always happen both *within* (individuals, collectives, societies, socio-natures) and *in relation to* (other humans, groups of humans and nonhumans)”?

On a practical note, leaving the students with abstract tasks to explore proved unsuccessful time and again. Although they seemed willing to explore this new realm of moving, their blank and empty eyes expressed a confused and a fatigued state that prevented them from actually engaging physically with these new tasks (further explored in chapter 6.1.1). This led me to change my original concept of letting the students only discover their dancing through relational aspects, which is an emerging process, particularly when they seemed motivated and elevated by involving everyone together in group activities doing the same moves and dances. Consequently, I made up a conventional choreography for them to a soundtrack from the musical Hair; “Flesh & Failures (Let the Sunshine in)”. This means I made up all the steps for the students, prepared in advance of the rehearsals, and I organised them in the space according to my interpretation of the song. The students’ only task was to copy the movements I had created, to come onto stage as I had instructed them, and to relate to the other students in the formations I had chosen (lines, circles, scattered, etc.). This way, their eyes again filled with motivation and a sense of confidence, hence the clear goals for how the

dance should “look like”, as the set dance-routine provided a tangible goal to master (thoroughly discussed in chapter 7).

What emerges of significance in this part of the thesis is that the choreography acts as a device to involve all the students in the *same* way, accordingly, serves a point of reference. This top-down approach is the conventional way of organising bodies in dance. By referring to the inherent aspects around this vertical and hierarchical approach, the students could then understand and contextualise aspects around the Relation Choreography on stage; either as a set choreography and outside of their control or explored individually in a group as Mari described in her above quote. Thus, the experience of dancing together with agreeable parameters can explore embodied knowledge production and its wider impacts, thus creating a space for collective embodied possibilities, in addition to the individual. This brings us back to the alternating feeling of the subjective vis-à-vis the collective:

Isak: [...] I never have experienced such intense listening as with this performance. I believe perhaps because it's about the body and being so physically involved made me very focused on what surrounded me. I believe feeling so present is to do with dancing. I don't know quite how, but...

Mari: I was also more involved when I was not on stage in this performance. In earlier productions I knew every line and I could just wait for my que. But my body responded and was attracted towards the dancing in GRIEF, making it more engaged. [...] In GRIEF, there's more of a community, more feeling and listening to one another...  
(14.12.2021)

In the above descriptions from Isak and Mari, their bodies reacted in response to their immediate social space. Seemingly immersed in a space of perception their bodies materialise as receptors, illustrating what Massumi refers to as intensity or in-betweenness: it shows how their bodies have been affected by the other students' bodies as well as having had the capacity of affecting in return. They both felt a certain attraction of being involved with their peers' bodies in the everyday dancing, however, they dealt with this new landscape in different ways. The more experienced mover, Mari, immediately threw her body into the unknown of exploring the possibilities in this new world. She confidently would involve her dancing with other students as well as with the scenography in the space, however, realising

that her preconditioned knowledge of dance was partly a hindrance in getting to terms with “staying with the trouble”. Contrary, Isak new to dancing, moved as if in a spaceship. Carefully, he'd put one foot in front of the other, slowly immersing himself into the performance space and with the other moving bodies. Noticeably using his cognitive sense to take in the information that surrounded him, I could sense that he eventually managed to let his receptors sink to also include a *feeling of the space* through his body. Although he initially had problems with the dancing part of the project, to know how to organise his own body according to the explorational method, it was evident for both him and Mari that they were on the way to an embodied understanding of the implications of GRIEF.

Most of the dancing involved their bodies to be in a close relationship, their bodies within touching distance of each other, and thus tangible presences. They had to rely on all their senses to keep the agreed proximity of the other bodies in the set group dances, being in the right place and on the right time, particularly as in these sequences they also had to sing. The combination of singing and dancing is a formidable task and trusting your bodily (trained) instincts is crucial to be able to manage (tolerable) singing. Similarly, the more experimental dancing also involved to use the body as a receptor to locate where yours and the other bodies were in space. Here, the students were challenged to incorporate a three-dimensional aspect of their dancing, different from the more two-dimensional dancing in conventional dance routines described above, which was a disorientating experience for the students. This dancing changes where they look in space to include the floor, the roof, and all the dimensions in-between, displaying a more contorted form of dancing, thus making them somehow dizzy. Therefore, relying on the body to know where they were in relation to the other moving bodies, not only the eyes, was important to prevent hazardous stage behaviour. Because of this dancing closely with the other students, they all affected each other bodies, and gave them a shared attention -and emotional focus (Massumi, 2003; Collins, 2004; Brennan, 2004). Accordingly, this collective activity created a communal and tangible *atmosphere*, which drew their attention to a mutual activity that happened between them. These mechanisms explain how Isak and Mari could “take-over” their peers’ energy in the space, suggesting that affect is foremostly physiological and comes into play before cognitive awareness occurs. Accordingly, the affect Isak and Mari describe is a concrete material, a biochemical and neurological process of entrainment that can directly be transferred through their senses as a transmission of affect (Brennan, 2004). It manifested as an atmosphere in the



space that the students could sense and in return be infected by. Thus, GRIEF contained a contagious and transferable emotional energy *between* the students' bodies. This contagious dimensionality is also demonstrated by Oda's experience:

Oda: This type of dance we do is something achievable for most people in that it continuously develops *with* the dancer, which is contrasting the "difficult" ballet. What is needed is motivation and a body. With an accessible form like this existing for nearly anyone, then it's easier to inspire each other believing that one can actually do it. Perhaps your contagious enthusiasm can inspire in their individual work? A very contagious way of working. Contagious art, where the finish line or skills are not the most important. Most people can do this, and that I find inspiring.  
(14.12.2021)

To fully understand the feelings of Isak, Mari, and Oda, it is useful to expand on Massumi to include the social aspects of his affect theory. Like the artistic practice of GRIEF, agency in one's social life is to be found in its micro-sociology through social interactions (Massumi, 2003; Collins, 2004). When the students returned to similar scenarios, it created in return an expectation of keeping up a social solidarity and conformity from a wish of an intense and heightened feeling of community, known as collective effervescence (Collins, 2004, p. 49). One can question whether they all appreciated this "bubbly" feeling of dancing together (August: "I just don't get dance", 06.12.2021), however, they kept showing up, either because they had to but hopefully because they had a *will* to carry on. Mari referencing her active and lively sense of community might prove the latter argument in addition Isak's much improved sensation of being present. In that respect, one could say that this project facilitated situations for the students to experience a bigger social body, a body that only can be experienced collectively, thus connecting them to a feeling of group solidarity with a potential of including communal moral and ethical values, in line with Oda's sense of inspired enthusiasm. In particular, the students who enjoyed the set choreographic group dances sum up the idea of the symbiotic relation between affect and togetherness that can inspire processes beyond the students' engagements with GRIEF. I believe we all have at some point been in a crowd listening to music, or dancing together in a club, feeling the energies flowing between the bodies present that might mobilise an atmosphere with a potential for collective actions: *a feeling of doing something together*. In its extreme form, it reflects a group mentality that currently is performed by Extinction Rebellion or other direct action environmental

groupings. It is exactly this affect that the students felt at various moments during GRIEF, that potentially can ignite an engagement with social change and climate transformations, which is further explored below with Maia and Oda:

Maia: The catchword for me is *surrender*, whether it is surrendering to nature or to the masses (people). During the process we appear to be individuals, but then we surrender more and more to what's is going to happen or already happened on stage. [I]n the last unison sequence, we give up and just follow the stream. Here I think about the environment; we try together to achieve a communal and great goal, but we end up just following the stream. When things get difficult it is much easier to surrender to what everybody else is doing, rather than following your own path. It is difficult to stay with the trouble. When one is caught in a negative spiral, it is difficult to break out of it. This particularly concerns environmental issues, as we are not used to make sustainable choices.

Oda: [B]ut people have often managed to make something happen when in a flock or following a trend. I remember a period when people, through the use of social media, were complaining about the sudden trend of buying second-hand clothes and things, something I anyway thought was a *good* thing. Making second-hand a trend is how we as people functions, and together we can put a spotlight on an issue. We can't do things individually, regardless of how much you try to convince yourself. We make things happen as a group. Surrender to the group, to the trend, *then* making it trendy to care. It's not that long ago second-hand was an unpopular and only a place for poor people.

Maia's reflections discuss the process of a will and a need to act on behalf of the socio-nature complexities, the performance of GRIEF representing the students' artistic engagements with environmental issues. However, their individual initiatives became too isolating in their endeavours for a collective contribution to radically changing the status quo of their stage-world, as most of them initially preferred me to take all the decisions regarding the making of GRIEF, as previously demonstrated. Consequently, Maia's experience of their attempt to mobilise elucidates the heavy responsibility that is put on them to adapt to the new strategies and shows how individual action can be an unpredictable factor, and according to Nightingale et al. (2021, p. 5), an individual emphasis is not enough for (socio-natural) changes. Similarly, Oda's frustration reflects contemporary society's tendency to compartmentalise the aspects of processes in separating the individual from other scalar systems, seeing them as separate entities:

*Oda uttered a frustration over her own abilities in the rehearsals rather than faulting the transparent project per se.*

(Fieldnotes 23.11.2021)

Without questioning or contextualising my proposed experimental and choreographic systems, Oda initially took too much individual responsibility for her perceived failings. I interpret Oda's isolation of her efforts from seeing them in relation to structural issues is impacted by a current sticky affect that disentangle the complexities of our society (i.e., capitalism) and the contemporary focus on the individual of being a site for change (i.e., transformation literature). How Oda experienced this frustration is explored in chapter 6, depicting this affective impact on all the students. Consequently, in both Maia's and Oda's attempts to stick to an unknown and emergent stage-future, they initially surrendered to a mainstream organisation of dancing that avoided relational and interconnected visions of radical choreographic systems. Although conventional dance *can* be a promising start for how we engage with sustainability in and outside of a dance space, as explored in chapter 2.3.2 with Bentz (2020), the choreographic strategies from this top-down perspective might be disconnected from changing the way we go about dancing, and thus a hindrance for change. Normally, dancing is considered from the way it looks, portrayed in mass-media or on mainstream stages with spectacular physical mastery or in the background supporting the main event, and not for what it can do, illustrated later in 5.2.1 by the students turning their bodies "into a new world".

