RELATIONAL FLOW IN IMPROVISATIONAL TAP DANCING:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

CAROLYN HEBERT

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Abstract

This motion-sensing phenomenological inquiry explores relational flow moments experienced by five professional tap dance artists in improvisational inter-action with jazz musicians to better understand the meaning of feeling relational flows in inter-activities. Guided through the Function-to-Flow conceptual framework, interviews and study with the five research participants focused on the functional capacities required to feel relational flows (e.g. movement repertoire and listening being), the form and structures of feeling relational flows (e.g. visible, audible, animatable and tangible forms of relational flows), and the feelings of relational flow experiences (e.g. connecting to, disconnecting from and transcending the self, Other and spiritual world) to discern meaning from inter-active, improvisational jazz-tap experiences. A motion-sensing phenomenological approach, which combines Max van Manen's hermeneutics with Michel Henry's material phenomenology of life to turn not simply to the things themselves but to the how of their appearing – that is, to the affective resonances of living, of bodily being – enables a primacy of sensorial attunement to the affects of kinaesthetic being or the feelings of being a body in motion. Interviews with the participants reveal meanings of relational flow in improvisational tap dance practices, and align with Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's call to phenomenologically inquire into the extraordinary experiential movement realities of professional dancers to deepen our understanding of the effect of their honed kinetic capacities. This inquiry seeks to not only deepen our knowledge of relational flow experiences, but also to add to research on tap dance, improvisational practice, and dance education more broadly.

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Chapter One: The Intro

Beside me in the jam circle, Johnny plays a couple bars with a series of quick, jutting heel drops that swing to the song's groove. I watch his head bob side to side with each accenting heel thump and feel a lump grow in my throat. Squinting, I listen for the top of the musical phrase amid Johnny's syncopated rhythms. Allison looks to me with an encouraging smile as Johnny finishes his solo with a turn and a stamp-ball-change, throwing his right foot slightly off the ground in my direction. My stomach lurches forward as I fall into motion, missing the beginning of the bar. I shake my head and stumble through some scratchy shuffle[1] *heel drops and a few toe jabs here and there – sha-ga dee dah, GAH GAH. What am I doing with my feet? My thighs are burning and my feet are heavy as concrete. I close my eyes and bow my head … a sound is missing from my back brush*[2]*. Where is the downbeat? The thud of my heartbeat echoes in my ear, drowning out the musical track behind me. I lift my eyes to Allison's and beg for her to cut me off, but her hand never raises to indicate the end of my turn. Seconds pass like hours. How many bars do I have left? My heart starts to race, and my feet follow suite. Some sloppy ball-heel crawls on my left foot pull my weight out too far to the side and my right foot SLAMS down and across, catching me mid-fall. A bounce in the knees of the dancer to my left draws my eyes to her. She inhales deeply and bends lower with her exhale. I see her sit in a pulse slower than the one in my heels. I breathe in and feel my knees soften with hers. My weight shifts back as I sink deeper into the heel drops of my paddle and rolls – bah-Kah dee-da, bah-Kah dee-da – heel-DIG*[3] *brush-ball, heel-DIG brush-ball … As it pulls me back on my heel and pushes my dig forward, I can finally feel the downward*

[1] A 2-sound tap dance step in which the ball tap strikes the ground as the leg throws forward and out, and then again as the leg pulls back and up.
[2] A 1-sound tap dance step in which the ball tap strikes the floor through either a forward/outward throw or backward/upward pull of the leg.
[3] A 1-sound tap dance step, striking the floor with either the ball or the heel. In this case, "dig" refers to a strike of the heel through a lightly flexed foot.

swing of the beat. A smash on the drum cymbal breaks the steady rhythm, leading us into another chorus. Exhaling loudly, I pass the solo on to the next dancer.

With over 20 years of experience as a tap dancer and tap dance educator, why did I have such difficulty improvising to the music alongside a group of professional dancers in a setting known as a tap jam? I joined Johnny, Allison, and the other members of the Toronto Rhythm Initiative tap dance collective that day in 2014 as part of an assignment I was completing for the ethnographic research course I took in my Master of Arts in Dance program at York University. As part of the assignment, I decided to infiltrate this group of professional dancers during their weekly jam sessions in an old basement studio downtown Toronto. Although over many years of training as a tap dancer I had certainly 'made it up' on the spot before, this was my first time improvising with other tap dancers in the format of a tap dance jam. Furthermore, it was the first time I ever really danced to jazz music, let alone heard this particular song (the name of which I have long forgotten, but chances are that it was likely a tune in the bebop genre of jazz, something which would have sounded extraordinarily obscure to my unfamiliar ear). Despite these firsts, my over-confident self thought that since I spent many years training in the tap dance studio, I should be able to keep up with these talented performers. Evidently, I was not expecting it to be so difficult to feel the beat in the jazz music or hear count 'one,' the beginning of the musical bar I needed to find so I could dance in time with the music. Once it was my turn to solo, I struggled to make my feet articulate the sounds I wanted and hardly managed to fit in any of the steps I knew. The voice inside my head drowned out the music, scolding me: "You're better than this! Show these dancers you can keep up!" It was not until I noticed the girl to my left, bending her knees and bouncing to the beat, that I realized I was rushing the tempo. With a deep breath, I settled myself into the pulse with one of my go-to steps, a paddle-and-roll. Suddenly I

felt my movements sink into the swinging groove of the music, like boots on a well-trodden path in the snow. I connected with the music just in time to pass the solo off to the next person. I can still feel the heat on my cheeks from embarrassment. Although my solo in this jam felt like a lifetime, I would have only been dancing for about twelve or thirty-two bars in length (depending if it was a 32-bar jazz standard or a 12-bar blues tune), which would have amounted to less than a minute of time.

This really wasn't my first-time dancing "off the cuff". As a child, I shuffled, stomped and dug my feet into the kitchen floor, staring at the reflection in my mother's oven door. I danced there to some song heard only in my head and my mother always beamed, "I'm so glad to see you practicing, honey," to which I would promptly reply "I'm not practicing! I'm just dancing!". I was not practicing any particular piece of choreography, or even any of the 'steps' – any series of tap dance movements strung together in rhythmic patterns – that I had learned that Saturday in my recreational dance classes. No, I was "just winging it", "going off book", "playing around"; I was improvising. I got so lost in this improvisational state for hours, often-times closing my eyes to move my focus from my feet in the oven door to the sounds of my socks on the linoleum floor. In my kitchen, I experienced what positive psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi has called 'flow', or the experience of optimal joy and complete immersion in an autotelic activity (for e.g., 1975a, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). These solitary "kitchen sessions" allowed me to freely experiment with the rhythms and steps I was learning in my dance classes, moving my feet in different combinations and phrases until I made the steps my own. In these moments of improvisation, when aural and visual phrases seemingly spontaneously and instantaneously emerged through dynamic shifts of weight that manipulated and played with rhythm and melody, I felt as if the movements and rhythms were coming from

somewhere deep inside me, pulsing out through my feet, arms, and hips. When I danced in my kitchen, movements seemed to emerge without any concern for correct form or technique, without any premeditation or cognitive thought about what came next. Here, dancing felt like the natural means for bodily expression. But in the tap jam that day with Toronto Rhythm Initiative, nothing felt natural or right to me. I could not feel my body moving freely and in relation to the music in the same way I could in my kitchen. What about jamming to jazz music with professional dancers in Toronto was so different from my kitchen sessions?

Csikszentmihalyi, who first articulated his theory of psychological flow in *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (1975a), might suggest that the challenge I faced in the jam – to improvise to/with an unknown piece of jazz music with/in front of a group of esteemed professional tap dancers – far exceeded my skills as a dancer more versed in doing other people's steps or teaching steps to my dance students. Following his conceptualization of flow, which has been taken up through hundreds of studies over almost fifty years of research that seek to explain, measure, and control the experience of peak performance in solitary and social activities (e.g., Boudreau et. al., 2020; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975b; Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989;), I was certainly not "on track" to "achieve" flow: I had no idea what I should be doing in the jam situation, and therefore had no "clear goals." Further I was so distracted with my inability to perform that I was unable to receive and respond to the "feedback" I was getting from the other dancers and the music. Unable to meet these "conditions" for flow, it appears it was certain I would not experience any of the six characteristics Csikszentmihalyi has identified: my mind was so cluttered with thoughts of my being off-time with the music and which steps I should be doing that I was unable to experience the intense focus and concentration reportedly required to feel a merging of action and awareness, or a loss of self-consciousness. Feeling my feet run away

from me or slide out from under me, I felt a disconnect from my own body, as though my limbs had a mind of their own. Although I did experience a distortion of time – the less-than-thirty seconds I spent soloing felt like hours – this was because I was lost, not because I felt lost in the experience. My experience did not feel intrinsically rewarding, as immediately after I felt mostly regret and shame. Therefore, following the criteria laid out through Csikszentmihalyi's extensive body of research, this improvisational tap jam experience was hardly one he might call "flow".

It is true that I just wanted it to be over so I could get back to repeating the steps as they were shown to me from a teacher at the front of the room or demonstrating combinations of steps for my dance students. But, at the same time, something about this tap jam reminded me of my kitchen sessions, and I yearned to feel that same freedom and expressivity in this movement context. Something inside me, though ashamed for not knowing what I did not know, hungered to learn more and to try again until I understood what was happening. While not 'optimal' 'peak' or 'autotelic' by any standard of flow, this improvisational tap dance experience showed me what tap dance could be: the possibilities for expression, rhythmic and melodic creation and inter-active engagement inherent within the form. It inspired me to delve outside of my comfort zone to move through the deeper meanings of an improvisational tap dancing practice. Although this experience might not be one of the flow as described through Csikszentmihalyi's work, perhaps it hinted at the multitude of flow possibilities available to tap dancers in inter-active improvisation with others, and revealed the dynamics, undulations, and variations of flow identified by those who took up and expanded upon Csikszentmihalyi's flow phenomenon (e.g., Lloyd, 2015a, 2015b, 2017, 2021; Lloyd & Smith, 2006a, 2022a, 2022b; Smith & Lloyd, 2020). My inability to connect to the jazz music nor to express myself as a tap dancer in that group of

tap dancers was a turning point for me; I realized that, despite years of training and performing, I had only scratched the surface of what the art of tap dance could be.

This moment of failure and my drive to do better inspires the current inquiry into the flow experiences of tap dancers in interactive, improvisational settings. I begin this dissertation with the above vignette to bring my living experiences of improvisational tap dancing to the fore, to establish what phenomenologist Max van Manen (1990, 1997, 2014) describes as a sense of wonder in the experiential that drives phenomenological research, and to orient – turn – towards the feeling of flow in improvisational tap dancing. This experience led me to wonder about the inter-active nature of improvisation, particularly when tap dancers and musicians co-create rhythms and melodies in musical-moving exchanges. What is the experience of shared musical creation between moving tap dancers and musicians? I am inspired to delve deeper into flow's motile affects, the inner feelings or sensations experienced through the body in musical-moving creation, so that I may cultivate a sensitivity and openness to the feelings of flow that emerge through tap dance improvisation with others.

Such an inquiry into the moving experiences of tap dancers calls for an experiential research approach, one that allows for discerning the kinaesthetic (the inner sense or feeling of the body in motion) and kinetic (relating to the motion of material bodies and the forces and energies associated therein) affects (forces that impress upon, in, through) of flow experience in relation with others through inter-activities. A phenomenological inquiry premised in the sensing of meaning through movement opens research pathways for the feelings of moving flow experiences to emerge. What follows is a motion-sensing phenomenological inquiry (Lloyd & Smith, 2006b, 2015, 2021) into the living, moving experiences of relational flow as felt in inter-active, improvisational tap dancing. The term inter-active is hyphenated to emphasize the

relationship between the root meaning of the prefix, inter, "among, between, betwixt" (Harper, 2017) and the suffix, active, "producing or involving action or movement" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), whereby inter-activities are movements or actions engaged between or among others. In the detailed description for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded *Inter-Active for Life Project: Exploring Sustained & Sustaining Movement Practices through the Interdisciplinary Function2Flow model*, Rebecca J. Lloyd and Stephen Smith define being 'inter-active' as "a perceptual feeling of interconnection between oneself, the movement, others, and the environment within which the activity takes place" (R. Lloyd, personal communication, April 17, 2018). There are many forms of inter-actions in improvised tap dance performances, between: dancers, dancers and musicians, performers and audience members, performers and the created sounds, performers and the created movement, and the movement and sound. A review of literature in tap dance, jazz music, improvisation and flow concepts identifies the necessity of an experiential research approach into the kinaesthetic and kinetic register of flow consciousness for a deepened understanding of the relational, motile flow experiences of improvising tap dancers and music makers. Phenomenological research, specifically an approach which privileges the sensing of meaning in the motions of both a textual and movement practice, is determined to be most fitting for such an inquiry. This research inquiry adopts both a moving and writing approach to the exploration of the inter-active musical-movement experience and prioritizes the sensing of and sensitizing to the motile affects of the phenomenon – relational flow as felt in improvised tap dancing. As will be further detailed below, I have taken up the phenomenon 'relational flow' as defined by Smith and Lloyd in *Life Phenomenology and Relational Flow* (2020) as the shared experience of flow that facilitates connection in inter-activities like improvisational tap dance.

With the following dissertation, I phenomenologically wonder about the living experiences of tap dancers in creative, inter-active tap dance performances, and the role of improvisation in their practices. What is it like to improvise through tap dance with jazz music? What is it to experience flowing in relation with others through musical-moving inter-activities? This dissertation proceeds as follows: In chapter two, I provide a review of literature concerning both the inter-activity – improvisational tap dancing – and the phenomenon in question – relational flow – to contextualize the inquiry. In chapter three, I discuss the Function2Flow conceptual framework and the research methodology, motion-sensing phenomenology, which have been chosen to shape this inquiry. Also in this chapter, I provide an overview of the inquiry itself, including the research activities and participants. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present and discuss the function, form, and feeling of relational flow experiences gathered through the research activities. The final chapter, The Outro, provides a summary of the dissertation as well as a personal reflection on the implications of this inquiry. Through a sensitizing to the moment-to-moment inter-actions in improvised tap dancing, this inquiry contributes both to a deepening of my personal practice as an improviser and to my pedagogy as a tap dance educator. Furthermore, a deepened understanding of flow affects in inter-active, improvisational settings has value for movement educators interested in flow motility beyond the discipline of tap dance. And finally, I wonder about what we might learn about ways of being in relation with others in all of life's inter-active movements.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

As stated at the outset of this dissertation, this research inquiry is guided through a wonder at tap dancers' experiences of relational flow as they inter-act through improvisation. Therefore, a review of literature to introduce the inter-activity – improvisational tap dance – and the phenomenon of interest – relational flow – will first situate the inquiry. This chapter is thus separated into two sections. In the first section, I explore the inter-activity, beginning with an overview of improvisational tap dancing that includes a brief outline of its history and relationship with jazz music. Additionally, I review literature concerning tap dance pedagogical practices, particularly those which include improvisation, to contextualize my own experiences of tap dance education. To close this section, I provide a brief discussion of literature concerning cognition and movement improvisation, with a specific focus on that which considers tap dance improvisation. The second section discusses the phenomenon, relational flow, beginning with an introduction to the concept of flow and related research. I provide an overview of how other scholars have approached flow in dance and music studies, as well as those who have explored it as a shared experience. I then discuss the specific concept of relational flow as proposed by Smith and Lloyd (2020), highlighting why this approach to flow has been adopted for this inquiry. In closing, I describe the questions which remain following this literature review and discuss how they inspire the present inquiry.