On the other hand, Oda's sensation of aligning her subjectivity with a collective in "Let the Sunshine in" -sequence reflects the above comments from Joakim and Marianna. It illustrates how they felt a sense of community in accordance with Massumi's notion on affect as an in-betweenness. Not only does she acknowledge the force and the flow such an affect between bodies felt like, but she also scales her experience up to include the power of how subjectivities as a collective can create change reaching beyond their singular collective. The quality of the group mentality enabled the students to potentially fight for a communal cause, symbolically or politically, hence the centralised organisation of choreography. This claim on autonomy and agency for the students' own identity created an aspiring and enthusiastic emerging quality with a promising for making something happen from within and in possibly

relation to other human groups. However, what about the nonhuman and decentralised aspects that potentially can make GRIEF a site for a more extensive relational and embodied change?

Interpreting and reflecting on the students, and the many weeks of singing, swinging, stomping, and sweating, I believe the dance-project generated emotional affiliations within the students, which are the characteristics of Tomkins and feminist understandings. Moving beyond a tangible space that the students could feel, the collective energy became noticeable to me when the students realised what they were a part of, and thus placing it into a wider social context by expressing their feelings of individual particularities, demonstrated in the above quote with Oda and explored to a greater extent in chapter 6 and 7. Consequently, in my understanding, GRIEF moved beyond a pure physiological interpretation to include affect as different and subjective manifestations, thus deepening the notion of scale to include their *inner worlds*, as the thesis now explores further.

### 5.3 The Subjective Body

We all do the same thing. Everybody's stomping and everybody's doing their Future-Creature. But we don't do exactly the same thing. It is our own interpretations of the things, and then one does what comes naturally to them. Some use the hips, some use the arms, some dance on the ground. Everybody's doing their speciality, together with the same tasks.

(Mari, 14.12.2021)

The students were exposed to different approaches of being together through their bodies in this project, and as Mari demonstrates in her quote, being together in abstract ways can provide a platform where individuals can interpret or feel what it means to be together. In my attempt to create GRIEF as a site for transformations, I conceptualised a collapse of space according to new materialism theory, thus opening up for encounters between a diversity of subjectivities. In my post modernistic notion on a decentralised dramaturgy, I hoped to create a non-anthropocentric stage "milieu" and thus a decentralisation of "the self". Like Mari illustrates above, the students were given the possibility to go in and out of different materialities (persona or things) to explore more aspects of themselves, hence using their imaginative plasticity. In this way, the students engaged in a relational, social, dialectical, or

collaborative form of physical participation. Consequently, the students did not only participate in the artwork of GRIEF, but the making of GRIEF participated in the wider society. I am aware of the democratic problem of who gets to participate in art, which is a topic too big for this thesis, however, the work of GRIEF can tell something about the democratic potential for the role of art in society to include nature. As the students moved their bodies in the rehearsals, I witnessed the students' spatial and temporal decision-makings gradually changed from the idea of being in the centre of the stage, presenting an agreed upon dance together, to a more individualised, erratic, unplanned, and a more joyful togetherness. Thus, it resembled more an everyday behaviour, and eventually GRIEF was embedded in socio-nature relations, as I show below.

### *5.3.1 Turning the body into a new world*

The scene, "Oh, what a world", starts with Mari and Marianna placing their hands on top of a pile of glitter, then they gently drag two streams of glitter along the floor by moving their bodies backwards into space. With the lighting reflecting on the glitter, and the sound of a steely electric guitar, seemingly creates a river to appear. August, who plays the guitar, starts singing Rufus Wainwrights "Oh, what a world", the lyrics reflecting the world we live in with fast trains and plains. Slowly, Maia joins in with similar, straight shaped glitter, and the three of them elevate the glitter in front of their bodies, looking like curtains they can open and close. The other students join August in the singing, while Isak enters the stage with his glitter curtains open, showing them off as if on a catwalk. There are now four students with their glitter curtains open, increasingly picking up their pace in circular formations, the prancing attitudes have been replaced with a glitter-machinery that can remind one of a fast carousel or distant galaxy speeding further into the universe. Then Joakim, Lena, and Isak frantically move their hands up and down with irregular patterns with the glitter as an extension to their arms, making the glitter noisy, sounding, and looking like a wild waterfall. They all rush off the stage as Marianna appears with half her body hidden by a huge glitter-ball popped on top of her, only her legs visible. She starts shaking the glitter-ball, and we experience the three-dimensional qualities as the lights hit the ball from every angle. Then she makes her way down to the floor, as if crumbling into the crumbled glitter, followed by sweeping the floor

with the ball in sideways movements, resembling a sea wave or cleaning the floor, leaving the stage empty.



Photo 7: Lena, Isak, and Joakim in “Wild Waterfall”. Photo: Stephen Hutton.

Maia: During “oh, what a world”, the glitter-things popped up as “beautiful garbage” as a thought. The delicate treatment of the glitter in the show symbolises the earth. We have so many valuable resources, but the glitter-ball Marianna is working on is pressed together as a garbage bag. In the part where she shakes it, I am thinking: “Is there still life? Is there still life?” And then it gets thrown away. That is what I see, and I get the same impression every time. It goes from being something great and valuable to be destroyed.

Oda: yes, it is so nice to see the glitter gets worked on to mean different things, in that the glitter is not only represented as glitter.  
(14.12.2021)

In a rehearsal space, as we can understand from Maia and Oda in their description, the boundaries between social reality and fiction can be obliterated correspondingly to “losing oneself” as an individual’s wish to open for other realities. Exemplified with the glitter-scene,

GRIEF reflects a stage-reality that includes both an imaginative and material reality, thus representing an ontology that shaped the students' social relations, creating a possibility for an embodied emancipatory future to include nonhuman. Further, the project asked implicitly questions about what a movement is, or how can we organise materialities or bodies in space:

*How is the organisation of materialities/bodies in GRIEF?*

Maia and Oda were confronted in a broader context with their experiences of the glitter-scene, both contrasting and including current representative or vertical democratic organisational forms in society that has a tradition of a male dominant, racist, and progressive capitalism that exploits nature (Haraway, 2006). Particularly Maia moved between recognising the devastating realities of our planet, however, at the same time she was given direct autonomy in structuring her dances subjectively, as all the students' organisations of their bodies came initially from an imminent structuring. Such a set-up contrasts conventional choreographic systems from top-down, or the world "out there", thus implying horizontal organisations inspired by network systems in social movements or the notion of nodes (rhizome). It provided for the students the potential to include other in the rehearsals by using their imagination, and thus inviting "their fantasy" into the space, or in their responses to the concrete stage-material as co-habiting the space, hence producing intersubjective relations. As Maia expresses in her scalar experience of the glitter, it provided for her a fragile poetic relation between garbage, life, and the earth.

My attempt to make the students involve their bodies to be present and not to be thought of as an overlap between their artistic and social worlds (Braidotti, 1994), but as corporeal experiences of their bodies to be understood as ongoing creations and re-creations in continuous processes that consequently opposes dualistic thinking, had mixed results:

*While finding "it difficult to explain what they are doing" (Marianna) and initially "heavy and could not find any solutions on how to approach this project" (Maia), many of them felt "emancipated" (Mari) in relying on the body to speak, or contrary, to pragmatically circumvent this free aspect and did "what works for me" (Joakim). Consequently, they acknowledged a new reality in which to operate in, a new way of being a dancer, whether in "relaxing in the known, performing the same routine every*

*time” (Joakim), thus providing a different approach and energy into the performance, or enjoying the uncertainty in the unpredictable. Regardless of approach, they all contributed to a variety of subjectivities into the work of GRIEF, broadening and enhancing their sense of listening.*

(Fieldnotes 06.12.2021)

However, referring to subjective and intersubjective aspects, which means that being-in-the world is constituted through a dialectical and relational mode *with* the world (Engelsrud, 2006), Isak demonstrates below how to include nonhuman into his daily dance-practice imposed a challenge for him:

Isak: I struggled to incorporate Future-Creature into my work. I used mostly a ritual as a way into this work, trying to organise the space ready for the audience. What made me emotionally the most was in the sequence of “oh, what a world”. I really like the song, but in combination with me taking off my rubber boots and turning my body into another world, a world of the sight and sound of glitter, beautiful singing, and a bass-guitar was nice. The glitter-ball was exiting, particularly the shaking of it in the end. (14.12.2021)

Without overtly realising it himself, Isak verbalises the notion of other in a new materialistic sense by including the concept of a ritual into his work. Even if he thinks he failed to work out the Future-Creature concept, he clearly embodied a new world in the emotional turning of his body, seeing and hearing the performance of the shaking glitter and the electric guitar. I believe his stage-behaviour was impacted by the co-residence and co-production with materials other than human, which I interpret through his reference to ‘ritual’, that seems to address when, “there are so many aspects of the performance difficult to interpret” (Isak, 14.12.2021).

*What is movement in GRIEF?*

*Predominantly carrying her weight on the front of her feet, Oda looked as if wearing stilettos in rehearsals. When dancing in the set and conventional dance-group routines, her body seemed to float around in the room, looking effortless and with poise. Although seldom touching the ground with her heels, she easily integrated the*



*combination of dancing and singing. However, when challenged with the Relational Choreography concept, she immediately felt lost in grasping the experimental proposal, accordingly, it stopped her progress in the project. When leaving the rehearsal space, Oda walked firmly out of the room; the heels well planted into the floor.*

(Fieldnotes, 07.11.2021)

Oda was little aware of her “performative walk” when I confronted her with my observations. After having given it some thought, she replied that she wanted her dancing to “look good”, though without explaining to me what she defines as looking good. I believe Oda’s initial idea for moving is inspired by what traditionally is recognised as dance, represented in mainstream media or theatre. To my mind, this representation currently maintains the status quo on the notion of gender, race, and class categories, historically classified by the social realities of patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism (Haraway, 2006), which is too extensive of a topic to discuss in this thesis. However, from my experience, I could see with Oda that she resembled the girls from music videos or the backing girls in musicals, coming across as coy, but at the same time available. Her reply “I want it to look good” contrasts her later quote in the process of “doing what the body says”, having integrated the outside of rehearsals with the inside, which the thesis now explores by questioning what or who moves you, as well as questioning what is recognised as dance.

By addressing and questioning who or what moves you, Oda and the other students were challenged in their dance praxis to suspend the stable categories mentioned above for a period, to see if they could create new identities of “otherness, difference and specificity” (Haraway, 2006, p. 123), which is clearly a political construction. From moving in a manner often portrayed as stereotypically feminine, Oda explored how her light and tentative body could embody another reality that was direct and heavy. She explored, metaphorically, spreading her body weight out on the stage floor like a tree or fungi with their interconnecting rooting systems underground. In doing so, she played around with the ideas Butler calls gender performativity and towards Haraway’s imaginative and constructed social reality, in which she “felt stronger and cooler. I liked feeling big and taking up space” (Oda, 14.12.2021).

In the intentionally chosen oversized thick, dusty blue t-shirts and outdoorsy trousers, Oda and her peers resembled eco-warriors on a mission. Their baggy outfit disguised and anonymised to a certain extent gender differences, particularly resulting in Oda to scale up her physical range that ultimately went beyond “looking good” or encompassing any gender related (stage) behaviour. She stomped her feet hard to the ground as if to wake up the dead in the ground, and she let her hair hang down to cover her face, swaying it forth and back, linking this new “creature” up with Isak to create an extension of her own body. Her physical expressions related more and more to unpredictable and irruptive movements, rather than to the systemised qualities in ballet or break-dance that can be predicted and measured. She could now, with the rest of her peers, shift between moving in unifying ways to stretch their dances beyond recognition.



Photo 8: Oda in “Future-Creature”. Photo: Stephen Hutton.

From what we have learned, both Maia and Oda constructed their moving identities that had the capacity to go beyond natural identification in an eco-political kinship, involving an affinity or a conscious coalition where they explored a form of unity, thus inhabiting political

identities that could be more hopeful than characters representing status quo. However, it also invited them to co-habit the more realistic realities of current socio-natures, as Maia explains:

Maia: Like nature, much of the things we do on stage is nice, but also not so nice. Everything from beauty to ugly, things live and die, just like nature.  
(14.12.2021)

By playing and moving with materialities different than in a conventional stage-play or dance, they learnt to see their own persona from another, nonhuman point of view, demonstrated above with the glitter-scene, Maia, and Oda, but also reflecting the notion on Future-Creature and Cosmic Hoover. With this in mind, we take a few steps back to see how the turning of the body into a new world was met with anthropocentric obstacles.

### 5.3.2 (Non) Anthropocentric stage body – a spatial issue

*An initial concern and a problem to overcome throughout the project for the students was the contradiction between mastery and the unknown, particularly as they were not “used to be given such free reign” (Lena) to develop their practices and projects. The apparent quality in this distinction seemed to be of a tangible character, in that “they wanted to look good” (Mari) while dancing within “a given framework of reference” (August). These two aspects point to a preferred (and learned) aesthetic, bodily quality, and a clear cognitive goal as a reference to measure and control their developments. In this sense, they would “know” whether they were successful of mastery to a preconceived notion of stage behaviour, whether concerning a physical goal of dancing according to specific technique (street dance, modern, ballet) or achieving an emotional state of the “character” or situation.*

(Fieldnotes, 05.11.2021)

I believe current popular culture’s portrayal of dance in commercials and in conventional theatre through the increased use of individual abilities, like break-dance, has impacted greatly on how young people perceive dance; it becomes about mastery and showing off

skills. Like “quick fixes” in a capitalistic mode, the students seemingly produced something of value, moving from one idea to the next, giving little time to develop a situation, a state, or a movement phrase. These are the consequences of the students wanting to “look good” by attempting to display impressive dexterities, resulted in an abundance of dance-material without contextualisation. Their placements on stage were centralised, just like the protagonist in a traditional play or the dancer in a commercial, performing their material as if to a camera:

*Using the outskirts of the performance space was never an option as they gravitated towards the middle of the stage, bringing a resemblance to the individual singers appearing on tv-shows like x-factor or pop-idol, where the performers are situated centrally on an actual cross.*

(Fieldnotes, 04.12.2021)



Photo 9: “Let the Sunshine in – looking good”, a conventional form of dancing.  
Photo: Stephen Hutton.

The freedom given resulted initially in perpetually producing “creative” dance-vocabulary. No wonder Isak out of frustration uttered: “I just don’t get it” (07.11.2021), as he was limited

by this unsustainable mode of producing dance. Understandably, Isak's lack of mastery felt frustrating, as mastery is traditionally an important part of feeling empowered. Contrasting the semiotic perspective in GRIEF and the potential of the poetic capacities of relating their dancing with a specific or relation local, social, and global scale, Isak initially needed a clearer target within reach to master. This is known to be inspirational that can produce hope and change within the individual, and is further discussed as transformative learning, chapter 7. However, in my attempt to circumvent an instrumental experience for the students, their feeling of bewilderment gradually turned to focus their attention to include the intersubjective capacities and co-producing social realities in a posthuman perspective:

*While being presented to “a frustrating and non-logical” (Joakim) starting point of the project, they turned to their earlier experimental experience in how they “exposed and endangered the audience” (Isak) by locating them in the middle of the performance space, different in orientation to an anonymous and conventional auditorium seating. By flipping this “risk” back to them as performers, they conceptually understood how they potentially could be affected in the same way as their previous audience, thus having to let go of preconceived stage-behaviour knowledge.*

(Fieldnotes, 05.11.2021)

In the following we will see how the anthropocentric stage body is reflected in stage politics:

Maia: The Future-Creature scene has the mentality of “the one who shouts the loudest gets the spotlight”, in addition to the actual spotlight August is carrying around. The most colourful things attract attention and can be heard. Like politics, the ones who offer the most in many respects gets to speak, they bask in the glory. What is lit up on stage is where we conventionally should pay attention to, and we can get time to “shine”. Whatever happens outside of the light is not given same value.

Oda: When August arrives with the spotlight, I am rather thinking of slowing down. There is so much information when you get lit up, and you can do less. I continue to work on my themes in interplay with med the light if it points in my direction. I am thinking the audience has been given a goodie-bag, one they themselves decide where to look.

(14.12.2021)

Maia and Oda demonstrate how GRIEF as politics is reflected both on stage and in wider society. In Maia's experience, the stage-behaviour in the Future-Creature scene translates according to Guy Debord's (1967) "Spectacle of the Society" to reflect art as cognitive and individualised, like dancing often is displayed in mass-media. Contrasting this view is Oda's reflection on the diffusion of focus, thus potentially giving attention to other materialities or subjectivities, and demonstrated here by Joakim:

*Joakim eventually pushed through and stayed with the trouble by performing his dance facing towards the stage-curtain and away from the audience. With his mouth open, he indicated a relationship with the curtain that clearly impacted his dancing. His actions additionally animated the curtain, bringing life and dynamics into it, thus shifting who or what he includes in his performance as well as opening and relating the space to more than human beings.*

(Fieldnotes, 10.11. 2021).

Consequently, the Relational Choreography eventually permeated the process, thus attention to the qualities of rhythm (time) and formations (space), sensations, wishes and wants formed the physical performativity, resulting in a transformation of their approach to their stage body. This new body explored the outskirts of the stage, often performing with their backs to the audience. Using their bodies three dimensionally, by exploring the asymmetric capacities of the body, resulted in a more relational dance and choreography. Thus, the conventions of performing directly towards the audience was challenged, and the two dimensional and relatively flat understanding of space was expanded on.

Summarising, the students' physical expressions became much more unpredictable and irruptive, contrasting with the highly stylised ones associated with ballet or break-dance. Their stage activity moved from what can be predicted and measured, to one that allowed for an embodiment of intra-actions through intersubjectivity. Exploring individual engagements relating to a wider society became a process that dependent on the individual as much as the collective, with their subjectivities, organised horizontally and from within, thus contrasting a more "copy and paste" dance approach organised "top down" and globally from commercial forces.

## 6 NAVIGATING THROUGH STUPLIMITY

Oda: It was very physically and mentally tiring always having to work, work, work, constantly having to pay attention. When I was finished, I was very tired. I'm pretty sure I have used parts of my body and brain never used before in a performance.  
(14.12.2021)

Imagining constantly having to search for possible ways of dancing in the rehearsals, always having to pay attention to how to organise own body in relation to movements and to other bodies in the performance space. Imagining a posthuman starting point for dance to question the anthropocentric view of the world and to disrupt the idea of what it means to be human, meaning the outset for movement is not necessarily alone centred around human qualities or activities. Imagining the attempt to include and encourage a more imaginary, philosophical, and embodied experience-based dance, leading to asking question about who or what is the initiation for movement, ultimately challenging what dance is. Imagining consequently questioning the ideas around gender, race and class, aspects of our society that are classified by the social realities of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, and that encourages to dance intra-agential with otherness, difference, and specificity in collective processes. Imagining dancemaking that moves between relativistic or pluralistic ontologies, a post-modernistic position, to also include specific political constructions that can be a tangible experience in the rehearsal space for the dancer. This intro conveys, as Oda also expresses in her quote, the fatiguing exercise of GRIEF in exploring the nature of stage-behaviour as a concept in relation to nature "out there". It was an overwhelming prospect of having to rehearse sustainable futures through their bodies inside the confinement of the four walls of the school:

Isak: I almost lose my will to live when thinking about what our dancing has to do with sustainability, as I really find it difficult to find an answer. The closest I get in answering is the ritual relation I believe GRIEF has, which is in line with a prayer to a sun god and asking for a better world for the future.  
(14.12.2021)



Photo 10: Oda and peers in “Relational Choreography”. Photo: Stephen Hutton.

A central theme emerging was the worrying or nagging feeling produced from within the uncertainties of GRIEF. Instead of a clear emotional engagement with the topical issue of climate change or dance, which would imply a clearer intention and therefore a direction to aim their attention towards, the experimental dance produced a certain limbo or a liminal space; a situation in which the students did not quite know *how* or *what* they should be engaged with or in. This state, described by Ngai (2005) as *stuplimity*, is a mode to deal with the feeling of inadequacy. This mood contradicts society’s demand or pressure for feelings to be prescribed and already clarified positionally on political issues. Although *stuplimity* is an uncomfortable feeling, this thesis explores how it can also serve as an intervention into the temporal aspects of the status quo that prefer quick fixes instead of durational processes. This notion potentially relates to the trajectories of an uncertain climate future, however, the feelings that tangibly surfaced within the students were more of a paradox (discussed in the closing chapter).