The Inter-Activity: Improvisational Tap Dance

The inter-activity in question, improvisational tap dance, is historically and culturally linked to jazz music, and in effect, African American culture and tradition. Given this connection, an overview of relevant literature to contextualize a phenomenological study of this inter-activity necessarily includes scholarly work from both dance and music studies, as well as

an acknowledgement and recognition of the art form's complex history. While critical discussion of the intersections of racism, sexism, classism, appropriation and exploitation embedded within tap dance's history and development warrants dedicated further examination, such a project would require a different research intention and approach altogether and is not within the scope of the present study[4]. However, a brief discussion of the origins of tap dance and the role of improvisation and jazz music in its evolution will support the reader's understanding of the relationship between these music and dance forms – one that was established long before this researcher ever attempted to jam with the Toronto Rhythm Initiative tap dancers.

The origins of tap dance, which may be defined as "a percussive American dance form distinguished by the interplay of rhythms and amplification of sound by the feet" (Valis Hill, 2010, p. 2) have been traced by music and dance historians back to the secular and religious dances of the people of central and western Africa (Guarino et al., 2022; Malone, 1996; Stearns and Stearns, 1994/1968; Valis Hill, 2010). Forcefully abducted and transported to the "New World", Africans enslaved in the United States and the Caribbean "brought with them a rich tradition in instrumental music, song and dance" (Malone, 1996, p. 37) that mixed with the white European-derived music and dance of the colonists to form the basis of "a new world popular culture" (Szwed & Marks, 1988, p. 29). As she traces the evolution of African American vernacular dance forms through historical intersections of music and dance in *Steppin' on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance* (1996), Jacqui Malone includes tap dancing as a Black vernacular dance form, which she defines as,

[4] Within the context of tap dance research, other scholars have done and are continuing to do this valuable and essential work (See, for example: Durkin, 2012; McLean, 2009; Morrison, Forthcoming, 2014; Robbins, 2013; Thomas, 2019; Wein Shiovitz, 2016; Willis, 1994, 2016;).

> dance performed to the rhythms of African American music: dance that makes those rhythms visible… It derives not from the 'academy,' but from the farms and plantations of the South, slave festivals of the North, levees, urban streets, dance halls, theaters, and cabarets. It is constantly changing. These changes, however, always reflect an evolving tradition and a vital process of cultural production. (p. 2)

Thus, as a Black vernacular dance form, tap dance is historically and culturally connected to African American music forms, like jazz music, and its movements derive from the places and spaces wherein African Americans traditionally moved and made music together.

Through improvisation, which Malone lists as one of six definitive characteristics of African American vernacular dance forms, these forms continue to evolve while maintaining connection with their traditional roots.[5] Defined as "an additive process … a way of experimenting with new ideas," (p. 33) improvisation, according to Malone, is Africa's most important contribution to the Western Hemisphere. Within the context of jazz music, Constance Valis Hill defines improvisation as "the spontaneous creation of music as it is performed, without the benefit of written music: the act of composing on the spur of the moment to create an immediate composition of the entire work, or variations within the existing framework of the composition" (Valis Hill, 2003, p. 97). As tap dancers simultaneously create images, sounds, and rhythms through their movements, improvisation in tap dance is similarly an act of composition, though of both music and movement. The role and use of improvisation in tap dance has shifted through the development and evolution into its contemporary form, though it remains a consistent driver of change.

[5] The other five characteristics are, according to Malone: rhythm, control, angularity, asymmetry, and dynamism (1996, p. 32)

In the tap dance challenge, improvisation is particularly conducive to evolution and innovation. Valis Hill defines the tap challenge as "any competition, contest, breakdown or showdown in which dancers compete before an audience of spectators or judges" (2010, p. 3). Also referred to as a "cutting contest" or "tap jam", the tap dance challenge encourages dancers to steal, adapt and trade steps and rhythms as they attempt to out-dance one another. The challenge, according to Valis Hill, "is the dynamic and rhythmically expressive 'engine' that drives American tap dance performance… [it] sharpens the ability to copy, fuse, and reinvent dance movement. It is a creative act that requires a mastery of the form and the ability to 'deform' the mastery – to creatively extend or embellish the form in order to reflect the individual expression of the creator" (2003, pp. 90-93). Malone (1996) compares the impact of the challenge or "cutting contest" on rhythm tap's evolution to that of the jam session for jazz instrumentalists. As per American author and jazz musician Ralph Ellison, the jam session is the "jazzman's true academy":

> … when we approach jazz we are entering quite a different sphere of training. Here it is more meaningful to speak … of apprenticeship, ordeals, initiation ceremonies, of rebirth. For after the jazzman has learned the fundamentals of his instrument and the traditional technique of jazz – the intonations, the mute work, manipulation of timbre, the body of traditional styles – he must then "find himself," must be reborn, must find, as it were, his soul. All this through achieving that subtle identification between his instrument and his deepest drives which will allow him to express his own unique ideas and his own unique voice. He must achieve, in short, his self-determined identity… This does not depend upon his ability to simply hold a job but upon his power to express an individuality in tone. (Ellison, 1964/1972, pp. 208-209)

Tap dance challenges historically took place on plantations as jigging competitions, in juried Buck and Wing contests, on stage in the grand finales of minstrel shows, backstage or in the alleyways of Vaudeville's theatres (and sometimes choreographed onstage as well), at social clubs such as Harlem's Hoofers Club, jazz clubs, and on street corners (Valis Hill, 2010, pp. 3 & 87). In these competitive inter-actions, dancers exchanged ideas, inspired one another, and battled for a spot in the "rhythm tappers' hierarchy of excellence" (Malone, 1996, p. 97). In her essay on the extra-legal means used by African American vernacular dancers in the early twentieth century to copyright their dance steps, Anthea Kraut discusses how "stealing" steps from other tap dancers constituted a primary mode of learning, and problematizes copyright law's ideology of exclusive ownership (2010, p. 181). This interactive exchange is referred to when dancer Eddie Rector says, "Shucks, if you could copyright a step … nobody could lift a foot" (as quoted in Kraut, 2010, p. 179). Stealing from one another is how dancers learn, develop, and how tap dance grows and evolves. Written on the wall at the Hoofer's Club in New York City from the 1920s through the 1940s, the challenge rule was: "Though Shalt Not Copy Another's Steps – Exactly" (Kraut, 2010, p. 181). While it was acknowledged that dancers could steal and adapt steps, they were not supposed to copy them exactly as they were. Tap dancers reserved entire front rows of seats anytime a tap act performed at a local theatre and stood up to interrupt the performance if they saw any of their "pet steps" (Malone, 1996, p. 97). This practice of stealing and creatively modifying the steps of others in the tap dance challenge propelled the evolution of tap dancing.

Over time, the challenge also evolved with a new model of cooperative competition that encouraged friendly interaction among tap dancers. Donna Marie Peters examines this new tradition of exchange through an overview of the "old head/ younger dancer mentoring

relationship" that allowed for the passing on of the history, steps, and values associated with rhythm tap (2010). Specifically, Peters looks at the experiences of dancers who "trained" with tap dance master Jimmy Slyde at the "University of La Cave" in Manhattan, New York, from 1992 – 1994. Although Slyde was not the first to host jams between old tap masters and new tap dancers, he "was the first to materialize the idea of instructional improvisatory performance" (Valis Hill, 2010, p. 302). In these jams, tap dancers of all levels were welcomed to improvise solos and trade choruses on stage with other dancers and musicians (Peters, 2010). The instructional aspect of these jam sessions emphasized improvisation or "ad libbing" and performance technique. The focus, according to Slyde, was "not that you learn steps, not that you learn combinations, but that you learn how to handle yourself while finding yourself the combinations. And not [be] afraid to venture now and then. Ad lib, not improvise" (as quoted in Valis Hill, 2010, p. 302).

Improvisation in the challenge might be the "spontaneous creation or composition of a percussive statement", or "the act of responding spontaneously (to an opponent, musician, or member of the audience), in the moment of performance" (Valis Hill, 2003, p. 90). Valis Hill (2003) expands further on the role of the call and response in the challenge, demonstrating the inter-active nature of improvisation in this form of performance:

> If the challenge is the call to action, the putting forth of a rhythmic statement by the challenger, then improvisation (or more aptly, the improvisatory imperative) is the response (and not only an "Amen") – the answer to the call that is spontaneous, creative, and reactive, compelling the challengee (who in turn becomes a challenger) to look, to listen, and to respond in the moment, with any and all means necessary. Even when the challenge dance is built on previously rehearsed materials that are not freshly composed,

> what is essential in the dynamism and fierce excitement of the challenge is that it at the very least be perceived as an extemporaneous, or improvised, battle: an in-the-moment happening that may never again be repeated the same way. The temporal notion of spontaneity and spontaneous invention in the challenge, as it relates to improvisation, must always and at the very least be implied. (p. 90)

While the tap dance challenge is one of the most popular spaces where tap dance improvisation occurs, it is not the only setting. As discussed by Robbins and Wells (2019), improvisation is also used in informal jam sessions between dancers such as the Toronto Rhythm Initiative jam session I participated in, choreographed works featuring sections of solo or group improvisation, and performances with musicians, where tap dancers may take "a chorus like any other member of the band" (p. 722). In both practice and performance settings, improvisation continues to drive tap dance forward while maintaining connection with its origins and roots in jazz music.

Tap Dance and Jazz Music

The histories of tap dance and jazz music are intimately entwined and interconnected throughout the origin and development of both art forms. With *Stepping on the Blues* (1996), Malone provides an extensive overview of the ways in which music and dance are interrelated in African American culture, beginning with the relationship between West African drumming traditions, jazz music and tap dancing. An essential element of jazz music from its inception, dancing, and particularly tap dancing, developed alongside jazz music until about 1960 (Brown et. al., 2018). In *Jazz and the Philosophy of Art,* Lee B. Brown, David Godblatt and Theodore Gracyk claim that the first reference to "jazz" in print describes it as "dance music full of vigor and 'pep'" (2018, p. 10), suggesting that while much about jazz is often disputed, one thing is for

certain: “its origins link inexorably to bodily motion” (2018, p. 19). In *Jazz and Dance*, Robert Crease writes, “jazz was not a noun naming a musical genre, but probably an adjective describing a certain quality of movement and behaviour…By the end of [the 1920s], the term was applied to both a kind of music and a kind of dancing” (2000, p. 696). Thus, at its inception, jazz referred to not only the music but also the dancing; the word ‘jazz’ encompassed both art forms in one.

From the 1920s to the 1940s, jazz music and dance typically occurred together in both social dance halls and professional performances (Brown et. al., 2018). Malone quotes jazz trombonist Dicky Wells to demonstrate the role social dancing played in jazz music: “While you’re blowing, cats are dancing … and I mean, really dancing … it would invigorate you because you’d be playing better while people were dancing” (1996, p. 89). Dancing was not something that simply *accompanied* music, nor vice versa; in dance and concert halls, clubs and cabarets, jazz musicians “frequently took their cues from [both social and professional] dancers … during the heyday of jazz popularity,” (Brown et. al., 2018, p. 18). However, as Robert. G. O’Meally argues in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture,* tap dancers were especially inspiring: “the best of [tap dancers] could provide complex foot-drum rhythms and take choruses as if they were members of the jazz bands with which they performed” (1998, p. 273). Tap dancers were considered musicians, their feet their instrument: “when the music was on, this form of dancing was like another instrument and so, with tap dancing, we have the *sound* of dancing. Tap dancing intervals sometimes replaced the drums and were often solos with metal taps clicking on to hard, polished floors” (Brown et Al., 2018, pp. 16-17).

Jazz musicians, singers, and professional dancers travelled and performed together in night clubs and cabarets in the 1920s. In the 1930s, as Vaudeville was replaced with the

"presentation" format, the relationship between dancers and musicians continued to evolve (Malone, 1996, p. 92). Musical revues featuring "big-name bands" secured dancing acts, such as the duo "Coles and Atkins" staring Honi Coles and Cholly Atkins, through booking agencies. Coles, quoted in Malone, recalled that "the dancing act was the nucleus of every show. Dancing acts were always sure-fire crowd pleasers … generally speaking, [they] were used to strengthen the show" (1996, p. 93). Dancers and musicians not only worked and played together – some scholars have argued that the best jazz artists were both musicians and dancers: "Without making any false separation of jazz music from jazz dance – not only is the influence from one to the other very strong and immediate but in many cases, the dancer *is* the musician (as with tap kings Bill Bojangles Robinson, Baby Laurence, and John Bubbles), and the musician is an excellent dancer (Cab Calloway, Ella Fitzgerald, Jimmy Rushing)" (O'Meally, 1998, p. 274). Malone points to jazz drummers who were also tap dancers – Philly Joe Jones, Buddy Rich, Jo Jones, Big Sid Catlett, Eddie Locke, and Cozy Cole – to emphasize the close relationship between tap dance and jazz music (1996, p. 95). She quotes Louis Bellson (drummer for Duke Ellington) who said, "We base all our rhythms on dancing. When I play a drum solo, I'm tapping" (Malone, 1996, p. 95).