Thus, due to the experimental nature of making and performing GRIEF, uncertainties became the innate strategy in the rehearsals, which were experiences that affected the students in



uncomfortable ways, in a fourth and back relation as performers and as individuals in wider society. Consequently, the students potentially understood a world that *stuck* to them through their embodied experiences on the dancefloor. In contrast to positive feelings and experiences, expressed by Oda and Isak above, this part of the analysis of GRIEF explores rather the notion and validity of feeling uncomfortable, seeing what could be called mistakes not as “bad”. Here we begin to question the power relations in who gets to decide what dance is. Referring to my previous exploration of nowtopia, the rehearsal space a place to engage directly with the world, the thesis questions: *how does affective uncertainty in experimental dance offer openings for transformation?*

## 6.1 Stupid Body

*During the improvisations, the students keep on quickly producing suggestions or solutions to the given tasks. However, they are losing a sense of timing, in that they have the same patterns in how they approach their dance material. I see two problems arise from this notion. Firstly, the time spent building up a context is discarded, jumping from one investigation to another, which displays poor management. Secondly, the actual time spent investigating is similar, accordingly they are producing similar content in similar manners. I believe their feeling of not progressing leads to a frustration and a standstill, as slowing down is never an option.*  
(Fieldnotes, 04.10.2021)

The approach described above is neither sustainable for the students’ development of own understanding of themselves as performers or in a wider social context, nor does it provide a platform in which they have the potential to go deeper into the *how* and the *what* in their engagements with GRIEF. The feeling of “falling into a rhythm of doing similar things” (Isak, 05.12.2021) is comparable with Debord’s (1967) notion on fetishization of producing and representing a spectacular image, in my mind currently represented by the commodification of break-dance skills in mass-media. Regardless of a faulty comparison, similar mechanisms were displayed in the rehearsal space, where the students were attempting to “look good” by merely reproducing performative expectations.

The students displayed indecisive, bewildered, and hesitant behaviour that even bordered on apathy, when invited to make choices and take actions. Despite the demanding and draining demands of GRIEF, the students chose to go along with the uncomfortable feeling, because it felt important to them. Although the experience was disorientating, the issues raised were seemingly of their concern as it did something to them. It triggered relational responses from the students as political subjects in ethical-political processes, and potentially provided a space for the students for a more pluralistic understanding of the (theatre) world, as it destabilised a more totalising view of theatre. However, relational responses founded on political and ethical reflections on environmental issues were harder to retrieve.

Even with the uncomfortable and exposing experience of making GRIEF, and without quite managing to relate to the project, the students kept turning up as they felt what they were doing important and interesting:

*Expressing a personal vulnerability in such an open exercise, Mari compared how she normally could “rest” in a theatrical text, both knowing the trajectories of the plot and characters, whereas in this “unknown” situation she found it extremely psychologically demanding to contextualise the how and the what. Concluding on this testing process, Isak found this quest of navigating his “stupid body” extremely tiring. Although having to mobilise a huge amount of energy, he still carried on.*

(Fieldnotes 23.11.2021).

Consequently, in processing the experience, the students shifted between the feelings of wanting to do the project without knowing how to engage. Perhaps they were surprised to encounter the contrasts between the experimental dance and their own presumptions and experiences of stage craft? I believe this nagging feeling of incompetency in relation to the serious thematic left the students “hanging in the air”, and thus feeling stupid:

Maia: It is very personal when improvising dance, and it is easy to feel stupid.

Isak: The physical is way more difficult than the verbal. I am afraid of looking stupid.

Joakim: [...] frequently I was thinking: what on earth am I doing? It is difficult to analyse while doing, thinking now I am doing it, now I am in it, now I look really stupid. But that’s the way it is.

(14.12.2021)

### 6.1.1 Getting stuck

The students were put in a position of having to make political, ethical, moral, and aesthetic points of view, which is a demanding and fatiguing exercise. However, what were their opinions and how is this expressed through their bodies? The production of these less prestigious affective reactions was predominantly displayed in the preliminary stages in the making of GRIEF. Expressing a mixture of shock and fatigue, these affects resulted in momentary standstills in the progress of the work:

*They were talking about what they would like to do and how to organise the space between them. Evidentially calm and collected, without traces of sweat on their bodies, they discussed amongst themselves, probably because they found it easier to talk about things, than actually getting on the floor to explore. Although with some resistance, they seemed to get on with the task of dancing while I was present in the room. (Fieldnotes, 12.11.2021).*

Shock as affect in the case of GRIEF displayed something about the students not being unable to fathom the bigger picture, and the prospect for them to both shape and perform GRIEF in different ways from the usual set choreography or pre-written theatre script. I believe the fatigue part relates to the lack of power of being able to rehearse a choreography or movement ideas, resulting in discussion rather than exploration through their bodies. Together, the feeling of stuplimity describes the students' diametrically opposite affects of shock and fatigue in their aesthetic experiences. The combination of these contradictory affects brings about a complex feeling, displayed by the students' limited capacity to grasp the totality of the project and a failure to generate responses or actions:

[...] it is too much to think about, it makes me feel *stuck* as I am losing the overall view (Isak, 21.11.2021)

These ugly and unpopular feelings bring us an aesthetics without catharsis, which is an ambivalent experience different from conventional theatre or dance. Stuplimity offers the non-beautiful feelings without offering transcendence, an escape, or moments of release. So, what is the relevance of feeling of shocked and fatigued, and how does it contribute to the environmental challenges ahead?

## 6.2 Embodied Ambiguity as Critical and Political

In my analysis, a picture of GRIEF as an aesthetic object and a practice with an agenda became clearer. Eventually, the complex nuances in political discourses around a climate changing world through embodiment emerged, and evidentially ambiguity became a strategy for both producing the material for the performance as well as producing affects *in* the students for my analysis. Consequently, the work of GRIEF avoids a reductionist approach in that it challenges the students' approach to their dancing by producing an experience of affective *dis-ease* (Duggan, 2017):

Mari: If I was thinking too much I couldn't dance. If I were to have all the rules, used the concept of 3D movements, time and space, taking in each other, but not too much, then it became difficult to engage the body. The head could stop the body.  
(14.12.2021)

Like the literal meaning of the word disease, Mari's description indicates the challenges of GRIEF and the organisation of her body in relation to the thematic of the project. Due to its repeating changes of focus and materiality, creating dizziness and disorientation, this in the end was fatiguing for the students and thus difficult to engage with. Accordingly, the critical potential of GRIEF lies in the demanding process of trying to engage and relate to what is topical through embodiment. What is demanded, in the end can be translated into a reflexive competency, aligning with the cyclic nature of praxis outlined in chapter 2.3.3. Such competency is a circularity of thinking, feeling, and dancing in an interaction between the content and different perspectives of the performance, the context and the discourse it refers to, and the students' own stance or relationship to the topic of climate change. When GRIEF produced affective uncertainties, a space was created for the students to meet this feeling through reflexivity in their *praxis*. Like the contradictory content of stuplimity, the affective responses created on one hand a sense of fatigue by the overwhelming task of having to relate to the political situation on climate change, and on the other hand the work encourages for a commitment as it felt important to the students. Despite GRIEF being a demanding affective exercise, a will to endure the uncomfortable was established in the group of students.

Consequently, the students were pushed to dwell in uncertainty that potentially could facilitate new ways of doing and thinking. Without quite defining their interaction with the

artwork GRIEF and in letting the objects' intentionality emerge, this common bewilderment joins together in a process with a certain risk to challenge our aesthetic and normative presumptions. Particularly difficult is the verbalisation of such experimental experiences:

Marianna: [...] eventually, things became clearer, however, things switched from becoming easier to totally losing the direction, and to then again getting a sense of mastery. There are so many things we try to combine, both information and physical tasks, at certain points it felt impossible to progress. It was particularly difficult to talk about it and try to explain what we were doing.  
(14.12.2021)

According to Marianna, the continuous process of embodying GRIEF led to ambivalent and not so strategic feelings that affected her sense of progress negatively. This ambiguity of stuplimity is, according to Ngai (2005), diagnostic of our current uncertain and changing (climate) world and leads to a sceptical and critical affective praxis. The students could potentially “go wild” in their map of feelings and figure out their own positions on climate change, giving the navigation process of stuplimity purpose and meaning. Although habits are thought of as representing the status quo, I will in the following elucidate habits as a tool or quality-parameters for this process, particularly through the notion of ambivalence.

### *6.2.1 The habitual body – a temporal issue*

Although the felling of stuplimity and the affective uncertainty within the arts have the potential in creating non-normative processes, opening a horizon for something different, and in my understanding to *other*, the navigation process for the students was not a “winning streak” in rapid breaks with their established physical habits:

Maia: The mentality in the beginning was “just doing for the sake of doing”, and I could not see an end to it. However, halfway through the process something changed. Even if I wasn't a hundred percent sure of what I was doing, I eventually managed to see beyond myself and what I was doing, as I managed to put it into perspective. What I was doing had a purpose. Although it was a heavy process, it was very exciting and emancipating.  
(14.12.2021)

Here, Maia transformed her habits of just doing “whatever” or falling back into her dance-habits to incorporate the new concepts into her dancing. Thus, GRIEF facilitated relevant experiences for the students’ contemporary life in consolidating new habits and potentially expanded their horizon of understanding, aligning with notions on hermeneutic processes. This reflects the subjectivity process innate in the arts that produces the experience of time as an open horizon, a rhythm that is less hurried than the urgency needed in traditional activism.

These micro-changes at the individual and collective level are related to the production of the open-ended temporal experience of GRIEF. Therefore, the experience of time in GRIEF offers an alternative vision to the current trends of optimisation and efficiency, allowing time to be valued as transformational. Consequently, the students could focus on the process and relations of the reproductive and transformative capacities of their (theatre) habits, hence contributing to critical affective processes through their “metamorphoses of being”, as we earlier explored with Heikkurinen (2018).