The shift in musical genre from swing to bebop[6] jazz in the 1940s and 50s is often equated with the severing of jazz music's relationship with dancing, in part because bebop was considered more for listening than dancing (Valis Hill, 2010, p. 174; Brown et. al., 2018, p. 11). Although this period marks a disconnect between social dancing and jazz music in what Brown et. al. suggest was the professionalization of dancing to jazz music (Brown et. al., 2018, p. 26),

[6] Bebop has been defined as music "characterized by complex polyrhythms; steady but light and subtle beats; exciting dissonant harmonies; new tone colours; and irregular phrases." (Southern, 1971/1983, p. 477)

many tap dancers actually adapted their styles to the new sound. Valis Hill (2010) states that the shift from swing to bebop inspired tap's "first inward-looking artists" who were "willing to explore their own pioneering rhythmic inventions… [and] create percussive accents that were implied, but not bound to, the underlying beat" (p. 174). Some scholars have even suggested that it was tap dancers themselves who inspired the improvisatory style of bebop in the first place: "tap dancers "first 'dropped the heel' in a way that created the bomb-drop rhythmic syncopations later characteristic of bebop" (O'Meally, 1998 p. 273; also discussed in Malone, 1996, pp. 116-117). Additionally, while bebop's focus away from big bands to small jazz combos and soloists resulted in less work for some dancers, it inspired others to experiment with increased improvisation and musical interplay, to take longer, extended solos and to create new melodies and rhythms with their feet in the same way that the musicians would. While bebop's "elevat[ion] [of jazz] to an art form" supposedly "made it less suitable for dancing … [and] drove away the dancers" (Brown et. al., 2018, p. 25), tap dancers continued to evolve and innovate their practices and aesthetics alongside jazz music (Valis Hill, 2010, p. 169-178). Given the intertwining of tap dance and jazz music history throughout their origins and development, I have sought to ensure that the account of tap dance presented through this thesis includes equal consideration of jazz music, in alignment with Brown et. al.'s argument that "any account of jazz that isolates sounds from bodies is seriously incomplete" (2018, p. 11).

The "Lull" and the Divide

Despite tap dance's evolution in some circles, the post-World War II period coincided with a waning in the cultural popularity of tap dance, or what has been referred to as the "demise of tap," "tap dance's decline" or, in Honi Coles's words, "the lull" (Malone, 1996, p. 114; Valis Hill, 2010, p. 168). Scholars have proposed various reasons to explain why tap dance seemed to

"go underground" (Bresnahan, 2019; Valis Hill, 2010; Brown et. al., 2018; Malone 1996), though a number of socio-economic factors are likely the cause. For example, as a result of a federal tax levied against establishments offering both "refreshments" and "dancing privileges or any other entertainment, except instrumental or mechanical music alone" (cited in Brown et. al., 2018, p. 24), jazz clubs and dance halls either closed or banned taxed activities. Big swing bands, jazz singers and dancers were replaced with small instrumental bebop groups and jukeboxes, which contributed to a loss of work for many professional tap dancers (Brown et. al., 2018, p. 24; Malone, 1996, pp. 109-110). At the same time, a shift in aesthetics further exacerbated the work shortage for tap dancers: Where jazz and tap once ruled the Broadway stage, ballet and modern dance took over (Valis Hill, 2019, p. 159). Finally, popular opinion on tap dance similarly began to shift: Sonja Thomas discusses how at the eve of the American civil rights era (1954-1968), the African American community sought to disassociate from the racist caricatures of the "coon" and "uncle Tom," so often portrayed in Vaudeville through the Black male tap dancer (2019, p. 199; also discussed in Malone, 1996, p. 115 and Valis Hill, 2010, p. 169).

In *tap dancing America*, Valis Hill provides ample evidence to suggest that although tap dance was no longer at the helm of entertainment during the 1950s, it never really died (chapters 8-12, 2010). In the 1960s and 70s, tap dance maintained a presence in popular culture on television shows, inspired the choreographed dancing of rhythm-and-blues vocal groups, and returned to the Broadway stage initially through the revival of the 1925 musical theatre show, *No No Nanette* (1971). This revival similarly prompted an increase in students studying tap dance in commercial dance schools and studios, which exacerbated the already existing divide between styles of tap rooted in African versus European aesthetics. In commercial dance studios, students were primarily white, middle-class women who were inspired to take up tap dancing by its

resurgence on the Broadway stage. These students typically studied other forms of dance such as Ballet and Modern, which drove and influenced a dance studio style of tap that diverged from its roots in African aesthetics (as described by Kerr-Berry, 2022) and aligned with a more European-inspired style and aesthetic. Though significant in the evolving styles of tap dance professionals working through the changing aesthetics brought on by Bebop, improvisation and musicality were scarcely taught in studio tap classes. Instead, technical execution and precision were favoured over personal style and expression.

At the same time, a smaller cohort of younger women sought out Black male rhythm tap dancers to pass along the tap tradition rooted in jazz and its African aesthetics. Empowered through the social movements of the 1960s and 70s, a group of primarily college-educated White women trained in modern dance began to explore the rhythms and traditions of tap dance in alignment with its Africanist origins (Bechelli, 2017). This movement, referred to as the "Tap Renaissance," was primarily led by five key individuals, according to Cecilia Boden Bechelli in her 2017 Master's thesis, titled *Women of the Tap Renaissance*: Brenda Bufalino, Jane Goldberg, Lynn Dally, Linda Sohl-Ellison and Dianne Walker. These and other women of the Renaissance formed mentor-mentee relationships with some of the Black male tap dancers who had come to prominence during the height of tap's popularity and brought them into performance and educational spaces to move tap forward while preserving and documenting its history and culture. In these circles, improvisation, jazz music, and the rhythm and sound of the mentors remained at the fore of the form, while at the same time, this new generation of dancers propelled the art form forward by creating full-length pieces of tap dance choreography and experimenting with various musical genres (Bechelli, 2017, p. 102).

Though jazz musicians and dancers did continue to work together through tap's "lull" period as discussed in the section on Bebop above, the 1970s resulted in what Valis Hill refers to as a "reunion" between dancers and musicians. She points to interactions between dancers and musicians in small intimate jazz clubs and alternative performance venues as they explored "new roles for time-keeping and … expressive positioning of drum and dance" (2010, p. 218). In part due to the mentor-mentee relationships established during the Renaissance, dancers also performed alongside musicians at jazz music festivals throughout the 1960s and 70s, and on the concert dance stage in shows where both old and new generations of tap dancers featured. In the decades following tap's resurgence in popularity, tap dance has continued to evolve with varying degrees of connection to jazz music, including through concert dance productions created and performed by tap dance companies, the steady re-inclusion of tap dance in Broadway musicals, dedicated tap dance festivals wherein the dance is performed, discussed, shared and learned, and in social events and regular improvisational jam sessions that bring dancers and musicians together.

Tap Dance Pedagogy

As discussed above, improvisation plays a key role in the passing on of tap dance steps and rhythms between dancers. Traditionally, according to Valis Hill, the fundamentals of tap dance technique are learned and taught "visually, aurally, and corporeally in a rhythmic exchange between dancers and musicians" (2010, p. 3). While other forms of Western concert dance such as Ballet are codified, meaning the technique is systematically arranged and coded for uniformity across the form, tap dance is traditionally shared through "people listening to and watching each other dance in the street, dance hall, or social club, where steps were shared, stolen, and reinvented" (Valis Hill, 2010, p. 3). In effect, tap dance has traditionally resisted the

codification of dance syllabi and manuals that inhibit the freedom of expression through movement (Malone, 1996, p. 28). Illustrative of the experiential learning embedded within the tap dance tradition, Malone quotes tap master Honi Coles, who said, “I [didn’t] know anyone who went to school to learn business or dancing. You learned it … as you were exposed to it” (1996, p. 28).

While today many tap dance practitioners continue to pass on the tradition of sharing, stealing and reinventing tap dance steps in what may be regarded as “informal” teaching spaces, such as jam sessions, tap dance also continues to be taught and learned through more “formal” teacher-student (or mentor-mentee) exchanges in dance classes run in commercial schools/studios or as part of dance festivals or training programs. In these settings, tap dance is sometimes codified into syllabi or dance curricula that have broken down basic tap dance steps into teachable building blocks. These syllabi often provide step by step instructions for passing along tap dance steps, with the rhythm structure for each step clearly defined. Examples of popular syllabi in use in Canada include the Al Gilbert Tap Syllabus (Gilberttapexams.ca) and the Associated Dance Arts for Professional Teachers syllabus (adaptsyllabus.com). Sally Crawford (2014) argues that because these syllabi associate steps with particular rhythms, such as the International Standards for Teaching Dance (ISTD) used in the United Kingdom, they effectively discourage dancers from experimenting with diverse rhythms through these steps. While useful in terms of broadening a tap dancer’s step vocabulary and knowledge, tap dance syllabi potentially limit dancers’ creative and expressive capabilities. Like syllabi, reference manuals (for e.g., Fletcher, 2002; West, 2005) provide definitions and figures for tap dance steps and routines that may be used by teachers or students alike, though are often less prescriptive. Finally, students seeking to “teach themselves,” or teachers seeking additional material and

resources, may refer to texts such as Acia Gray's *Souls of Your Feet* (1998), Anita Feldman's *Inside Tap* (1996) or Mark Knowles's *Tap Dance Dictionary* (2012). These resources break down tap dance steps into rudimentary basics, such as brush and dig (e.g. Feldman, p. ix-xv, 1996), or document commonly accepted terminology used to refer to tap dance steps and phrases (Knowles, 2012). Gray (1998) offers a description of each tap dance step based on the number of sounds (from one to five) created through the step and includes traditional combinations of these steps as well as floor patterns which may be followed in execution. As Gray notes, some teaching approaches emphasize "rote learning" through learning and reproducing tap dance "routines," while others focus on exercises based on tap dance technique (1998, p. 23).

In contemporary tap dance practices, improvisation is specifically associated with rhythm tap dance (also referred to as *jazz tap*), which can be distinguished from other forms for its emphasis on musicality and connection with African diasporic aesthetics. Malone suggests that rhythm tap dancers are "jazz percussionists who value improvisation and self-expression" in that, like jazz musicians who "tell stories with their instruments," rhythm tap dancers "tell stories with their feet" (1996, p. 95). Providing a brief overview of rhythm tap's key innovators, Malone highlights the elements of movement and musicality that propelled its development: "King Rastus Brown's flatfooted hoofing preceded the legendary Bill Robinson's 'up on the toes' approach. Eddie Rector added elegance and body motion, and John Bubbles's crowning achievement – dropping the heels – added extraordinary rhythmical complexity" (p. 94). Scholars, such as Marshall and Jean Stearns in their seminal work documenting the history of tap dance up to the 1960s, *Jazz Dance* (1968/1994), have attempted to distinguish between styles of tap dance by presenting forms of tap in separate categories. However, as noted by Margaret Morrison, these categories are more useful for marketing and scholarship purposes and

distinctions within the form may not serve practitioners (M. Morrison, personal communication, July 10, 2022). For example, Stearns and Stearns organized the stories and descriptions they compiled into distinct forms such as "Eccentric Dancing," "Comedy Dancing," The Flash Acts", and "The Class Acts" – categories of performance style with which the practitioners, like Harold and Fayard Nicholas, the "Nicholas Brothers," did not necessarily identify. For example, the Nicholas Brothers were often referred to as "Flash" dancers, though according to tap dancer Leonard Reed, "Flash dancers didn't do too much, just flips and turns and spins … [and] Fayard and Harold [Nicholas] were not flash dancers" (interview with Bruce Goldstein, 1991, as cited in Valis Hill, 2002, p. 185). Other scholars, attempting to distinguish between forms, equate differences in movement style and rhythmic quality with race: Kathryn Edney states that "white" tap dancing describes "smoother choreographed moves à la Fred Astaire" (Sommer, 1988 and Willis, 1996 as cited in Edney, 2013, p. 13) and "Black" tap dancing is comprised of "more complex rhythmic structures" (Sommer, 1988 and Willis, 1996 as cited in Edney, 2013, p. 13). According to Valis Hill (2010), tap dance "evolved in two streams of musical theater dancing – one based in Black vernacular dance and Black rhythmic sensibilities, the other in the jig and clog tradition of white Broadway" (p. 4). In her cultural history overview of the development and evolution of tap dance, Valis Hill states that distinctions between forms of tap dance may be made between these "rhythmic sensibilities" rather than drawn across racial lines (2010, p. 4). Terry Monaghan similarly distinguishes rhythm tap from "show tap" or "Broadway" style through its emphasis on sound, rhythm, and African diasporic aesthetics. Accordingly, Broadway tap incorporates movement vocabulary from ballet and other European dance forms, while rhythm tap focuses on musicality (2002, p. 21).[7] For the purposes of this study, it is important to

[77] Though, the use of the term "Broadway tap" to describe that which is in opposition to "Rhythm Tap" ignores the prominence of the style of tap Monaghan defines as 'rhythm' in many Broadway musicals, such as Black and Blue

note that the style of tap that I primarily learned growing up as a dancer training in a commercial dance studio in Southwestern Ontario, Canada, is more closely aligned with the Broadway tap as defined by Monaghan (2002), than the rhythm tap style as based in Black vernacular dance and rhythmic sensibilities.

Tap dance pedagogy, when it is true to its roots as a Black vernacular art form, also includes the passing on of historical and cultural information in addition to the movement and rhythm patterns that comprise its 'steps'. Tap dancing is not simply the creation of musical movement through the execution of tap dance steps, but, as Gray writes, it is the cultivation of "a rhythmic voice that is guided by a legacy of figures, steps, and sounds, woven in a tapestry of individual souls singing their own unique melodies" (1998, p. 24). Rhythm tap teachers, in effect, come from a long lineage of rhythm tap dancers who have passed along their steps, rhythms and melodies in mentor-mentee relationships like that between mentor Jimmy Slyde and his mentees at the "University of La Cave" as described by Peters (2010). Movement and musicality are not the only elements that are passed along in these relationships; oral histories of the inter-actions between dancers, musicians, and audiences in performances, challenges, informal or formal 'hang outs,' and jams are shared as part of the lessons of tap dancing. Given its roots in African aesthetics and Black American culture and tradition, tap dancing necessarily involves storytelling, and it is not unusual for a rhythm tap dance teacher to tell stories and share memories of dancing with, learning from, or simply being with their mentors. These stories provide glimpses of what these dancers were like both personally and professionally and inform the learning and trading of their unique rhythms and steps. Thus, learning to tap dance includes

(1989), Bringin' Da Noise Bringin' da Funk (1995), and Eubie Blake's 1921 Shuffle Along, which was revived on Broadway in 2016. Though this terminology is widely accepted to distinguish the forms, it is overly simplistic and demonstrates how divisions within tap dance are incomplete.

learning the histories and stories of its practitioners, innovators and creators, in addition to studying their steps, rhythm and sound patterns.

Some of the pedagogical literature also outlines popular approaches to teaching improvisation for tap dancers. With her book *Tap into Improv: A Guide to Tap Dance Improvisatio*n (2017) Barbara Duffy provides a complete resource dedicated to teaching and practicing techniques for improvisation. In an article for *DanceTeacher Magazine*, Kat Richter (2014) interviewed professional tap dancers Annette Walker, Chloé Arnold, and Andrew Nemr to discuss tips and tricks for teaching tap dancers how to improvise. Arnold suggested teachers "[Start] small, with just two to four bars of music … per dancer, [to help] students realize that improvisation is less about steps and more about music" (as quoted in Richter, 2014). Nemr states that "the final frontier of improvisation is that of relationship," and suggests that teachers use improvised duets to help students realize how their choices affect the other musicians and dancers around them (Richter, 2014). Research with professional tap dance improvisers will inevitably reveal a multitude of approaches to teaching both tap dance and improvisation.