Despite the students’ wish to navigate the processes with clarity, particularly in improving their performing skills, they eventually accepted the processual open-endedness and the longevity of the ambiguous and uncertain modus of operation. Rather than having to overcome this so-called irrational modus, they mostly appreciated this creative dialectical state, finally accepting an unresolved and unreleased existence in their dancing beyond the creation and into the touring of the work. As we will see with Joakim, he conjured the aesthetical object of GRIEF with his “conceptually embarrassing” (Razinsky, 2017, p. 79) ambivalent state (of dancing), thus including doubt and ambivalence as part of his rational state of mind:

Joakim: In the beginning I couldn’t find any intentions behind my movements. *That* is what I needed to change, to find my way of thinking or another type of intention. Then it resolved. The metaphor of passing a ball through the body worked for me, and I took it with me further in the project, using it on the Future-Creature. Then I found *my way*, which I believe matched the project.  
(14.12.2021)

Joakim portrays how ambivalence pervaded his everyday dance practice, and the difficulty of not having a clear intention and direction. He eventually changed from: “when I have made something nice, or when finding movements I like doing, I tend to stick to them and finding it

difficult to get new impulses. I'd like to repeat the things I like" (Joakim, 14.12.2021), to finding his own way to circumvent what he is *stuck* into. This demonstrates how two opposed attitudes toward the same object can exist at the same time. So, the concept of ambivalence develops or re-constructs the notion of subjectivity earlier discussed, as both a pacifying and enhancing state of mental activity. This brings focus to the understudied phenomenon of emotions as they relate to ambivalence as part of the rational mind (Razinsky, 2020). As we experienced with Joakim, his emotional ambivalence does not necessarily imply "harmonious" feelings, but rather related ones. Consequently, Joakim's ambivalence is neither falsifiable to duality or confusion, nor is it paralysing his everyday dance practice, and thus important in slowly un-sticking his everyday dance habits.

### 6.2.2 Anxiety – from what to when

The overwhelming prospect of having to complete a performance for touring in five weeks was distressing to the students, leading for some to a state close to anxiety:

*Isak was concerned with the perception of GRIEF while on tour, maybe tarnishing the reputation of the school that could potentially lead to a lower recruitment and financial difficulties for Solbakken Folkhøgskole. He repeatedly asked the questions of what do we do now, what is this, what are we going to do next, and when will we know, and when is the piece ready? Whilst understanding his concerns, I was on the contrary hired to do the opposite of his warning, to rather improve the recruitment. The school have previously experienced excitement from the students regarding my earlier work, hence our continuous collaborations. Regardless of the quality of GRIEF, his need for predictability clearly highlights scalar temporal aspects, encompassing a certain control of the present as well as future activities, contradicting the notion of "staying with the trouble" in the presence in addition to elucidating a wish to predict the lived experiences from future audiences. This personal need to control the nature of stage performances coincides with a rational worldview. Consequently, this view fails to understand the poetic properties of the arts as well recognising the individual interpretive capacities. In this instrumental view of GRIEF, it implicates a singular future*

*perspective already pre-planned, contradicting a processual and emerging future through an exploration of the medium of stage craft, thus avoiding embracing alternatives and subjectivities.*

(Fieldnotes, 10.11.2021)

Anxiety is related to the unrest Isak describes above and to his state of being tense regarding the reputation of the school, and this combination of being overwhelmed and anxiety is different to the previous shock and fatigue in stuplimity. Isak and the other students repeatedly used the word anxiety both in individual and collective contexts, describing their different emotions or affects, thus important in understanding their *world makings*: “The different words for emotion do different things precisely because they involve specific orientations towards the objects that are identified as their cause” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 13). Although Isak’s questions initially was a hinderance to his development in the process, his questions about *when* elucidates the expectation of what he thought could happen in the future. He moved on from asking the question “what”, to my mind a more static and apathetic position, to “when”. According to Ngai (2005), this expectation revolves around a form of *imagination*, meaning Isak could envision future scenarios or hypothetical situations that might release further anxiety or fear, but also hope. Not alone in his anxiety, a collective experience of feeling unsure about their future performing reality created a unison anxiety and distress in the group, that analytically relates to affective uncertainty. I believe the obvious reason for producing this feeling stems from making them responsible and to some degree accountable for the progress of GRIEF, thus making the students questioning what responsibilities they *should* and *could* be in charge of. However, wanting to be answerable is one side of the task, figuring out *what* they should and could do proved to be overwhelming, thus creating distress hence the vagueness of the situation.

### 6.3 Hope as an Emotion

In my endeavour to create an experience of transforming climate-anxiety into environmental engagements for the students, the empirical data in the processual work did not particularly accommodate for such a revelation. The potential prolonged impacts of GRIEF are partly unresolved in this thesis, hence the missing data on how the students shape and re-shape their



experiences in the aftermath of the project. However, in finalising GRIEF, a relation between *hope* and the uncertainties emerged in the students:

Isak: In the process, I was struggling with overloading my head with way too many aspects of the project. [I] didn't manage to translate this physically. All the time on the way of doing one thing I thought I needed to do more things at once. Eventually, I got all tied up. Interesting is it when I had a bad day and just decided to do something. That was the best thing I so far had done. Therefore, I had to find a combination of these methods, and accept to live with the back and forth between feeling frustrated and mastery.  
(14.12.2021)

Isak demonstrates how hoping for a better (performance) future is a *risky* investment, moving between feeling confused and having success. It suggests an intimacy between hope and anxiety: “In having hope, we *become* anxious, because hope involve wanting something that might or might not happen” (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 183, original italics). Isak's hopes for the future revolve predominantly around his concerns for his progression on stage, and the future reception of GRIEF, however, implicitly also for the climate. By personally and collectively investing in an imaginary future, the students brought their present and past into a projected future scenario, thus it *did* something to them. Consequently, and according from what we learned so far, the work of GRIEF is implicitly political, hence the affective, emotional, and imaginative experiences are activated internally and brought the students closer through to distant and current theatrical and environmental complexities. The apparent and metaphorical collapse of time and space is triggered by the relationship between the students' imagination and their active creation during the rehearsal period. In applying Ahmed's (2014) notion on sticky affect, the students' imaginative investment contributed to a further sticky and emotional experience with a potential of getting stuck, as we explored above with Isak and Joakim.

However, as with Isak, accepting the sticky aspects of the project, and by slowly advancing in hermeneutic processes to an understanding of their engagements that reaches beyond looking good, hope's critical potential lies in the notion of “might”. According to Ahmed (2014), the might represents an active relation to an unknown future, a promise about something to happen, regardless of whether hope is redeemed or not. Therefore, to follow Isak acceptance

of having to go forth and back in his engagements with GRIEF, his hope to progress in the uncertain future is not naïve, but rather a hopeful anxiety.

Combining what we have explored regarding action and agency in relation to affective and aesthetical experiences, it thus concerns resisting reductionist and conclusive solutions (Massumi, 2003; Nicholson, 2005; Serpell, 2014; Fragkou, 2019), with an emphasis on the processual and subjectivity (Nightingale et al., 2021; Butler, 1997). Thus, agency and action imply *risking* one's normative assumptions, to reflect upon the conventionally strong need to quickly reach a consolidation or release. In other words, to stay with the trouble, which is both distressing and enabling.

#### 6.4 The Politics of Uncertainty

In the complex and problematic issues of climate change, the students were caught between collective and individual embodied engagements on and off stage. It proved difficult to activate a passionate involvement with the environmental issues, particularly when dancing was their “weapon”, and it took place inside the four walls of the school. How do they participate, and what is participation? What responsibilities do they take or can take on? And how much do they think art can contribute towards change? Where do they start? This “sticky” uncertainty introduced dimensions on a micro -and macro levels for the students in their attempt to engage with the socio-nature complexities of GRIEF. The climate issues reflect the macro-level whereas the students the individual on a micro-level.

In our current sense of “the political” the micropolitical has been given a lot of attention, as we earlier discussed with Nightingale et al. (2021), that have translated into a focus on ethical consumerism, sustainable fashion, or other individualised behaviours. Everything near and far has become political that demands a collective response, or in the case with GRIEF; a collective praxis, as we are continuously having to engage in the name of the broader collective. But why then did the students feel apathetic in their (lack of) responses to these micro/macro climate-political issues?

I believe much of the explanation is to be found in the frustration of the lasting processual uncertainty of GRIEF. By not achieving a concrete goal or findings, whether it concerned the way they danced alone or together, a political direction or a concrete example of transformation was never provided, thus a need for release in their activities did not occur. Thus, the students' commitment of GRIEF did not resolve in releasing or formulating immediate (climate) actions through the project. Instead, they remained within a state of processual uncertainty: without having a concrete objective to direct their emotions towards, a build-up of postponed and frustrated agency created non-cathartic feelings in a non-cathartic aesthetic experience. However, according to Ngai (2005), this type of art produces and features "a failure of emotional release (another form of suspended 'action') and does so as a kind of politics" (p. 9). So, despite GRIEF's failing to provide a release of finding ways of engaging with climate change there and then (which is after all an impossible demand), the transformative capacities in the learning experience might be an element in releasing the postponed agency stored in the ugly feelings of the students at a later stage in their lives. These diagnostic feelings might have been in the way of action for the students in the moment, but hopefully the sticky experience of the uncertainty might later lead to unexpected forces for climate initiatives.

GRIEF provided a space for the students to possess the capacities of doing and being done to, meaning they were both performers and audience in their own work, creating a space of perception where the macro-politics collided with micro-politics in the shape of; what can the students do about climate change through dancing? The transformative learning curve gave the students some tools to hold on to on the dancefloor, as a way of being, thus providing in some way an antonym to the uncertainty of the project. This lesson or position might strengthen a sense of security that might lead to future understandings of their theatre work. Further, the analysis shows the latent reflexive and processual qualities in affective uncertainty as a mode, explored above with the postponed agency, and perhaps the students' navigation through their disorientation was already a practice or a rehearsal for how they will later take action on a sustainable future.

However, a need on my behalf to formulate a less ambiguous position for the students, either through epistemological knowledge or agency, surfaced. Unsettled by not finding answers within affective theory, I turned to cultural theory in my analysis, thus providing something

concrete they have learned on the way to potential action for the climate. Consequently, I ended up where the students started their journey, with a need to “fix” things. I follow O’Brian (2016) in her notion on “humanistic climate response” and to claim that the solution is human, through affect and emotion. Seemingly reflecting Nightingale et al.’s (2021) critique of the individual focus in climate literature, she advocates the problem and solution to be found in a wider culture. Therefore, I will explore in the next section how transformative learning can lead to a potential impact on larger-scale sustainable transformation.