As previously mentioned, my training as a tap dancer in a commercial dance studio in Southwestern Ontario, Canada, was based in a white, Broadway-style (as defined by Monaghan, 2002) of tap with little reference to its roots as a Black/African American vernacular dance form, nor its relationship with jazz music. My personal tap dance education experience consisted of something between the formal syllabi experience and the informal trading of steps, and there was little to no discussion of improvisation. I learned tap dance technique by watching, hearing, and copying my dance teacher's motions and repeatedly practicing set sequences of movements to particular rhythmic motifs until I was able to independently and "correctly" recreate these motions and sounds myself. Although she did not use a formal tap dance syllabus, my teacher

used terminology, such as “shuffle”, “dig” and “stamp” to break down steps into their smallest motions or movements. Once mastered, these movements were then combined to create larger step patterns, like “irish ball change” (consisting of a shuffle, hop, step, step, step) or “paddle and roll” (consisting of a heel dig, back brush, ball, heel drop). These steps were then compiled into choreographed sequences of steps or routines, and we performed these routines to recorded music in annual recital and commercialized competitive dance events. In dance competitions, we aimed to demonstrate our “clean” technique, evidenced by clearly executed tap rhythms that were missing no sounds from our steps (which might happen if the tap fails to properly contact the floor) and perfect performance of the choreography (which includes smiling ear to ear for the duration of the routine). I competed in group, duet/trio and solo performances between the ages of 10 and 18 years and travelled to competitions across Ontario and in upper New York State. Given this experience, I was well versed in reproducing tap dance choreography – that is, when it included the steps which I had learned and “mastered” through my training. While this training and performance experience instilled in me a deep love for tap dance, for creating rhythm and music with my feet and for expressing through movement and music, it did not prepare me for the type of improvisational, rhythm tap dancing to jazz music that I stepped into for the first time at that Toronto Rhythm Initiative jam.

Cognition and (Tap) Dance Improvisation

The role of cognition in dance improvisation has been discussed at length by dance scholars and philosophers for many decades in an effort to bridge the mind/body divide promulgated by René Descartes referred to as Cartesian Dualism (see, for example: Albright & Gere, 2003; Bresnahan, 2014; Foster, 2003; Fraleigh, 1987, 2018; Ravn, 2020; Ravn & Høffding, 2022; Sheets-Johnstone, 2011a). For example, in her opening essay to the dance

improvisation reader *Taken By Surprise* (Albright & Gere, 2003), Susan Foster argues against the axiom that improvisation is "the process of letting go of the mind's thinking so that the body can do its moving," and suggests instead that,

> all bodily articulation is mindful. Each body segment's sweep across space, whether direct or meandering, is thought-filled. Each corporeal modulation in effort thinks; each swelling into tension thinks; each erratic burst or undulation in energy thinks. Each accented phrasing or accelerating torque or momentary stillness is an instance of thought. (p. 6)

Foster acknowledges the relationship between thinking and moving, suggesting each movement 'thinks' or is 'filled' with thought. While this begins to sew together bodily and cognitive processes, movement and thought remain separate acts one does; moving is still distinguishable from thinking, and vice versa. While simultaneously trying to mend the mind/body divide, Foster suggests that in the moment-to-moment experience of improvisation, a dancer's thinking processes are actually separate and distinct from those of her moving. She says:

> Improvisation involves moments where one thinks in advance of what one is going to do, other moments where actions seem to move faster than they can be registered in full analytic consciousness of them, and still other moments where one thinks the idea of what is to come at exactly the same moment that one performs that idea. Rather than suppress any functions of mind, improvisation's bodily mindfulness summons up a kind of hyperawareness of the relation between immediate action and overall shape, between that which is about to take place or is taking place and that which has and will take place. (2003, pp. 6-7)

This separation of thinking and doing is also repeated in Robbins and Wells' (2019) examination of improvisational practices in tap dancing. Employing Paul Berliner's (1994) concept of the "musician's storehouse" and the "scatting mind" and Ingrid Monson's (1996) theory of "intermusicality", Robbins and Wells analyze two professional improvisational tap dancing performances. According to Berliner, jazz musicians develop a "storehouse of knowledge," including "jazz tunes, progressions, vocabulary patterns and myriad features of style" through years of listening to recordings and performing live with other musicians. They draw upon this storehouse through their "singing mind", a term Berliner employs to describe an unconscious interaction between spontaneity and precomposition. Utilizing this "singing mind" improvisers, supposedly, translate material from their storehouse into jazz music (Berliner, 1994, p. 181). Robbins and Wells propose that tap dancers develop and utilize a similar "scatting mind" in improvisation that translates their embodied 'storehouse' of steps, rhythms and melodies into, accordingly, "convincingly 'musical' phrases that demonstrate their mastery of a complex art form" (2019, p. 725). Robbins and Wells layer their interpretation of Berliner's concepts with Monson's 'intermusicality', a "participant framework" which "encourages improvisation by grounding it within a regular structure" and enables musicians to refer to the past and "offer social commentary" (Robbins & Wells, 2019, p. 725). They suggest that rhythm tap dancers similarly participate in intermusical relationships, through which they "braid and layer well-known steps, rhythms, and movement styles in their improvisations… invested in their tradition's past and actively build[ing] their storehouse from an archive of steps and movements" (2019, p. 725). To demonstrate the application of these concepts to rhythm tap dance, Robbins and Wells analyse improvised performances by two prominent contemporary tap dance artists, Michelle Dorrance and Jason Samuels Smith, with these frameworks in mind. Their adoption of

theoretical perspectives based in jazz studies to propose frameworks for viewing, analysing and discussing improvisational tap dance begins to bring together music and dance scholarship, but it does so by further contributing to the divide between thought and action in dance research.

As Robbins and Wells discuss, scholarship on African American vernacular dance focuses on rooting its improvisatory aesthetic in African dance and music traditions (e.g. Stearns, 1968/1994; Hazzard-Gordon, 1990; Jackson, 2001). Perhaps as a means of correcting European and Euro-American misreading of improvisation in specifically African American dance as "instinctual rather than learned", as "spontaneous and unstructured and thus of lesser artistic value than … forms that privilege choreography and composition" (Robbins & Wells, 2019, p. 722), scholars such as Malone argue that improvisation in Black dance is a process of composition "on the spot – with the success of the improvisation depending on the mastery of the nuances and elements of craft called for by the idiom" (1996, p. 34). Jonathan David Jackson, in his review of improvisation in African American vernacular dance forms, argues that improvisation is choreography, and differentiating improvisation from choreography and privileging the latter "runs the risk of being ethnocentric" (2001, pp. 42 & 44). Scholars who approach dance improvisational studies more broadly and philosophically, such as Susanne Ravn (2020), Ravn and Simon Høffding (2021) and Aili Bresnahan (2014), propose arguments for the role of agency in improvisation that similarly dispute and disprove notions of improvised dance as purely spontaneous and instinctual and blur the lines distinguishing improvisation from choreography. These perspectives, however, do not discuss these distinctions in terms of African American dance specifically, nor do they speak to the racist implications of ranking artistic value based on these distinctions.

Although Robbins and Wells' application of ethnomusicological theories to deepen understanding of improvisatory practices in tap dancing supports the notion that improvisation in African American dance is intentional composition requiring practiced skill and learned ways of knowing, Berliner's theory of the "singing mind" maintains the separation between cognition and movement affected by Descartes. How might we view, assess and discuss improvisational (tap) dance experiences without reinforcing Cartesian dualism? Additionally, Robbins and Wells apply these concepts of improvisation to their own analyses of improvisational performances, leaving out actual lived experiences of improvisation from tap dance improvisers themselves. Rather than speak directly with these living tap dancers about their experiences, they apply their theoretical perspective to an analysis of improvised performances recorded on video. How can they know the processes through which the improvisers are improvising without speaking with them directly? While an important beginning assessment of improvisational processes in tap dance, Robbins and Wells' theoretical proposal is not without shortcomings. Instead, a phenomenological inquiry into the lived experiences of tap dance improvisers that encourages them to consider what it is like to improvise may reveal alternative perspectives on improvisational processes.

The Phenomenon: Relational Flow

Improvisational tap dancing is the inter-activity through which the phenomenon of flow, specifically that experienced through a practice in relation with others, is explored in this inquiry. As previously articulated, positive psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1975a, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) defined flow as the optimal experience of an autotelic activity, and identified eight conditions and dimensions of the phenomenon:

1. The meeting of challenge and skill;
2. The identification of clear goals and receipt of immediate feedback;
3. Intense and focused concentration in the present moment;
4. The merging of action and awareness;
5. A loss of reflective self-consciousness;
6. A sense that one can control one's actions;
7. A distortion of the temporal experience; and,
8. The experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding (autotelic). (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 90)

Initially, Csikszentmihalyi mapped flow as an individual, subjective phenomenon experienced in solitary play and work activities, such as art creation, rock climbing, weaving, and surgery (1975a, 1975b; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). A large body of research has been devoted to continuing to measure and validate the conditions and characteristics identified through this initial research (e.g. Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2012; Boudreau, et al., 2020; Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989). These studies identify Csikszentmihalyi's conditions for flow in various types of activities, including skydiving and kayaking, internet chess and 'exergames', though continue the narrative that flow is a psychological experience with psychological effects.

Flow in Dance and Music

Additional research has also observed Csikszentmihalyi's flow phenomenon in music and dance creation. Lori A. Custodero (2005) observed flow experiences in children's music learning environments, and Emma Hart and Zelda Di Blasi (2015) compared the flow experiences of improvising jazz musicians with the characteristics of Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory. Keith

Sawyer's extensive research connecting flow and creativity (e.g., 2007, 2015), particularly in group settings, stemmed from his experiences as a jazz musician. In *The Neural Substrates of Expertise and Flow Among Jazz Guitarists*, David Saul Rosen (2018) observes the neurological response related to flow states in jazz improvisers to argue that attaining flow contributes to successful improvisation experiences. Particularly, Saul Rosen argues that flow is "strongly related to creativity and peak performance in jazz improvisation" (p. 68). To support this argument, his research demonstrates the neural processes underlying both flow and improvisation experiences. As stated, "[t]hese neural results are evidence in support of the transient hypofrontality hypothesis, whereby decreased frontal, top-down, executive control and increased recruitment of posterior, bottom-up, associative processes underlie flow and jazz expertise, both of which contribute to improvisation quality and creativity" (2018, p. 79). Thus, research on the neuro-processing of improvisation and flow experiences confirm accounts of flow and improvisation that suggest decreased cognition or awareness in these experiences. That is, research on neural processing during experiences of flow and music improvisation demonstrate that one may lose one's sense of self and awareness as they experience themselves as immersed in the moments of flow.

In dance research, Csikszentmihalyi's conditions and characteristics of flow have been correlated through studies that measured flow in professional dance experiences (Thomson, Jaque, 2006; Hefferon & Ollis, 2006), the role and intensity of flow in creative group dance improvisation (Łucznik, 2018), and the relationship between flow, well-being, and the spectator-dancer experience (Douse, 2017). In her article on *Flow in the Dancing Body: An Intersubjective Experience* (2017), Louise Douse draws upon the eudaimonic concept of wellbeing to develop a theory of flow in dance improvisation. She argues that through flow, the spectator may better

understand both the dancer's wellbeing and their own wellbeing in the moment of observation, therefore suggesting that flow enhances the spectator-dancer relationship.

Studies in flow, music and dance collide in Nicolo F. Bernardi et al.'s (2018) research, which showed that the addition of music, particularly what is considered "groovy music," to dancing experiences "enhances the experience of flow." Accordingly, the state of flow was found to increase during spontaneous dance to "groovy excerpts [of music]" compared with listening while staying physically still or imitating the movements of another on a screen. This research highlights something any professional or amateur dancer certainly knows; that dancing evokes a distinct state of flow that may be used to promote well-being and address certain clinical conditions. These studies demonstrate how widely Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow is applied in researching a variety of active experiences, particularly in creative arts pursuits such as dance and music. Furthermore, they demonstrate how moving and musical experiences have been shown to elicit flow-like experiences.

Shared Experiences of Flow

Improvisational tap dancing is rarely an individual experience, rather dancers more often exchange rhythmic and melodic phrases through improvisation with other dancers and/or musicians in social, relational inter-actions. As the experience of improvising tap dancers is one that is shared with another – a dancer, a musician, or an audience member, and sometimes all three – one may presume that the flow experience is also shared. Recognizing that many activities through which one may experience the flow phenomenon may be shared social activities, scholars have expanded upon Csikszentmihalyi's mapping of flow to encompass social flow experiences as well (Hart and Di Blaisi, 2015; Sawyer, 2006, 2008, 2015; van den Hout et. al., 2018; Walker, 2010). Research that has attempted to define, measure, and map various forms

of flow experienced through activities shared with one or more individual all suggests that "doing it together is better than doing it alone" (Walker, 2010, p. 3).

These various studies all adopt different terms to define the type of flow that is shared in social situations. Walker (2010), who conducted three interrelated studies to test the hypothesis that flow is more joyful when experienced in social activities, distinguished between co-active flow – individual flow experienced in tandem with another – and interactive social flow, or flow that is experienced by multiple people in interactive, interdependent situations. Sawyer (2006, 2008, 2015) explored shared flow experiences in improvisational theatre and music ensembles. In this work, Csikszentmihalyi's flow model was adapted to highlight ten conditions for what Sawyer labeled "group flow," "an emergent group property [that] is not the same thing as the psychological state of flow. It depends on interaction among performers and it emerges from this process. The group can be in flow even when the members are not; or the group might not be in flow even when the members are" (2006, p. 159). A key difference between Sawyer's group flow and Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory is that group flow is a property of the entire group, "as a collective unit," whereas Csikszentmihalyi's flow is a "state of consciousness within the individual performer" (Sawyer, 2006, p. 158). The concept of "team flow" was developed through a review of literature on individual and social flow studies to apply flow concepts to understanding the dynamics of working in teams (van den Hout et al., 2018). Defined as a "shared experience of flow during the execution of interdependent personal tasks in the interest of the team" (van den Hout et al., 2018, p. 414), team flow describes that which occurs when "all members of a team experience flow that originates from a team dynamic and where its members share in feelings of harmony and power" (van den Hout et al., 2018, p. 415). Thus, in team flow, the flow experience derives through the act of being a team, and not necessarily through the

activity undertaken by the team, as a team. Hart and Di Blasi (2015)'s research on flow experienced by jamming (improvising) jazz musicians revealed the phenomenon "combined flow", which accordingly met seven of Csikszentmihalyi's individual flow characteristics (e.g., Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002)

Relational Flow in Inter-Activities

While studies of co-active, interactive, group and team flow experiences highlight the gaps in Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory as it pertains to understanding flow experienced between individuals, they emphasize defining, mapping and measuring these moments of shared flow, and maintain a focus on flow as a psychological phenomenon. That is, they quantify flow phenomenon and reconfirm its psychological affects/effects. Evidently, definitions, maps, and measurements contribute to our understanding of the mechanics of flow experience, but they do not help to understand what these experiences are *like* to experience. They do not help us to understand what it is like to feel flow in activities with others, and what meaning we may derive through experiencing them. Further, as a dancer, dance educator, and researcher, and therefore someone who has spent her life attuning to the kinaesthetic and kinetic affects of expressive movement experience, I cannot help but wonder how a phenomenon such as flow, one that is derived mainly through motion and action as evidenced through the focus of flow studies in sports, dance and other physical pursuits as listed above, could be conceived as an experience that is purely experienced psychologically. How are flow affects only experienced emotionally? For example, the emphasis in Csikszentmihalyi's and others' research on the "feeling" of being immersed in the experience implicates a bodily reaction, does it not? Furthermore, when flow is experienced through activities with others, and particularly in activities where inter-action and relational connection are inherent and required in the activity, are these *feelings* of flow

immersion mutual? Are they shared? Better yet, are they reliant and attuned to the feelings of the other?

Lloyd (2004, 2015a, 2015b, 2017, 2021) and Lloyd and Smith (2006a, 2010, 2015, 2021, 2022a, 2022b) similarly questioned the emphasis in flow research on the individual and the cognitive. The experience of "interactive flow" was first described by Lloyd in her doctoral dissertation, a phenomenological inquiry into the pedagogical relationship between a personal trainer and her clients (2004; Lloyd & Smith 2006). Lloyd expanded upon interactive flow and dove deeper into the various flow motions experienced in movement through collaboration with her thesis supervisor, Smith, in subsequent publications (e.g., Lloyd 2015a, 2015b, 2017, 2021; Lloyd & Smith 2010, 2015, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). Interactive flow (later referenced as inter-active and then InterActive[8] flow), describes the merging of action and awareness between multiple, moving individuals, whereby the movements of one are somatically and somaesthetically experienced and connected to the movements of the other. Originally proposed as a model for facilitating relational pedagogies in movement-oriented practices such as personal training and swimming (Lloyd & Smith, 2006), interactive, and, subsequently, relational flow, have since been taken up through phenomenological inquiry into other inter-activities, such as equestrian arts (Lloyd & Smith, 2022a, 2022b; Smith, 2015, 2017; Smith & Lloyd, 2020) breastfeeding (Lloyd, 2012a), climbing (Lloyd, 2012b) and salsa dance (2015a, 2015b, 2017, 2021).

[8] While early publications refer to 'interactive' as one complete term (Lloyd & Smith, 2006), and more recent published works refer to 'InterActive' (e.g. Lloyd & Smith, 2022a; 2022b), at the time of conducting this inquiry, Lloyd & Smith were referring to 'inter-active' in the hyphenated form (e.g. as per Lloyd & Smith's original proposal to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the Inter-Active for Life Project, received via personal communication with R. Lloyd, April 17, 2018). Therefore, while this does not align with their current terminology, I have opted to hyphenate so as to emphasize the relationship between 'inter' and 'active' as discussed in the previous chapter.

Lloyd (2004) is careful to clarify that this somatic merging of action and awareness between inter-actors is not the same as suggested by Csikszentmihalyi (1988), who described flow experienced by members of a Japanese motorcycle gang. In Csikszentmihalyi's research, motorcycle gang members merged into one "social organism" (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, p. 86). Rather, inter-active, "relational flow" (Smith & Lloyd, 2020) accounts for 'diversity in the oneness', "a deeper sense of mimetic transformation" than a complete merge or loss of self in the other (Lloyd, 2004, p. 55). Further, a relational approach to flow experience calls for "a shift away from external perception and an appreciation for our intertwined fluidity" (Lloyd & Smith, 2006, p. 230), whereby the emphasis in such connections is on the sensorial affects of relation rather than those perceived. In this way, an approach to flow premised on the inter-active relationality of the shared experience opens the possibility for developing a kinaesthetic consciousness of flow affects, rather than simple descriptions of flow characteristics. Research taken up by Lloyd and Smith ask how we might *feel* our way into, around, and out of flow experiences rather than *think* our way into flow, the approach suggested through the body of work aligned with Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory. This emphasis on the feeling of flow consciousness is inspired through Michel Henry's material phenomenology (1990/2008, 2000/2015) and rooted in the primacy of movement, as purported by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (e.g., 1999/2011b; 2015b). These methodological and theoretical considerations will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Additionally, this approach premises that flow is not purely cognitive nor psychological, but a bodied experience, one that might be cultivated and experienced through and in moving inter-activities shared with others. Thus, an inter-active, relational flow theory extends beyond mapping and measuring individualized peak and optimal group experience. Inter-active,

relational flow suggests an inter-dependent approach to "cultivating peak, immersed, and deep interactive [flows]" (Lloyd, 2004, p. 183) in moving relation with others, rather than a 'recipe' or 'manual' for achieving and controlling flow experiences as prescribed by much of the flow literature. Where followers of Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory have sought to outline a step-by-step method for achieving flow, Lloyd and Smith's body of work instead proposes that one feels their way through flow affects into flow moments in motion.

Relational Flow in Improvisational Tap Dance Inter-Actions

The resources discussed in the above literature review, while illustrative of the complex relationship between tap dance and jazz music, the varied perspectives on dance and music improvisation, and the experience of flow in individual and group activities, do not, however, deepen our understanding of relational flow experiences in inter-active, improvised tap dance performances. I remain curious as to the feeling of relational flows created in and through inter-active tap dance exchanges; what are the affects and sensations of connecting with another in musical-moving creation? How are these moments cultivated between performers, and with the audience? And further, what meanings do these relational flow sensations hold for these artists? Although some of the literature offers first-person experiences of tap dance from esteemed, professional dancers (e.g., Bufalino, 2004; Goldberg, 2008), these perspectives focus on the individual histories of the tap dancers and their mentors. Additionally, while revelatory of their practices, approaches, and lived experiences, these accounts do not specifically describe flow moments, affects, and the meaning of these experiences to the artist's practice. I am left wondering if they have, in fact, experienced relational flow, and if so, what it means to them to relationally flow with others in inter-active improvised music and movement creation. Thus, the above review leaves me with questions about first-person feelings of relational flow experienced

through musical-moving creation and performance, and particularly those of expert professional tap dancers. What might a feeling for relational flow through a first-person, phenomenological approach reveal about the nature of inter-activity in improvisational tap dance? What can we learn about tap dance pedagogy, improvisation, and inter-action through observing and conversing with expert, professional tap dancers and educators? I am curious as to how a relational flow is cultivated between professional tap dancers and musicians in inter-active, improvisational settings, and what a deeper understanding of this will mean for my own teaching and performing practices.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and the Present Inquiry

Inquiring into the kinaesthetic affects of moving, inter-active experiences such as improvisational tap dancing, requires a research approach and conceptual framing that affords a feeling for experiential descriptions, rather than a quantitative measurement or the seeking of causal explanations. Where Csikszentmihalyi and his followers sought to map out flow experiences to provide a sort of recipe or road-map for experiencing flow, instead, like Lloyd and Smith, I prefer to *feel* for flow-like experiences, to develop a deepened understanding of their functional and fundamental capacities, their formal shapes and structures and their sensorial, kinaesthetic affects. Through the present inquiry, I aim to describe what they are *like* to experience, and ultimately, what they mean for those who experience them.

Conceptual Framework: The Function-to-Flow Model

To address this line of inquiry, I employ a phenomenological research approach to feel for deep meanings of relational flow moments experienced through musical-movement inter-actions. I approach this feeling for meaning through a conceptual framework based on the Function-to-Flow model as developed by Lloyd and Smith (e.g., Lloyd, 2015c, 2016; Lloyd and Smith, 2006b, 2015, 2021). As demonstrated through its application to the study of salsa dance (Lloyd, 2015b), children's climbing (Lloyd, 2012b, 2015c) and breast-feeding (Lloyd, 2012a), the Function-to-Flow model encourages an in-depth aural, visual, and kinaesthetic sensing of the experiential dimensions of movement function, form, feeling, and flow, and maintains what Sheets-Johnstone coined as a "primacy of movement" to the seeking of meaning in lived experience (1999/2011b; Lloyd & Smith, 2015). The Function-to-Flow model structures explorations of movement function in relation to the physical and physiological capacities for movement; movement form, such as the outer shape or the visible materialization of movement

expression; feeling as in the inner sensations of movement experience – self-sensing, kinaesthetic perceptions; and flow, as in the existential time, body, space and Other dimensions of movement. As described by Lloyd and Smith (2021),

> The ‘function’ dimension of the Function-to-Flow framework conveys how movement may serve a health-promoting and practical purpose and, by including the ‘form,’ ‘feeling’ and ‘flow ‘registers of movement consciousness, we can come to appreciate how movement is self-sustaining and [can] be the very means of cultivating a *joie de vivre*. (p. 3)

The Function-to-Flow framework is particularly useful for guiding movement inquiry as it is inspired through Sheets-Johnstone’s phenomenological philosophy of dance and movement (e.g., 2011a, 1999/2011b, 2015b). Movement, for Sheets-Johnstone, “is indeed our mother tongue” (2015, p. 29) in that it is the “originating ground of our sense-making” (1999/2011b, p. 139). Through her large body of work, she demonstrates how our most basic cognitions,

> are saturated in concepts that derive from movement, concepts of distance, as in reaching: “is the glass near or far?”; concepts of size: “is the glass narrow or wide,” i.e., “how small or large must I form my grasping hand?” … it is insufficient to discuss “skills and abilities” without inquiries into the concepts that come with them and the learning that grounds them. (2015a, p. 29)

This “primacy of movement” actually begins in utero, as our kinaesthesia and tactility are “the first sensory systems to develop neurologically … fetuses move in utero, and … infants come into the world moving and kinesthetically experience their movement not in terms of ownership, but in terms of immediately and directly felt dynamic intensities, amplitudes, momentum”

(2015a, p. 28). Through the process of moving, an infant discovers what the founder of phenomenology Edmund Husserl described as "if/then relationships" such as "if I close my eyes, it is dark". These kinaesthetically felt experiences ground what Husserl identifies as the "*I-can* of the subject" and actually assert Husserl's critical insight that "*I move" precedes "I do" and "I can"* (Husserl, 1989, pp. 13, 273; Sheets-Johnstone, 2015a, pp. 28, 29). Thus, a conceptual framework based in Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenological philosophy of movement presumes kinaesthesia as "the bedrock of our learning our bodies and learning to move ourselves to begin with, and of our learning new abilities and skills as we mature" and therefore

> nothing is explained, much less elucidated, without bringing in the living dynamics of movement [or "the dynamic patterns that constitute the habits of our everyday life … such as brushing our teeth … breaking an egg into a bowl … sawing a piece of wood… that precisely allow us, on the basis of their kinesthetically-felt dynamic familiarity, to attend focally to whatever the task at hand … without our monitoring our movement every step of the way"] … [these dynamics of movement] are grounded in the experienced qualitative dynamics of kinesthesia … that, when learned, inhere in kinesthetic memory. (2015a, p. 31)

This approach centres our kinaesthetic and kinetic perception in the analysis of experience and is based in the premise that we experience the world as *moving* bodies and engage with others and the world as *animate* beings. Animation grounds our "being alive in all its affective, perceptual, cognitional, and imaginative guises, stages, practices, and surrounding worlds … the full range of … dynamics that constitute and span the multiple dimensions of our livingness" (1999/2011b, p. 467). Therefore, the Function-to-Flow model, informed through Sheets-Johnstone's assertion of animation as the "generative source of our primal sense of aliveness and of our primal

capacity for sense-making (1999/2011b, p. 114), provides a framework through which one might discern phenomenological meaning in our living experiences as moving beings.

Lloyd and Smith developed the Function-to-Flow model to guide researcher-practitioner questioning of how the most basic actions of any movement, such as the dropping of the weight into the heels in a *paddle-and-roll*, may be understood on a non-linear continuum from the quantifiable, mechanistic factors that enact the movement (*function, form*) to the qualitative aspects that describe the subjective experience of the movement (*feeling, flow*) (e.g., Lloyd, 2012b, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016, 2017, 2021; Lloyd and Smith, 2021). In its initial conception, Function-to-Flow was designed to support analysis of individual experiences of flow in movement activities, so that the functional and formal aspects of the movement practice, such as cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, technical form, and outward shape of the individual's body, led into the feeling of breath and emotional response elicited through flow moments in movement. Because my research inquiry focuses on the experience of relational flow in inter-active movement experiences, I have reinterpreted the Function-to-Flow framework to shape this inquiry and to support analysis. Thus, function includes the foundational, physical capacities required to experience relational flow in inter-active improvisational tap dance performances with others; form comprises both material and immaterial shapings and structures of inter-active experiences of relational flows; and feeling describes the sensorial and emotional affects and effects of relationally flowing with others in inter-active improvisational tap dancing. Certain aspects of the framework which are geared towards understanding individual flow experiences, such as the foundational technique required to physically experience flow through the movement activity (*function*), and the individual approaches to improvisation that shape or form the interaction (*form*), are indeed applicable within this study and discussed, though with

reference to their role in facilitating relational flow experiences in inter-action with others. Such capacities support the tap dancer's ability to participate in the inter-activity, and therefore to experience relational flow.

In adopting this conceptual framework for my research, I not only emphasize the primacy of movement to living experience, but further take up Sheets-Johnstone's call to phenomenologically inquire into the extraordinary experiential movement realities of professional dancers to deepen our understanding of the effect of their honed kinetic capacities (2015b, p. xv). The Function-to-Flow model frames this research approach to connect what expert professional improvisational tap dancers and educators know in terms of tap dance pedagogy with their sensed, motile experiences of musical-movement creation. Through such a framing, we may begin to deepen our understanding of what relational flows are like, how they feel and are cultivated, lost, and ultimately experienced by those whose very livelihood is based in their affectivity.

Research Questions

The research questions which guide this inquiry are inspired through the Function-to-Flow model. Lloyd and Smith ask how researchers might pose research questions that enable a "sensibility where emotions and motions are integrally connected" (2021, p. 10). Given my primary interest in the affective dimension of relational flow in improvised inter-activity, the main research question that frames this inquiry is: ***What are the feelings of relational flow in inter-active, improvisational tap dance?*** Prompts related to this primary research question concern the feelings of flow experiences: What is it like to experience time, space, body and to be in relation with others in improvised tap dance inter-actions? What feelings and affects reveal relational flow moments? Lloyd and Smith suggest that,

> By attending to the various ways joy and other pleasurable or even painful sensations manifest in terms of building, cresting, and fading intensities, energies, rhythms and frequencies, we are challenging how emotions are understood as reflective states, and ones that are seemingly unitary and categorical in the Darwinian sense of states of happiness, interest, surprise, anger, and so on. (2021, p. 10)

This inquiry is also guided through two secondary research questions that address the function and form dimensions of the Function-to-Flow model:

The formal sub question for function is: *What movement capacities are required to experience relational flow in improvisational tap dance?* Prompts to address this include: What is required to feel flow emerge in improvisational performances? What is required to move musically through tap dance with others? What is it like to execute tap steps in the creation of rhythms and melodies?