## 7 GRIEF AS A TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS

Maia: I got a confidence boost when I was told that I have a natural way with my body, *and* I didn't expect my body to actually manage the big challenges in the project. That was very pleasing.  
(14.12.2021)

In her description of a transformative dance, Maia demonstrates how the affective uncertainties in GRIEF and her (dance) anxiety were met by hearing, validating, and respecting her feelings, and for her having the chance to act upon the distress through her own performance. In other words, through the mitigation of her stressors she experienced enhanced subjectivity (Hickman et al., 2022). Initially, Maia would fade in the background physically and verbally in her engagements with GRIEF. Her movements almost imploded, and with her eyes looking down at the floor she figuratively speaking seemed to want to dissolve her very presence in the room. However, when she was asked to start off one of the opening scenes, the only music in the rehearsal space was the students' repetitive and constant stomping on the ground, she gradually realised the responsibility she was given for keeping the precarious rhythm going, one step out of timing would sound like an incompetent drummer. Acknowledging her abilities to keep a steady rhythm and maintaining a pulse, she expanded on the range of her dancing, in the end confidently playing with the timing of her stomping, thus stretching the sense of body and musicality, and with her eyes directed towards the audience she would lick her lips as if just having devoured the "cosmic hoover".

The thesis will in the following see whether individual behavioural change might bring an awareness to the dynamics of change through the transformative learning processes of making GRIEF, "to better understand the evolution of human consciousness in individuals and groups" (O'Brien et al., 2019, p. 271). It is evident that "culture has a gravitational pull" (p. 284) on the students in different directions, in that they were divided into different camps in experiencing the work of GRIEF as either thrilling, complicated, random, or not to their taste. It is within this tension the thesis now turns to identify what individual and collective aspects can be catalysts for change towards sustainability, drawing on the insights from chapter 4 on Integral Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Dialogical Action, by asking: *What are the potentials and limitations for dance as a transformative praxis?*

## 7.1 Transformative Limitations and Possibilities

Oda: I found the last sequence difficult to do. It was scarier when we had to do a set choreography and song as one could see or hear the mistakes. In the other sequences I could listen to my own rhythm or impulses from the group.

Joakim: I'm opposite of Oda. I could relax and enjoy having a fixed path and a choreography.  
(14.12.2021)

Oda and Joakim demonstrate here two contradictory experiences of the cultures created in GRIEF. Joakim portrays a conservative choreographic culture that supports the status quo in dance and theatre, that is slow in responding to new ideas, as much conventional dance and theatre feed on the inclination of individuals to fit in or conform. Oda's quote corresponds with the personal transformational aspect in Integral Theory and the notion of the subject-object shift, as she experienced a change in her understanding of where, what, and how dance materialities can be created and performed. The social norms or the social imageries explored in GRIEF compromises cultures that are both promises and limitations for transformative change. O'Brien et al. (2019) postulate that individuals can impact change through a change of beliefs and attitudes, creating cultural tipping points similar to Massumi's affective threshold explored earlier with collective enthusiasm, *and* they can occur from individual initiation in a rapid and non-linear manner when social thresholds are exceeded.

### 7.1.1 Challenging conformities and social imageries

The stronghold of perceived stage appearance in dance held Joakim to the perceived weight of the structures within conventional theatre discourse (Wilber, 2000). In his quote above, he reproduced the mindsets that implemented the structures in the first place, admittedly recognising how he had a wish to conform with the known forms and shapes previously seen in theatres or been thought prior to GRIEF. This dominant level of stage consciousness defines shared ideas and social norms within the performing arts, and thus creates the *social imagery* against which the social dance reality of GRIEF was patterned and acted out. The thesis has earlier explored how a constructed praxis has the capacity to change or be a site for change, thus creating enthusiasm and a momentum of its own. However, the desire of

conforming may foster an avoidance or editing of how to understand the world, known as cognitive dissonance, as it threatens the sense of self, both in relation to identity and the social (Norgaard, 2011).

Like Joakim, Oda (and the other students) was initially reciprocal in being interested in individual mastery and “looking good”; ideas that they absorb from mainstream media or theatre. However, she expresses above how she eventually managed to observe herself and her peers from an externalised viewpoint, experiencing that they impacted or affected each other’s dance vocabulary, thus her subjective immersion transformed into an objective view (see chapter 5.1.3, Widescreen Body). In other words, it meant for her and the students rather than individually going about their own business mastering specific skills in the rehearsals, a transformation happened precisely in their subjective practice in becoming aware of their surroundings in their *situatedness* (Haraway, 1998; Barad, 2007). Thus, their dance practice eventually appeared consciously to them as an objective point of view that would challenge their norms and behaviour from their preconditioned theatre culture.

### 7.1.2 Grooving with GRIEF

Lena: I was a bit lost at the start. I am not used to jump straight into things, and I was a bit unsure of what was right or wrong. But, working with “grooving”, something I had some experience with, I found a way into this work. I needed to bring in the attitude from hip hop in my work with GRIEF.  
(14.12.2021)

Lena initially felt lost and bewildered in her relation to ownership over her own or the projects’ intentionalities, she neither achieved a sense of autonomy, competence or contextuality in her early stages of the project. These are important aspects in Self-Determination Theory, and consequently she did not have an intrinsic motivation for the project, nor did she appreciate the physical inquiries into proposed approaches in combining movement and stage behaviour with environmental issues. However, this experience aligns with similar projects with students I have previously taught, accordingly, knowing that positive feedback is crucial to keep them motivated for their dancing. Recognising I had left

the students in the unknown, I was eager to encourage every step of their cognitive or physical understanding during the process, promising that they in time would “groove” with the project, like Lena experienced and expressed above. With Lena, I felt I needed to take a conventional teacher’s role, contrary to the projects’ aim, by giving her direct advice that made her feel more secure in her dance-explorations. Picking up on her natural groove when she danced to popular music, I encouraged her to use this sense of musicality to permeate the work of GRIEF, thus giving her confidence on the dance floor. She would hunch her body, rapidly moving her feet as a ninja cutting through space, aiming to involve her dancing with and through the group. She even included the floor in her explorations, behaving as if focusing her dancing away from the audience was the most natural thing to do.



Photo 11: Lena “grooving” with Relational Choreography. Photo: Stephen Hutton.

Similarly, the “Let the Sunshine in” -group dance was created on those grounds. I made up a choreography the students could “rest” in, giving the students a break from always having to be responsible for their progress. Finally, I observed the students move from their bewildered experience to unfold a need for autonomy over the weeks, expressed below by Mari, resulting in a wider understanding of that their social stage context reflects the wider social society in general, as we will see with Isak:



Mari: The process became easier the deeper we got involved. It was very scary in the beginning, as there were no characters to hide behind. Eventually, we found hooks to attach things to, making it easier to move on. Particularly when I relaxed things loosened up. I wanted to enjoy myself and have fun, try new things and if they didn't work, I just moved on instead of chasing perfection and praise from the teacher.

Isak: [...] the cosmic-hoover is probably the most affecting thing we do. The gasping for air is pretty obvious, and easy to interpret for what it is; that there is little oxygen left on the earth.  
(14.12.2021)

Mari came to appreciate the process. She, and the other students, committed to an understanding that the feeling of choice, mastery and context is an ongoing and emerging process, particularly as the project felt important to them. Her quote further elucidates that they achieved a sense of understanding of individual vis-à-vis collective agency, whereas Isak demonstrates, to his mind, how GRIEF is poetically linked to the changing climate in the real world. There is a sense of both Mari and Isak are becoming authors or subjects of their own roles in GRIEF, expressing ownership and critical interpretative capacities. They are accordingly experiencing emancipatory processes that go beyond seeing themselves as objects, which can be an oppressive and alienating experience, but by critically reflecting on and naming the embodied stage realities (i.e., Future-Creature and Cosmic Hoover), they can potentially transform their world beyond. This critical awareness must be applied to understand the roles of power and politics and how they can influence a potential change (O'Brien et al., 2019, p. 274), which was helped by the iterative process of doing and talking, demonstrating how the students' individual verbalisation of the bodily actions affected the group as a whole:

Mari: When you *say* something in theatre, you can't add *like* or *you know*, because it becomes less direct and if as you don't really mean it. However, when using the body to express something, you can interpret it in many ways, without being held accountable in the same way. It is up to each individual to translate what one sees, whereas when you hear a sentence, there's meaning in it. The body can be interpreted from what you see, which is different from person to person, and at the same time it contains what you want to express.

Marianna: You need to *think* more when trying to say something smart. If to make a good dialogue-based scene, a lot of thinking is required. I experience thinking in dance is less prominent.....and then you don't have to be so creative, but rather to follow the impulses already there, which are bodily.

Isak: That depends upon the person. I believe there are two camps, whether one prefers physical or verbal improvisation. I don't completely trust my physical impulses. I need to think before I do a physical action, something that perhaps has something to do with physical experience.  
(14.12.2021)

Through this dialectic relation between dialoguing and dancing, the students influenced each other in discussing how the ideas permeating the project created new practices that challenged their way of performing, which in return hinted at what it means to be a performer in a wider societal context. This interpersonal sharing allowed for both the students and me to eventually shift the dominant dance or social discourses through GRIEF, according to Integral Discourse an important dimension towards change. This shift is particularly evident in the way Mari describes their bodily practices, in that it influenced her perception on what she regarded to be acceptable, even possible, in dance. Mari was on the outset mostly concerned with contemporary dance, with its set forms and liberating sensation of working *with* gravity, opposing ballet's attempt to defy gravity. However, using Massumi's notion on collective individuation to describe her transformation in the way she now sees dance, we understand her view on dance to be an individual interpretation, despite the students are experiencing the same dance at the same time, and not from the commodification of "spectacular" dance they earlier were trying to achieve. Consequently, a change of culture can happen subjectively within a group, rather than assuming an agreed upon aesthetics, thus making space for individual expressions in the *togetherness* of a group. So, even though they had variations in their experience of embodiment of GRIEF, either automated or more cognitive, they developed through dialogue new thoughts and ideas that over time was absorbed into the project, normalising these new inputs to be a part of GRIEF. The ongoing critical inquiries led them to an embodied understanding of what dance is and can be, thus important for their transformative learning experience, according to Dialogical Action Theory.