The formal sub questions for form are: *What shapes and forms the inter-activity so performers may experience a relational flow? What are the material/physical/bodily shapes and signs of a relational flow in inter-active, improvisational tap dance?* Prompts to address these include: What are the structures that form relational flow moments in improvised tap dance inter-actions? What are the visual shapes of the inter-action which indicate feelings of relational flow?

Methodological Approach

To tap into the feelings of relational flow between dancers and musicians in improvisational tap dancing, I adopt a research approach known as motion-sensing phenomenology (Lloyd & Smith, 2006b, 2015, 2021) that employs Henry's (1990/2008, 2000/2015) radical, material phenomenology of life to elaborate upon the hermeneutic

phenomenology as proposed by Max van Manen (1990, 2014). Before I delve deeper into motion-sensing phenomenology and its use in the present study, I will first provide a brief overview of Henry's radical reversal of phenomenology and discuss its relevance.

Material Phenomenology

As the philosophical study of lived experience and the seeking of universal, shared meaning (van Manen, 1990, p. 19), phenomenology derives through the work of Husserl, a 20th century Austrian-German philosopher whose descriptions of the objects of consciousness aimed to reveal transcendental meaning through a return 'to the things [the phenomena] themselves' (Husserl, 1973/1900, 1982/1913, 1989). Since introduction, the term 'phenomenology' has been used to describe the main philosophical orientation in continental Europe during the 20th and 21st centuries, which, as demonstrated through the work of van Manen (2014), has grown into a living body of practices with a variety of traditions and 'research methods.' In its original conception as transcendental phenomenology, Husserl sought a descriptive philosophy of the essences of pure experience without interpretation, explanation, or theorizing. This epistemological project aimed at developing a rigorous science of transcendental phenomena, which are the hidden, experiential entities that reveal themselves in consciousness. In Husserl's phenomenology, consciousness is always conscious of *something* – objects or phenomenon – and the process through which these objects come to be in consciousness is intentionality. Husserl uses the term *noesis* to describe the interpretive act directed towards an intentional object. He uses *noema* to describe the content of noesis, or the object as intended. These noema are the main focus of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, which aims to describe the things of our consciousness, as they intentionally appear to us. Three aspects are key to Husserl's philosophy: the suspending of the natural attitude for the phenomenological attitude; the process of

bracketing or the epoché; and the eidetic reduction of phenomena to reveal their essential characteristics. In his reversal of phenomenology, Henry problematizes these and other aspects of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and instead proposes a material phenomenology (1990/2008, 2000/2015).

In Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, our intentional experience of phenomenon privileges vision as the primary mode of sense-making. Alternatively, Henry's material phenomenology emphasizes the feeling sense, turning not to the things but to their mode or *how* of appearing, that is, their impressionality, rather than our intentionality towards them. This emphasizes the affectivity of the things of lived experience. For Henry, this impressionality is the very force of life's self-generation, what he terms auto-affection, in that "it is always the force of feeling that throws life into living-toward. And what it lives-toward is always life as well" (1990/2008, p. 40). That is, under every sense-impression is the force of life, and it is life that drives our sensorial experience. In this living towards life, life is a "self-movement which experiences itself and never stops experiencing itself in this very movement … nothing ever detaches itself from this self-experiencing movement, in such a way that nothing slips out of this moving self-experience" (Henry, 1999, p. 352). This self-movement is the conscious capacity to move which precedes the phenomenological sequence of "*I move, I do, I can do, I can*" (as discussed by Sheets-Johnstone, 2011a). It is this self-movement of life that "provides the milieu in which all intersubjectivity whatsoever can take place … in the experience of a radically immanent subject that life arrives to itself and sees its own being…and is also the way in which everything that can affect it originally arrives, including the 'being' of the other" (Henry, 1990/2008, p. 4). Thus, material phenomenology inquires beneath the objectification of phenomenon to "an entirely new terrain in which there are no longer any objects" (Henry,

1990/2008, p.42), and instead, there are the "affectivities, resonances, synergies, synchronies and attunements" (Smith & Lloyd, 2020, p. 539) of the force of life itself, as revealed through the movement of living towards life.

In addition to reversing phenomenological philosophy – that is turning towards the how of appearing, rather than the objects themselves – Henry also problematizes Husserlian phenomenology with regards to the eidetic reduction to the phenomenological attitude. As briefly mentioned, in Husserlian phenomenology, one suspends the natural attitude, our belief that the world is as it appears to us and that the objects of our consciousness exist independent of our relationship with them, and instead turns to the world of pre-reflective experience, our immediate and direct consciousness of the objects of the world. Through the eidetic reduction of phenomenon, one begins to reveal a phenomenon's essential characteristics by reducing it to its essences or *eidos*. The reduction is intended to rid the phenomenologist of any scientific preconceptions of the phenomenon in question to encounter the phenomenon itself, free from any associated labels, theories, and opinions. Henry suggests, however, that one cannot use the eidetic reduction in a pure phenomenology, because we live in a life-sensing, life-sustaining field. The eidetic reduction extinguishes everything we know about the phenomenon's appearing – its impressionable qualities, its affectivity, and our sense perceptions of its being. Henry argues, "the reduction … demands that this movement [(the pure gaze, the regard, the turning to the thing)] be restricted to what is actually seen in it, while everything that is not – whatever is only presumed or emptily intended – is set aside" (1990/2008, p. 49). Thus, this reduction is "ultimately nothing but seeing. Thought is identified with this seeing and obeys only its internal teleology" (1990/2008, p. 49). But, as previously emphasized, "everything falls back into life and only has its being in it; everything is alive" (Henry, 1990/2008, p. 6). And so, just as we move

from objectification to a realm where there are no objects, only sense impressions, it is also not simply through seeing that we encounter life's phenomena; we do so through modalities other than sight – we hear them, smell them, and feel them – we sensorially engage with the phenomena of life. Further, it is not simply the *thing* we are *seeing* or *sensing* that we are seeing or sensing, but also the primordial force of life itself, and thus we cannot reduce our experience of phenomenon to its objects, but rather turn towards their appearing and thus to their impressional qualities, our sensorial perceptions of their being which are their modes of appearing. Henry (1999) says, "[w]hen classical phenomenology practices the transcendental reflection of the phenomenological reduction by opposing life to itself in this reflection, by putting life outside of itself, by giving it to be seen, by making itself the 'Spectator' of it, classical phenomenology is devoted to the task of rediscovering this life, but as if life were not saying itself, as if life were not its own Verb" (p. 363-364). Thus, Henry's radical material phenomenology challenges us to "research moments that move us to where there is no detachment … [and to] [delve] beneath notions of visually-informed objectification" (Lloyd & Smith 2021, p. 2).

Material phenomenology suggests we cannot dismiss our sense impressions of phenomenon as phenomenon cannot be separated from their modalities of appearing, just as we cannot dismiss that in sensing the phenomenon, its impressions, we are simultaneously sensing the appearing of life itself. To better illustrate both the auto-affectivity of life living towards life, and the duplicity of appearing, Henry (1999) refers to the cry of suffering as an example:

> …the cry of suffering is an expression of life entirely different from a linguistic proposition such as "I'm in pain." The proposition is a noematic irreality foreign to the reality of the suffering which it signifies… the cry belongs to the immanence of life as

> one of its modalities in the same way as the suffering which the cry bears within itself [is] one of life's modalities… its belonging to life can be recognized only if the cry is grasped in its subjective utterance, as a phonic act of the living body possessing the phenomenological status of life, and not as a behaviour of the objective body uncovering itself to us in the world. (1999, p. 358)

And

> … we … hear this cry resounding in the world like another noise … *but the cry of suffering does not speak in this way; it speaks in and through its own pathos; its speech is the speech of life.* We also hear it as a sound which resonates in the proximity or distance of an "outside," solely because of the duality of the appearing; we hear it this way, because, in the exteriority of the world, the noise to which our corporeality is open in hearing is added over and above to the original revelation of the suffering which is pulled in tight against itself in its pathetic flesh and which is striving always in this pathos to free itself through its cry. The two speeches speak in one same and most simple cry, because the philosophy of language refers to and is possible only on the basis of a phenomenology whose radical presupposition is the duplicity of appearing. (1999, p. 358)

Thus, a material phenomenology offers a reversal of Husserlian phenomenological philosophy in that it embraces our sense impressions of phenomenon in their how of appearing, rather than our intentionality towards them as they appear, and in effect, there is no more separation, no more objectification. With this in mind, Lloyd and Smith developed motion-sensing phenomenology to delve "beneath notions of visually-informed objectification" to "consider the animating and relational underpinnings of perceptual consciousness" (2021, p. 42).

Motion-Sensing Phenomenology

Inspired through material phenomenology's radical shift from objectivity to modality and from intentionality to impressionality, Lloyd and Smith developed the motion-sensing phenomenological research method to bring a "first-person, kinaesthetic" sensitivity to phenomenological inquiry that turns towards the motile affects of "moving and being moved by the natural world" (Lloyd, 2011, p. 78). A motion-sensing approach privileges the felt, sensorial perceptions of movement experiences of life's auto-affection to elucidate the meaning of phenomena. Further, it invites researchers to actively move in and through their inquiries "to experience the primacy of movement afresh with enlivened kinaesthetic and energetic sensations of connection" (Lloyd & Smith, 2021, p. 4). Lloyd and Smith (2021) suggest that motion sensing phenomenology, in contrast with more traditional approaches to phenomenological inquiry, is "a more constructive phenomenology in that it invites us as researchers to move in and through our inquiries in keeping with the very movements of our active and interactive lives" (p. 4). Thus, researchers actively connect to the movements of their inquiry firsthand:

> They sense the continual wave-like ebb and flow of vital breath, and they do so in a way that is grounded in the movements themselves. [Motion sensing phenomenology] thus challenges phenomenological notions of suspending judgement and bracketing understandings by inviting researchers to not only see with 'fresh eyes', but also to experience the primacy of movement afresh with enlivened kinaesthetic and energetic sensations of connection. (Lloyd & Smith, 2021, p. 4)

A motion-sensing approach has been applied to phenomenologically inquire into a variety of activities, including exercise pedagogy (Lloyd & Smith, 2006b), swimming (Smith 2006), climbing (Lloyd 2012b, 2015c, 2016), hula-hooping (Lloyd, 2012c), salsa dance (Lloyd

2015a, 2015b, 2017, 2021), and equestrian arts (Smith 2015a, 2015b, 2018, 2019; Smith and LaRochelle, 2019).

Motion-sensing phenomenology prioritizes our motile sensory experiences of phenomenal life as it is lived in movement, that is in living experiences, rather than our visual perception of objective phenomenon. As the primary focus of a motion-sensing phenomenological inquiry, movement, according to Lloyd and Smith (2021), "is less something to which consciousness is directed and more a manner of feeling alive and living with verve" (p. 1). Motion-sensing phenomenology is about "taking up kinetically, aesthetically, kinaesthetically and energetically the lived and living meanings that emerge over time from the disciplinary practices themselves" (Lloyd & Smith, 2021, p. 1). It provides an approach to inquiring into how phenomena 'show themselves' in consciousness "by attending closely to the very motions by which these phenomena emerge" (Lloyd & Smith, 2021, p. 1). Such an approach is well suited to an inquiry into relational flow as experienced through an inter-activity like improvisational tap dancing. A phenomenological feeling for meaning in lived movement experiences, rather than a "seeking" of "essences" as in traditional phenomenology, may deepen our understanding of moving experiences by emphasizing our bodily engagement with life, given that our very being is premised on movement.

Thus, with the aim of elucidating living experiences of moving, a motion-sensing phenomenological researcher participates in the movement practice herself and reflects upon this actualized experience through writing and rewriting phenomenological descriptions of the experience. In this approach, the researcher must engage firsthand with the research topic: "[Motion-sensing phenomenology] requires that one selects a topic which is deeply moving…When engaged in [a motion-sensing phenomenological inquiry] … there can be no

detachment…Rather than spending the majority of one's time sitting at a desk, it is necessary to step actively into the inquiry" (Lloyd & Smith, 2021, p. 5). This active stepping, the phenomenological attitude, is described as a literal "taking off our shoes to have immediate contact with the terrain of what it is we are exploring…a barefoot consciousness where 'the ground we are exploring touches us' and where we attune to that which is there pressing into us with each step…we must move to, in and through what we research" (quoting Sheets-Johnstone, 1999/2011b in Lloyd & Smith, 2021, p. 5).

Motion-sensing phenomenology's revitalized approach to sensing movement inquiries is further supported through Henry's (1999) renewed conception of language, whereby one turns to the body's speech in philosophical inquiry:

> The genuine body … as having the speech of the life that speaks in every living body. With this language of the body, that of the spontaneous gestures which accompany everyday life, that of dance, of mime, of sports, etc., an immense domain uncovers itself for us. It would be a mistake here to think that the term "language" is merely a metaphor: a hand given and open arms have an immediate meaning just as words do. We really see this in the language by which we communicate with animals which excludes all intellectual meaning. Like the intelligence of ordinary language, the intelligence of this complex language refers to a phenomenological bedrock, its complexity being based precisely on the fact that it implies, like the language of the body for example, not only the appearing of the world – where the body is an object – but also the pathetic flesh of our living corporeality. Because it makes the duality of appearing intervene, the analysis of this language would lead back to the problems to which we have alluded. (p. 361)

Such a turning towards bodily languaging requires renewed processes for data collection and analysis. Motion-sensing phenomenology offers this: data collection and analysis activities focus on the *sensing*, *essencing*, and *sensitizing* to the motility of the phenomenon in question (Lloyd & Smith, 2015), that is, to its moving expression, its impressions in movement. I adopt this approach to the present research inquiry because it emphasizes the sensing of, that is a feeling for, the relational flows experienced in inter-active, improvisational tap dancing. It brings a motion-sensitivity to experiential descriptions (*sensing*), enables a feeling for the essences of relational flow in movement (*essencing*), and cultivates a heightened sensitivity to flow moments in inter-active movement experiences (*sensitizing*) (Lloyd & Smith, 2015, p. 260). A motion-sensing phenomenological approach to inquiry premised on the radical phenomenology of Henry (e.g. 1999, 1990/2008, 2000/2015), provides a philosophy upon which the phenomenological 'search' for meaning may be re-approached in kinaesthetic terms – a phenomenological *feeling* for meaning in living experiences.

Feeling for Experience: Motion-Sensing Research Activities

To inquire into the research questions identified above, experiences of feeling relational flow through inter-active, improvisational tap dancing were compiled through motion-sensing research activities that open the aural, visual, and kinaesthetic senses to experiential data[9]. These activities were: a) a personal improvisational tap dance practice which included private and group lessons, individual study, journal reflections and participation in musical jams (as recommended by Lloyd & Smith, 2021); b) close observations of live and recorded

[9] According to van Manen, the notion of data or *datum* is a "thing given or granted", and while the concept has quantitative undertones, in human science perspectives, "[w]hen someone has related a valuable experience to me then I have indeed gained something, even though the 'thing' *gained* is not a quantifiable entity" (1990, p. 53, original emphasis)

improvisational tap dance performances, and; c) conversing with five expert professional tap dancers and educators in one to two phenomenological interviews/feels (Lloyd, 2017).

As I felt for living experiences of relational flow through my own participation in inter-active tap dance jams, private lessons and group classes with the research participants, viewing live and recorded improvisational tap dance performances and listening to and conversing with expert professional tap dancers, I engaged the inter-feel approach as suggested by Lloyd (2017) to maintain a motion-sensitivity throughout my motion-sensing data collection activities. To inter-feel for experiential data through these sources implies a *feeling* for meaning through a kinaesthetic, rather than a detached visual, sense that is often associated with the inter*view* (Lloyd, 2017). Experiential data, such as anecdotes, stories, and narratives that illuminate the sensations of experiencing moments of relational flow in improvisational tap dance exchange were gathered through the activities of dancing, reflecting, observing, listening and conversing.

The Function-to-Flow model and associated research questions guided this feeling for meaning in each of the aforementioned research activities and the descriptions of these experiences that ensued. Such descriptions allowed me to delve deeper into the physical functions, forms and feelings of relational flow. Drawing upon the phenomenological existentials of lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived other, each description is analyzed to ensure the experience of relational flow is brought to life. The main research question, "***What are the feelings of relational flow in inter-active, improvisational tap dance?"*** oriented me to consider the phenomenon of what a relational flow feels like in my personal dancing and teaching practices (that is, how a relational flow phenomenon reveals itself to me), and to incite discussions about relational flow feelings with my own students.

Data were collected over a one-year period (August 2018-August 2019) through one to two interviews with each of the participants, observation of the participants in improvisational performances, and private and group lessons with each participant. Descriptive notes were taken during and after each lesson to provide practical grounding for the concepts discussed in interviews. Although prepared questions rooted in the Function-to-Flow framework provided a jumping off point for discussion, individual interviews were tailored to each participant through background research and were semi-structured so as to allow for conversational flow. Preparations for these interviews consisted of viewing video recordings of past performances, gathering biographical data on participants and their mentors, and listening to previously recorded interviews.

Participants

Five expert professional tap dancers and educators, four women and one man, were chosen to participate in one to two 60-minute, semi-structured interviews to describe their experiences of feeling relational flow in inter-active, improvisational tap dance performances. The sample size was kept small and purposive as per van Manen's suggestion to allow for a deeper understanding of each individual's living experiences of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). These experts were chosen based on their status as professional practitioners and educators of improvisational tap dance who: a) have learned and honed their craft through training with at least one of the great tap dance masters; b) emphasize the spontaneous creation of tap dance rhythms and sequences in improvisational performance rather than through choreography; and c) are internationally recognized as leaders in their respective tap dance communities. Participants were invited to participate in the study via e-mail following ethical standards for research with human participants at the University of Ottawa (Appendix A).

Each participant's involvement in this research inquiry was unique, depending on their interest, availability and my financial ability to travel to and train with them. One to two semi-structured interviews, based on van Manen's suggestion for semi-structured interviews that allow for an open, conversational environment so as "to stay as close to an experience as it is immediately lived" (1990, p. 67), were conducted in person and audio recorded for transcription purposes. In addition to interviews, I undertook a minimum of one private or group lesson with each participant to glean a deeper sense of their unique pedagogical approaches, and to better understand how improvisation and inter-action factor into their teaching practices. In addition to the brief biographies provided below, I describe their participation in this inquiry, which elaborates upon the research activity chart provided in Appendix B.

Heather Cornell

Heather Cornell (manhattantap.org) is a Canadian tap dancer, choreographer, teacher and artistic director of the former New York based tap dance ensemble, Manhattan Tap (1985-2004). Heather moved to New York in the early 1980s to study modern dance, but quickly became an apprentice under six American tap masters who performed in the height of tap's popularity from the 1930s to 1950s (Buster Brown, Eddie Brown, Harriet Browne, Cookie Cook, Steve Condos and Chuck Green). She is the only tap dancer to be mentored by the great bassist, Ray Brown, who was one of her "most profound influences" (Cornell, 2017a). Heather's innovative stylistic approach has been described as:

> a visual and aural link to some of the great tap masters, her blend of original material from her mentors, to which is added her own style of concert tap and her extensive work in collaboration with jazz musicians and world music artists, resulted in her own style-- a

> relaxed and low-keyed style of rhythm tap that is musically sophisticated and deliciously languid, indolent and dazzling at the same time. (Valis Hill, n.d. a)

Since 1990, Heather has hosted up to 15 students from across the globe for 3 – 5 weeks each summer at her cottage studio in Nyack, New York for her "Tap Labs". According to her website, these labs are:

> a place for focused, independent learning in a supportive community environment… to encourage one on one communication between musicians and dancers. … Heather strongly believes that artists should learn in the process of creativity, not imitation, and so supports the students in developing their own unique voice through discovery and listening. (Cornell, 2017b)

Heather also regularly performs with her band, "Making Music Dance," tours around the world teaching classes and giving university lectures, and is working on rebooting her Manhattan Tap dance company. As of June 2022, Heather is Assistant Professor of Dance Instruction at Hope College in Holland, Michigan and has moved her tap labs to the College.

For the purposes of this inquiry, I attended two weeks of tap labs at Heather's cottage in August 2018 and participated in her classes at the 2018 Vancouver International Tap Dance Festival, and at the 2019 RiFF tap dance festival in Dallas, Texas. I also hired Heather for a private lesson in September 2019 as she was in Ottawa, visiting from New York. It is difficult to generalize Heather's approach as a dance teacher, given each class with her is different and tailored to her perception of the needs of the students in the class at the time. In her Labs, Heather focused on helping participants develop a bodily feel for musicality, release muscular tension and encourage improvisational explorations, exchanges, and creations. In some of her

festival classes, Heather taught us phrases of repertoire she gathered through study with her mentors, namely Eddie Brown and Buster Brown. In my private lesson with Heather, we focused on learning and playing, through our bodies, a particular piece of music. This focus entailed not only growing familiar with the rhythm and melody of the tune, but communicating this through intentional use of the body, weight, and parts of the foot.

I viewed Heather in improvisational performance with musicians at the 2018 Ottawa Winter Jazz Festival (with Jesse Stewart), at the 2018 Vancouver International Tap Dance Festival (with the festival band) and at the 2019 RiFF tap dance festival showcase. To gather her impressions of experiencing relational flow, I formally interviewed Heather twice – once on the Saturday between the two Tap Lab weeks, and once in between workshops at the Vancouver International Tap Dance Festival. These interviews were recorded using an audio recorder, and a short video was made of the second interview as part of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded Inter-Active for Life Research Project under the direction of Lloyd and Smith (Studio7 Multimedia, 2018). In advance of presenting some of this research at the 2020 Vancouver International Tap Dance Festival, I discussed my findings with Heather and sought her input and support on which quotations I used. Through this process, Heather provided in-depth feedback which contributed greatly to my analysis and writing of this dissertation.

Brenda Bufalino

Brenda Bufalino (brendabufalino.com) is a "jazz and tap dancer, singer, poetess and composer who is considered one of the key trailblazers in the renaissance of tap dance in the 1970s and 1980s (Valis Hill, n.d. b). Brenda, who credits Charles Honi Coles as her mentor and partner, produced the documentary film, *Great Feats of Feet: A portrait of the jazz and tap dancer* (1977), which documented some of the lecture-demonstrations of the Copasetics, "an

ensemble of tap soloists of the Golden Age of tap … a performance group and social club" (American Tap Dance Foundation, n.d.). Through the late 1970s and 1980s, Brenda continued to teach, compose and perform new choreographic works, extending the traditional ten-to-twelve-minute tap routine into a full-length evening show to "challenge the audience to sustain its attention on prolonged rhythmic composition" (Valis Hill, n.d. b). Brenda founded and was the artistic director for the American Tap Dance Orchestra from 1986 – 1999, which toured the world performing full-length works such as *The American Landscape*, and *Buff Loves Basie Blues*. In 2001, former members of the American Tap Dance Orchestra collaborated with Brenda to establish the American Tap Dance Foundation (atdf.org), which continues to host the New York City Tap City Festival annually, offers tap dance classes, workshops and lecture series, and provides opportunities for emerging tap dance artists to host artist-in-residence series to develop their practices and new choreographic works. In 2014, The American Tap Dance Foundation began a multi-year tap teacher training program based on the classic tap dance repertory of the Copasetics. In addition to authoring an autobiography, *Tapping the Source* (2004), a book of poetry (2011) and a book of fiction (2018), Brenda continues to teach, create new works and perform. She is recognized as "a leading exponent and innovator of jazz tap dance" and "a major force in moving the concept of tap dance composition and performance forward" (Valis Hill, n.d. b).

For the purpose of this research, I attended the 2018 Big Apple Tap Festival in New York City to take classes with and interview Brenda. At this festival, I took four classes with Brenda and attended a lecture where she shared some of her experiences dancing with members of the Copasetics and discussed some of her own choreographic works. Like Heather, Brenda approached every class differently. In some classes, she taught the technical approach to tap

dance she had developed over her career, which included use of the entire body rather than tap dancing simply from the knee or ankle down. In other classes, she taught us short rhythmic movement phrases that we then explored more in depth – either by improvising in space through these phrases, or layering these phrases atop one another as a composition.

Following the festival, I interviewed Brenda in her studio apartment. I also participated in the first phase of the American Tap Dance Foundation Teacher Training Program in 2019 to develop a closer connection to Brenda's technique, as well as build upon my own teaching practice. In addition to studying under Brenda's students (Margaret Morrison, Barbara Duffy and Susan Hebach), I also took one class with Brenda during this program. I have not personally attended any of Brenda's live performances but have access to many video recordings of her past performances via DVD and YouTube.

Dianne Walker

Dianne Walker is "a jazz-tap dancer known for her elegant and fluid style of dancing that is delicate yet rhythmically complex" (Valis Hill, n.d. c). After a childhood of studying and performing various forms of western concert dance, including tap, Dianne took a hiatus from performing to pursue a Master of Psychology and become a counsellor at the University of Boston. She returned to tap dance in her late twenties under tap master Leon Collins, eventually becoming one of Leon's main protégés. She was featured in the 1989 *Great Performances: Tap Dance in America* television episode, hosted by prominent tap dancer Gregory Hines, and appeared as one of the Shim Sham Girls in the feature film, *Tap!* (1989). She also worked as principal dancer in the Paris production of *Black and Blue* (1985) and as principal and assistant choreographer in the Broadway production (1989-1991). As a passionate and committed teacher and mentor, Dianne is considered the link between the older generation of Black female tap

dancers and the younger generation, and continues the work of passing along the steps, stories, and traditions of jazz/rhythm tap dance by teaching at festivals, giving masterclasses, and guest lectures across the globe. According to dance historian and tap dancer Valis Hill, Dianne is "the holder and bequeather of the classical Black rhythm tap canon, making sure it will flourish with absolute perfection" (Valis Hill, n.d. c.).

For the purposes of this research, I attended the 2018 Big Apple Tap Festival in New York City to participate in two of Dianne's classes, attended the 2019 RiFF Dallas Tap Dance Festival in Dallas, Texas to participate in three of Dianne's classes, and attended a weekend-long workshop in Toronto hosted by Toffan Rhythm Projects to learn from Dianne through classes and a lecture series. In all of her classes, Dianne shared phrases of movement repertoire compiled and passed to her by her mentor, Leon Collins. Dianne is the lead authority on Leon Collins's body of work, and she shares this work, and the lessons embedded therein, in many of her classes.

I initially interviewed Dianne at the RiFF Dallas tap dance festival and conducted a second, impromptu interview with Dianne on the telephone while preparing my presentation for the 2020 Vancouver International Tap Dance Festival. During this conversation, Dianne elaborated further upon the experiences she had previously shared with me and expressed support for my interpretations. I viewed Dianne in improvisational performance at the RiFF Dallas Tap Dance festival and have access to many video recordings of Dianne's performances via YouTube.

Sarah Reich

Sarah Reich (sarahreich.com), a tap dance performer, choreographer, instructor and composer, has emerged as one of the leading artists in contemporary rhythm tap dance. While

Sarah trained under tap dance masters like Harold Cromer and Chance Taylor, her career began to take off through appearances in the music videos for Scott Bradlee's Postmodern Jukebox (e.g., PostmodernJukebox, 2017) and through dancing alongside the band on tour across the world. Through her Tap Music Project intensive, Sarah teaches young tap dancers how to communicate with musicians and write music, and she produced, composed and performed her own music for her album, *New Change* (2018).

For the purposes of this research, I attended the 2018 Vancouver International Tap Dance Festival in August and participated in one of Sarah's classes. I also attended the RiFF Dallas Tap Dance Festival in January 2019 to participate in three of Sarah's classes, and to conduct an interview with her for this research. In most of her classes, Sarah taught pieces of her own choreography, emphasizing the musical connection between the steps and the rhythms and melodies in the music. In one class in Dallas, Sarah led the class through activities to develop improvisational skills and provided details of her approach as an improviser to inspire and encourage her students. In advance of presenting this research at the 2020 Vancouver International Tap Dance Festival, I spoke with Sarah on the phone to seek her support for which quotations I included in this presentation, and to gain her feedback on my interpretations of our conversation. I viewed Sarah in improvisational and choreographed performance at both the Dallas and Vancouver dance festivals.

Travis Knights

Canadian tap dancer Travis Knights (travisknights.com) has been performing professionally since 2000, when he was cast as a principal dancer in the motion picture biography of Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson, *Bojangles* (Sargent, 2001) with Gregory Hines, Savion Glover, and choreographed by the legendary Henry LeTang. Since then, Travis has toured the

world performing in various solo and company works, including Cirque du Soleil, the opening ceremonies for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, Tap Dogs, and Tapestry Dance Company. From 2017-2019, Travis hosted the Jazz United Jam, a weekly jazz jam session at the Tranzac Club in Toronto aimed at connecting musicians with dancers. He currently hosts the Tap Love Tour Podcast, which documents tap dance's diverse and complex history through interviews with many prominent and influential tap dance artists.