"What's dance got to do with climate change, anyway?" (Mari, 05.11.2021) reflects the immensity and daunting task of realising their own environmental engagement into dance in two ways: firstly, how to define an individual concern around climate change proved difficult, and secondly, translating that into movements. Consequently, the basic human needs of autonomy and relatedness were not met, dimensions according to Self-Determination Theory which are foundational to sustain habitual changes. Eventually (see chapter 6.2.1, The

Habitual Body), by embodying the topical issues and translating them into their practice helped the students to gradually feel the proposed transformational aspects of the project, with the devices of glitter, the rubber-boots filled with water, and theatrical lighting having its own agency to develop atmosphere. In particular, the growing collective awareness was helped by the relational aspect, as it created a supportive process through the daily dance practice, and the repetitive focus groups and talks made them see and understand each other's struggles. By verbalising these issues, they found inspiration to overcome own obstacles as well as taking on new ones. In the end, the fact that they had to make an actual performance helped them being responsible and accountable for the work of GRIEF.

Mari, Marianna, and Isak found that the work of GRIEF facilitated physical concepts different to their usual textual and cognitive approach to the stage, challenging or bridging the two camps of the bodily and cognitive. Initially, they felt vulnerable without a character to hide behind, instead having to trust the body to "speak". On the contrary, most of them later realised the stakes of making mistakes are higher when speaking, as they are more descriptive and easily understood, eventually embracing the freeing qualities of the poetic body, thus allowing themselves to not think so much, but rather following bodily impulses. In the end, if they were to be judged, it would not be on what their performance looked like, but rather what it did, thus accepting the wait for a path or a direction to emerge over time, even when it failed to become visible. In the following, the thesis will elucidate and combine the embodiment of their affective experience with the ambitious attempt of the creating a new transformative praxis, thus a continuation of *grooving with GRIEF*.

## 7.2 Alternative Democracy

Isak: The performance is very open-ended. Backstage, after the performances, we talked having created a pretty good base-level. Even if everything was not a hundred percent, the performance went well anyhow. The response from the audience was overall very good. I believe the reason being the open-endedness of the performance, and that it was not necessary about displaying skills. The performances were different each time and could not be compared with each other. It was a new experience every time.

(14.12.2021)

Isak describes the open-ended nature of GRIEF, reflecting the Relational Choreography's attempt to circumvent any a priori explanations of what the students should "dance about". This lack of materiality was contrasted by the students creating a community in the rehearsal space, above explained by Isak in how a collective space emerged which included social relations, and below with Mari's *felt* community. It created a space for subjectivities in nonlinear events, thus echoing the abstract actor-network thinking of Latour (1993). This way, the students as subjects and the artwork GRIEF as object emerged and became visible at the same time as a form of an activity (Hennion, 2007; Ahmed, 2014). In other words, the concept of subject and object was erased that left out a single organising principle and pre-determined hierarchies, and it gave the students and other materialities the same ontological status as they were ordered as heterogenous entities "dancing" together over a certain time (Müller, 2015, p. 28), entailing giving certain autonomy to the students and to the exteriority by using their imagination. As we have experienced so far, this resulted in constant creations and transformations of space, which in turn shaped new expressions, behaviours, organisations, realities, and actors for the students in an attempt to avoid a socio-nature divide, to include animals, ideas, and things to have agency in their dancing. Although the actor-network concept is fairly abstract, the students embraced it, particularly as it provided them with a corporeal element:

Mari: In GRIEF, there's more of a community, more feeling and listening to one another, where the risk of putting my peers off their game was absent. This gives more space to try out different and new things without necessarily sensing or making mistakes. Coincidences becomes a part of the expression of the performance. It was comforting not knowing whether the performances were good or not, as there's a lot of things going on and somethings never to be resolved.  
(14.12.2021)

Mari's description of how GRIEF was a space to discover new things, without risk, gives attention to "that change always originates in the present" (Sharpe et al., 2016, p. 7), which helped the students with the possibility to imagine or create "pockets of the future in the present" (p. 7). In this new realm, they could momentarily dance democratically with ideas, concepts, or their peers' bodies from independent initiatives, organising them according to a whim or to a plan to explore. This, the students' rehearsal space became a site to deliberate over democratic processes, addressing ideals and ethics through their physical practice and verbal dialogue, hence their knowledge grew out of experience in contrast to the

epistemological and ontological assumptions of understanding climate change through fixed categories common in scientific models (Goldman et al., 2018).

### *7.2.1 Emotions and alternative democracy*

So far, GRIEF has shaped its reality through the practice of “staying with the trouble”, which entailed an imperative to view the world as performative and multiple, opposing a single pre-existing reality. It implied an ontological politics, which means it was shaped by the students. Accordingly, their knowledge about the world was contingent and not at my prerogative as the choreographer, teacher, or facilitator. This has so led me, so far in my own artistic work and in my experience with the students, to an understanding of the politics of materials to be a practical, contingent, and relational undertaking, accordingly the political an issue of associations. Hopefully, with time, the students can conceive how our politicians is not the origin of power, thus, to give them increased future subjectivity, individually or as collectives.

GRIEF was made outside the actualised power institutions of vertical organisations to be based rather within a bottom-up strategy in the fabric of an everyday dance practice. This power distinction introduces the role of affect and emotions discussed in this study as “making the socio-material hold together and fall apart” (Müller, 2015, p. 36), accordingly working as a third element that binds the social and the material together. As the thesis has explored, taken that affect is decentred and socio-material, the quality is distributed between and outside of the bodies of the students. While only hinted at by the students, this included nonhuman living matter and things. So, their felt experiences provided a space for a renewal of their consciousness that can hopefully serve as a future political goal of raising awareness of the effect of our impact on the nonhuman. After all, the role of affect is crucial in societal transformation, as change happens “first in emotions and second in people’s minds” (Galafassi, 2018, p. 73). The power of affect and emotions evoked students and nonhuman responses by linking their subjective imagined experiences through dancing, but most importantly, their affective responses were faster at generating authentic responses than appealing to their logic, thus they were more automated and embodied (Leichenko & O’Brien, 2019, p. 70).

### 7.3 The Embodiment of Relational Listening

The process of GRIEF did not follow a linear trajectory, in that the initial making and learning would eventually result in better understanding and control. There were shifts in motivation, inspiration, of who were responsible, who failed or succeeded. Most of the students came to an understanding that the project revolves around an emerging quality through their stage material being relational, practical, and contingent. Not being able to control and predict the outcome of every performance meant their greatest mastery came by embodying a *relational listening* skill that includes the individual, the collective and other, while realising that this understanding would shift in time and space. The initial provocative ideas eventually resulted in new ways of doing and being by challenging the students' social imaginaries and their worldviews.

The thesis has explored how change in an experimental dance-work can re-enact dominating or liberating characters in a society that dialectically moves between maintaining status quo and changing it. The former notion sees the cultural tipping point as a cultural "invasion" (Freire, 1970), partly explored here with me as an artistic expert, my visions (and solutions for sustainability) imposed onto to the students as dance practitioners. The latter promotes every student to have the capacity for changing systems through a cultural "synthesis" (Freire, 1970), which is a reflexive understanding of the power of subjectivity on the way to potentially act collectively through social movements (Brand, 2016).

GRIEF tried to push further than the above alternatives in facilitating a platform for the students to be flexible and open to being challenged about their view of the (stage) world that goes beyond what they understood it to be. In the end, they had to let go of preconceived knowledge, and "[I]t is in this space of mastery over paradigms that people throw off addictions, live in constant joy, bring down empires, get locked up or burned at the stake or crucified or shot, and have impacts that last for millennia" (Meadows, 1999). This is echoed in Salmaa & Johula (2020) and O'Brien (2018), arguing the most powerful leverage points for sustainability is taking place in the personal sphere, bringing up the distinction between looking at our beliefs rather than through them. However, to shift beliefs takes education, time, and imagination.

Summarising, the students have shown themselves to be conflicted between a more appreciated social connection and inclusion to survive and thrive (Lieberman et al., 2009) and the more experimental socio-political stage perspectives in GRIEF, which reflects their sense of what is *known* and *unknown* (Wilber, 2000). Eventually, the students shifted from dancing according to assumed stage appearance or their peers, to explore more of the unknown territories. Consequently, they shifted away from a conservative stage culture revolved to one engaging with the collective itself; how they were affecting or being affected and how they consensually understood their shared thoughts and ideals that they produced and reproduced in their everyday interaction with GRIEF. Consequently, the students challenged through their social representations the power relations in the aesthetical and political economy.

## 8 CONCLUDING DISCUSSIONS

The overarching objective for my thesis has been to explore whether dance as an everyday artistic practice can generate sustainable future potentials for a young group of students. Investigating how ten young adults at Solbakken Folkehøgskole acted upon their embodied and affective experiences in the making of GRIEF for a case study, my research has been guided by the research question: *Can climate challenges be understood in new ways through experimental dance?*

I have addressed this question by studying how we can know the environment through the practice of dance, studied how the students navigated the uncertainties of affect, and what the cultural practice of dance can contribute to transformational capacities within its own praxis:

- 1) *Can knowledge produced through the body be a driver for a sustainable future?*

The thesis elucidates that the importance of moving knowledgably can contribute towards increased knowledge about our surroundings and ourselves in a climate changing world. Particularly, the kinesthetic sense was central for the students' embodied understanding in GRIEF. The flocking-exercise suggested that movement experience produces rational knowledge and is epistemological significant. It explored another way to go about leadership in relation to future sustainability, and a sensory physical development formed an increased comprehension of the relation of self and the world. GRIEF contributed towards improving the students' sensitivities, thus they developed an awareness on how change (of climate) impacts own culture, also reversing the focus to include how the student are impacting the environment and culture on multiple levels. Thus, embodiment can be viewed not only as a singular strategy, but as diverse and rich embodiments from daily life to dancing, making up a mixture of knowledges in and through the body.

The dance performance attempted to work creatively with issues of inequality and power but found that it was challenging to deliberately create the 'right' kind of embodied performances that could help students go beyond the master narratives in conventional political ecologies that sees the body in dialectical terms. However, by embracing a feminist political ecology to deepen the scale in the Relational Choreography concept to include nonhumans, the analysis



elucidates how the students through an *embodies witnessing* produced knowledge subjectively *together* in a group. The experimental dance affected them collectively and subjectively as an *in-betweenness* and *through* their bodies, their bodies acting like a widescreen and accordingly developed a “global kinesthetic vision”. In “turning their bodies into a new world”, they attempted to skew an anthropocentric stage body by decentering themselves as protagonists, and thus challenging a conventional stage approach. Gradually, they recognised the potential in how they are *uniquely* embodied within their cultural and geographical location, which is an existential condition of being a person (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Therefore, it provided a framework of the lived body as ambiguous, encompassing the capability to affect and being affected, thus creating a position to engage with the body as lived, experienced, and subjective. It made the students’ embodied knowledges a study of deconstructing the *society-nature nexus* as well an interruption to the hegemonic and masculine structures of knowledge production (Rose, 1993). The body has thus transitioned in academia from an unmarked subject to a specified subject that negotiates with the situatedness of subjectivities and distinct bodies.

The ambition of epistemological pluralism in GRIEF was to think more creatively and widely about how to *imagine* options for responses through the body, rather than shaping improved predictions for change through natural sciences (Nightingale, 2016). Therefore, GRIEF emphasised an affective transformation to capture the nonlinear effects of transformative endeavours through dancing to include the social sciences and *move* the idea of the Anthropocene in new directions.

2) *How does affective uncertainty in experimental dance offer openings for transformation?*

The durational experimental experience of GRIEF and its affective uncertainty circumvented a release or consolidation for the students, as the embodiment of the topical failed in providing a clear agency or position in relation to climate change or the theatre’s potential to engage with it. It produced instead a *nagging* feeling, as the navigation of their *stupid bodies* resulted in having problems with the *how* and *what* dimensions of how to engage with GRIEF, thus the students experienced the uncomfortable and disorientating feelings of

*stuplimity*. Gradually, the students managed to micro-change their *habits*, reflecting a metamorphosis of being, and their static anxiety changed to a more *hopeful anxiety*.

In utilising Sianne Ngai's (2005) concept on ugly feelings, the thesis explored feelings that were less forceful, less resolvable: feelings that often become erased in conventional dance's drive to be finished and complete – surrendering some of this performative impetus gave the students a feeling of postponed agency/subjectivity. However, the postponed agency did not mean an absence of a space to manoeuvre or political relevance, as their navigation of the ugly feelings in a state of *stuplimity* was not totally without direction, thus leading to inactivity or apathy in the group. Although the students wanted to get out of these affective uncertainties, the dancing abstained from giving a release, they endured as the work of GRIEF *did* something to them.

Accordingly, the affective uncertainty in GRIEF appeared as diagnostic and troublesome, exposing the aesthetical strategies innate to the experimental Relational Choreography, the students having to dance in new, imaginative ways, including using rubber boots and glitter as an extension of their bodies. However, GRIEF guided the students through embodiment on a path to position them in the intertwined, complex, and political climate challenges. In introducing the imaginative as a theatrical tool, the affective uncertainty *stuck* to the students' experience, making the challenges on stage more actual, as the imagination deepened their involvement with current issues, both performatively and environmentally, thus providing a critical potential. The critical potential inherent in affective uncertainty introduced a bigger dramaturgy, it opened the students to the real world and expanded their understanding on dance and climate, thus they could approach this with a sensitivity at the same time challenging their normativity, experiencing to “stay with the trouble” is both distressing and enabling.

### 3) *What are the potentials and limitations for dance as a transformative praxis?*

The attempt of GRIEF was to facilitate a transformational space by creating social relations between the students (and the nonhuman), making a site for the subjective and the nonlinear. It was an experiment in participation, that suggested alternative ways of communicating and dialoguing by using the body and the imagination.

It is difficult to empirically specify how GRIEF as a transformative praxis potentially contributed towards change, thus one could question the emancipatory potential in GRIEF as an artistic practice. GRIEF would come across as having a low leverage point, as the dance practice represents a minor change in system behaviour (Meadows, 1999). This is probably correct, as this experimental dance activity is not mainstream, where one envisions change happening on global scales and over longer time periods. Nevertheless, less usual is an opposite thought; how can GRIEF as a small-scale cultural event impact larger scale change? Lenton (2019, p. 3) asks the same question: “Yet how could there be large scale tipping without this?”. He emphasises that change needs to come from somewhere and not nowhere, hence centring human individual or collective action. Following this logic, some researchers on the topic elucidate how a small group, a critical mass, *has* the potential to initiate social change with the ability to overturn established and settled behaviour (Xie et al., 2011; Moore et al., 2014; Nyborg et al, 2016; Centola, 2018), thus achieving a greater leverage point.

However, the participation of GRIEF created a space with the potential for developing and forming a future consciousness, hence its reflexive and reflecting aspects. The *transformative learning* equipped the students with both responsibility and agency during the process, particularly through an *embodied listening* the students gradually managed to *groove* with GRIEF, as they eventually felt a sense of mastery of their new performing world. Consequently, they more confidently challenged the *conformities and social imaginaries* in dance, over time developing authentic and subjective bodily responses to the *alternative democratic* platform of GRIEF, potentially developing an affinity with nonhuman and a change of their worldviews.

The students in GRIEF can hopefully with time place themselves within the context of contemporary complex situations, being aware of their roles to bring about change in relation to that of other actors in a wider societal framing. This new knowledge can provide an understanding of how actions (or dancing) in the present can contribute to an emerging future. These ideas reflect Karen O’Brien’s (2018) “Three Spheres of Transformation” heuristics, which was the basis for entering the stage in GRIEF. It can bring deeper matter of value into play, incorporating both aesthetics and ethics, and advocate the importance of engaging across the practical, political, and personal spheres of society. Thus, GRIEF had the capacity to emphasise the role of every student in the processes of transformation, not only as empowered

protagonists, but hopefully also with nonhuman and collective bodies. Consequently, how the climate-future is going to look like involves gradual and emergent dimensions as an embodied activity.

## 8.1 Is there an Elephant in the Room?

I have proposed through the praxis of GRIEF to challenge a binary understanding of the society-nature nexus, as it implicates how the students see humanity's place in the world. Through dance, I hoped to facilitate an experience of our socio-nature through and between our bodies that made possible an awareness by the students to have the capacity to change their worldviews, and so give rise to an understanding of how they can conceptualise nature and its future possibilities. I considered GRIEF to be an invitation to think differently about the society-nature nexus, particularly as a reorientation is already happening with many students of this age cohort's engagement with the Greta Thunberg movement.

Due to the troublesome and affective GRIEF, data on posthuman relations were partly absent and was not given centre-stage. Although the students eventually strayed away from "looking good", both them and I needed to concentrate on completing the project ready for touring, which meant switching priority to the mechanisms of stagecraft and performance. Targeting the research specifically around the students' place within the socio-nature world would be an interesting, and maybe even more rewarding exploration. However, that would need other research questions and practical methodologies, probably involving the students directly with nature rather than inside four walls. This newly emergent knowledge might spur me in my future activities to do precisely that: making my artistic endeavours more specific and with clearer methodological intentionalities.

Nevertheless, it seems unreasonable to fault any of the parties involved in the research. After all, how can any of us manage to see ourselves as part of nature when the positioning of humans outside of nature has been a dominating thought since we could read that God in the bible created humans in his own image and gave us dominion over the Earth, or when Descartes declared humans to be the only rational beings? These attitudes allegedly are the

cause of the current environmental crisis, particularly as humans are recklessly exploiting natural resources, believing nature only has value for what it can provide for us rather than in itself. The consequences for such a contradiction between logic and nature has legitimised a subjugation of social groupings that are associated closely with nature, the indigenous, the colonised, the working class, and women among them. However, Bruno Latour reminds us that seeing the world separately from humans not only is ethically problematic but also empirically false, since these nonhuman microorganisms that compose part of our skin and are crucial in food digestion, are also vital in the chemical processes such as photosynthesis that is foundational for all life, in the form of providing food, producing oxygen and for storing carbon from the atmosphere and fixing it and by so doing, ameliorating climate change.

Contrary of being apathetic to the dire climate trajectories, it is required that humanity sees the nonhuman as kin with an innate value to be recognised, instead of external objects for us to dominate or exploit. Rather than dissolving the important differences between deliberate agency and simply having consequences, since “in a world in which intentionality has been dissolved into networks or assemblages, there is no power, no freedom, and no morality” (Hamilton, 2017, p. 100), I believe it is important to understand the role of posthumanism. As I have demonstrated in the thesis, the concept comes into fruition when utilised as a cognitive apparatus through our imagination. A flat ontology was helpful for the students in grasping the conceptual nature of experimental dance, but in the end, it did not replace their anthropocentric worldview. In a time when human practices are rivalling the forces of nature, I propose we understand humans as nature, but ultimately a freak of nature, to understand our imperative of responsibility. There might be an elephant in the room and even throughout this thesis, however, it dances on the outskirts of the parameters of our confined stage area to remind us about the ambiguous and uncertain human and nonhuman realities.

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# APPENDIX

## Interview Guide

### BACKGROUND

- Can you tell me about your background?
- Have you danced or been involved with theatre before?
- What is your relationship to your body?

### NATURE-SOCIETY

- How do you think about nature?
- How do you think about society?
- How do you think about your place in nature or society?
- How do you think about your place in politics?
- How do you think about your place in the world?

### DANCING SPACE AND PRACTICE

- Why have you chosen to be a part of this programme?
- What do you think dancing spaces can offer compared to other spaces?
- In what ways do you believe your programme can affect you? Society? How?
- Can you describe the project GRIEF?
- What were the main issues during the process?
- Is this different from what you have encountered before?
- Does this kind of practice break with any social norms?
- Can this kind of practice contribute to rational ones like studying economics?
- Has the project informed the way you think about nature or society?
- Informed how politics is organised?
- Informed your place in the world?

### ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

- What are the environmental challenges ahead of us?
- How do they affect you?
- Has this project changed the way you think about:



- Your local community?
- Norwegian society?
- The global situation?
- What do you think would have been different if you hadn't started this programme?
- How do you believe your experience will affect you and the people you meet in the future?