For the purposes of this research, I attended the 2018 Vancouver International Tap Dance Festival and participated in two of Travis's classes, travelled to Montreal and Toronto for occasional classes with him, and took a private lesson with Travis at his home in August 2019. Since I first met Travis at the Toronto Rhythm Initiative tap jam in 2014, I have had a number of opportunities to study with him. Along with fellow dancers of the Ottawa Rhythm Initiative, I performed a piece of his choreography at the 2017 Ottawa TD Jazz Festival. Each class with Travis has been slightly different, though his emphasis on musicality, connecting to tap's origins and history, and on developing individual voice remain consistent throughout. In my experience, Travis does not focus on choreography or movement phrases, but on connecting to the origins and traditions of tap dance, either through traditional time steps, or exercises focused on connecting with jazz music through improvisation. I interviewed Travis for this research at his home in August 2019 and spoke extensively with him in advance of my presentation at the 2020 Vancouver International Tap Dance Festival. Travis's input and perspective were invaluable as I prepared this presentation.

Feeling for Meaning: Motion-Sensing Data Analysis

In phenomenological research, data analysis coincides with data collection so that the researcher is constantly reflecting upon the gathered living experience descriptions to search for

the essential themes and meaning structures of the phenomenon in question (van Manen, 1990, 2014). According to van Manen, analyzing thematic meaning in phenomenological research is "not a rule-bound process but a free act of 'seeing' meaning" (van Manen, 2014, p. 320), though as previously articulated, in motion-sensing phenomenology we might rephrase this to a "free act of *'feeling'* meaning". This feeling for meaning occurred through interview transcription, and repeated reading of these transcripts and notes taken in classes with the participants to identify key themes following the Function-to-Flow conceptual framework, with an emphasis on the feeling of the phenomenon of relational flow. Additionally, analysis through a motion-sensing approach encourages researchers to "'try' out interview data that is 'texted out' because reading an excerpt from an interview is one thing, but living it is another thing altogether" (Lloyd & Smith, 2021, p. 9). For this research inquiry, this active analysis consisted of moving with and through the themes that emerged as both a teacher and an improviser myself. Review of written notes and the 'trying out' of data coincided with the consultation of key phenomenological texts, including those on the primacy of movement in dance by Sheets-Johnstone (1999/2011b, 2015b), and the material phenomenology of life by Henry (1990/2008, 2000/2015) to connect experiential descriptions with philosophical interpretations. The aim of the data analysis in motion-sensing phenomenology is to unearth the essence(s) of a phenomenon through an openness or sensitivity to its motile affects.

Through the transcription of interviews, repeated reading of these transcripts and written reflection on these interviews, I identified several themes related to the functions, forms and feelings of relational flow in inter-active, improvisational tap dancing. While the practice of writing up this research was a form of analysis, the most important element of analysis was my

own personal practice as a tap dance improviser and educator. This personal practice allowed me to take up and try out the lessons and concepts shared with me by the research participants.

Personal Practice

Over the year and a half period through which I conducted this research, my personal practices as both tap dance improviser and educator became my labs for testing out the theories and ideas I gathered through study and conversation with the participants. This personal practice included weekly training with other tap dancers in the Ottawa Rhythm Initiative ensemble through improvisation classes and tap jams, and attending regular jazz music jams at a bar in Ottawa known as Irene's Pub. With the Ottawa Rhythm Initiative ensemble, we hired Toronto-based tap dance artist Dianne Montgomery (diannemontgomery.com) to deliver a series of workshops on tap dance improvisation. Having this weekly space within which I could apply what I was learning in my interviews and study sessions to my own tap dancing, and to glean additional perspectives that complimented my research, was invaluable to this inquiry. This practice allowed me to move with and through the data as a student, to process the ideas and concepts, and to actually *feel* the *data* in my tap dancing body. This regular practice of 'trying out' the research and of physically inquiring deeper into the functions, forms and feelings of relational flow, complimented and even facilitated the writing up of the research.

As a tap dance teacher, I brought the stories and lessons gathered in conversation and study with the research participants into my classes with my dance students, including 7-18 year olds as well as adults (ranging from 20-60 years old). My approach as a teacher was significantly affected as I integrated the concepts and ideas into each class. My focus switched from one of technique and choreography to one that emphasized musicality and musical theory, history and historical repertoire, and improvisational concepts and practice. We watched videos of important

historical tap dancers as I recounted anecdotes and stories shared with me through my interviews. I taught my students much of the historical repertoire I had learned while studying with the participants, and reiterated key concepts related to the physical and musical technique for doing and being a tap dancer that I had gathered through my research process. As a group, we tried out various improvisational games and activities, focusing on applying music theory and musicality in our own dancing. Despite that I was the leader of the class as their teacher, I was also working on integrating these theories and ideas into my approach as an improviser. Through regular teaching and sharing with my students, I was able to work through the theories and concepts and consider their application to tap dance pedagogy.

Writing and Re-writing

As suggested by van Manen (1990, 2014) writing and re-writing the descriptions of feeling relational flows gathered through the research activities, as well as reflections on these descriptions, were an integral part of the data analysis. As discussed, this practice of writing and re-writing also included active engagement with the research through a practice of improvisational tap dancing. This process of moving, writing, moving and re-writing allowed me to integrate my movement practice with the experiential data gathered through inter-feels/views with expert professional tap dancers, observations of tap dancers, and descriptions of experience found in audio and textual records. Sheets-Johnstone describes the challenge of languaging lived experience in phenomenological research, that is of both speaking to lived experience as well as writing it up, with reference to psychologist Michael Stern's discussion of the "slippage between experience and words". Stern says that "periodically, some transient sense of this experience [of self] is revealed … with the breathtaking effect of sudden realization that your existential and verbal selves can be light years apart, that the self is unavoidably divided by language" (Stern,

1985, as cited in Sheets-Johnstone, 2015a, p. 29). Thus this challenge was of important consideration in this process of ongoing analysis of the interview/feel transcripts.

Through the writing and re-writing of phenomenological texts to balance the "parts and whole" (van Manen, 1990, p. 30), this research process emphasized a sensitizing to the phenomenon of relational flow as sensed through inter-active, improvisational tap dance experiences, and ultimately aims to bring a kinaesthetic awareness of relational flow moments to pedagogical practice. As described by Lloyd and Smith,

> The goal of [motion sensing phenomenology] is to describe moments of movement pleasure such that they spring to life and take on meanings that were not necessarily so obvious at the time…the onus is on the researcher to 'write up' the study such that both the researcher, the study participants, and interested readers come away (walk away and dance away) with heightened sensitivity to the movement practice being described and analyzed. (2021, p. 12).

Thus, this written product strives to elucidate living experiences of the functions, forms and feelings of relational flow in the reader through descriptive and evocative text.

Limitations and Contributions

> *Material phenomenology neither uncovers nor reveals life. The task of making life advent to itself is really beyond its powers; in order to accomplish this, philosophy truly comes too late. We are always already in life; always already life is given to us by giving us to ourselves in the pathos of its Speech*. (Henry, 1999, p. 364)

Limitations of phenomenological inquiries generally are that they do not reveal empirical generalizations, statistically reliable information, or grand conclusions. Phenomenological

inquiries do not seek to solve problems nor reveal consequential relationships. The present inquiry required that as researcher, I mediated between particularity (concreteness and difference) and universality (essences, difference that make a difference) (van Manen, 1990, p. 23), and recognized that the phenomenon of relational flow is neither eternal nor ephemeral. I necessarily maintained a strong orientation to the living experience of the phenomenon through my own practice, and while I did not dismiss my sensorial perceptions of the phenomenon, I did reflect on my preconceptions and biases in order to step into the inquiry with a “barefoot consciousness” (Lloyd and Smith, 2021, p. 5). This particular study is further limited in that it only includes the experiential descriptions of tap dancers as provided through the interviews with the research participants, and therefore excludes the perspectives of the inter-active others implicated in these descriptions (other dancers, jazz musicians, audience members, etc.). These participants, while prominent in their field, are only some of the many tap dancers who employ improvisation in their practices and therefore represent a small sample of this group of practitioners.

The “mode of musing, reflective questioning” (van Manen, 2014, p. 27) at the heart of phenomenological inquiry allows for the deeper meanings of phenomenal experience to emerge, so that we may better understand the phenomenon itself. This phenomenological research text brings the feelings of relational flow in inter-activity to life and aims to evoke the experiences of improvisational tap dancing professionals in its readers, regardless of their lived/living experience with tap dance. Through commitment to a phenomenological inquiry that emphasizes a cultivation of a motion-sensitivity to relational flow moments, this study unearths the deep meanings of relational flow in musical-moving creation with others through tap dance. This has

the potential to expand the way we learn and teach tap dancing and will open possibilities for feeling relational flow moments in other movement practices.

Overview

The three chapters which follow present some of the key ideas stemming from this phenomenological research inquiry. I begin each chapter with a discussion of assumptions deriving through personal experience as well as literature about the functions, forms and feelings of relational flow experiences in inter-active, improvisational tap dancing. This represents a sort of bracketing of these perspectives while also contributing to a deepened analysis of the given aspect of experience. I then delve into the main themes raised through the experiential inquiry, supported through participant quotations. Each chapter integrates philosophical, theoretical and practical literature to highlight areas of alignment or demonstrate where experiential data gleaned through this inquiry provides alternative perspectives for consideration. Vignettes, as described by the participants or as crafted by me reflecting my living experiences of the inquiry/study processes, are distributed throughout each chapter to encourage sensorial attunement to relational flow moments.

The first research chapter, function, discusses the fundamental movement capacities required to *be* an improvisational tap dancer and to experience relational flow moments in inter-active improvisation with others. In addition to the technique and physical capacities required to *do* tap dancing movements, the research demonstrates that a tap dancer cultivates a musical-movement repertoire comprised of qualitative dynamics of musical-movement through study and practice with experienced teachers and mentors. Through a process of refinement, this repertoire becomes synonymous with their *being* a tap dancer as their individual style – referred to as their improvisational voice or touch. Additionally, the capacity to listen and to be listening with the

other in the inter-action is also fundamental to improvising with others in inter-active tap dance performances.

The second chapter, form, reviews the visible, audible, animatable and tangible forms that form, in-form and are formed in improvisational tap dance inter-actions. Visible forms include what we see in inter-actions, such as the bodily shapes and forms of the improvisers. Audible forms comprise what we hear in these inter-actions, including the musical forms and structures that form inter-actions between musicians, dancers and music. A cultivated body knowledge of jazz music form and structure, in particular, in-forms a dancer's approach to improvisation. Forms we do in improvisational inter-actions are divided into two sections of animatable forms. The first section discusses the forms of the inter-action, including how the setting within which the inter-action occurs shapes the inter-action. The second section reviews various approaches to inter-acting in improvisational tap dancing performances, which in-form the relational flow experience. Finally, the tangible forms we feel in improvisational inter-actions are described by participants as multiple entities taking the form of one thing, such as a tornado or a musical groove.

The final research chapter presents the participants' descriptions of the various feelings of being in relational flow while inter-acting with others through improvisational tap dancing. Their descriptions illustrate feelings of connecting to, disconnecting from and transcending the self, Other and the spiritual world through improvisational tap dance inter-actions. Participants spoke of connecting to themselves and to the inter-active moment through their breath, as well as connecting to and transcending their emotional and physical states of being, which in turn allowed them to connect to the other performers or audience members in the inter-action. They shared experiential descriptions of connecting to and disconnecting from the Other inter-active

participants – the performers and the audience members. These stories demonstrated the meaning of connecting with the inter-active Other in experiencing relational flow moments. Finally, the participants described sensations of connecting to a higher power, something beyond the physical or material world – the spiritual world. Their relational flow descriptions demonstrated that improvisational tap dancing inter-actions provide opportunities for feeling the affective power of life, as described in the phenomenological work of Henry (1990/2008, 2000/2015).

In the final chapter, like the outro to a swinging jazz tune, I revisit the key themes of the previous chapters and provide some reflections on the impact of this inquiry on my personal practices both as tap dance educator and improviser.

Chapter 4: Function for Relational Flow: Voicing, Listening, *Becoming* Tap Dancer

Tap is a quintessential multipurpose form. It is dance, music and theatre, suitable for clubs, studios, street corners, chorus lines and concert halls. It is aural, visual and dramatic: it can tell a story about people, places and emotions, or about rhythm, movement and a body talking to no one but itself (Jefferson, 1998, p. 381).

Beginning this research inquiry with an analysis of the functional capacities required to flow in improvisational tap dancing inter-activities is "just a first step in attuning to the taken-for-granted realm of movement, which is our fundamental sense of agency" (Lloyd & Smith, 2021, p. 7). Such an analysis requires an orientation to the fundamental capacities required to perform tap dance movements as well as those required to inter-act through improvisational tap dancing with others. The Function to Flow website lists some of the fundamental capacities for general movements as "pushing, pulling… extending and contracting actions of the body … the body's fluidity and the maintenance of an anatomical dexterity," (Function, n.d.), though these actions do not necessarily align with the functional capacities that lay at the heart of tap dancing movements. In this chapter, I begin with an analysis of the fundamental movement and music patterns that are at the heart of tap dance actions and yet are often taken for granted, as recommended by Lloyd and Smith (2021). These fundamental musical-movements are determined to comprise the functional dimension of *doing* tap dancing. Next, I discuss key themes arising through interviews with the research participants that demonstrate that the cultivation and refinement of one's individual movement style – their improvisational *voice* or *touch* – is a fundamental aspect of *becoming* a tap dancer that enables one to function in improvisational, inter-active performances. These initial functional capacities are grouped together in this chapter as *Foundational Acts for Voicing*. Finally, I outline how interviews with

the participants revealed the function of listening in facilitating improvisational inter-actions between dancers and musicians and students and teachers. This section, titled *The Function of Acts for Listening,* discusses the meaning of listening in musical-movement inter-actions and its role in *being* an improvisational tap dancer in inter-action with others. Throughout the chapter, I propose a philosophical framing of the functional capacities required to experience relational flow with others in improvisational tap dance inter-actions. I suggest that through training and practice, a tap dancer cultivates their musical-movement repertoire. By trusting in their cultivated musical-movement repertoire, that is by thinking-in-movement as they improvise, a dancer may open themselves to being in *listening being* in relation with the improvisational other. It is this being a *listening being* in the inter-action with the other that facilitates the emergence of relational flow moments.

Part 1: Foundational Acts for Voicing

Cultivating a Fundamental Capacity for Doing Tap Dancing

To experience relational flow through improvisational tap dancing, one must first cultivate the capacity to engage in inter-action through tap dance movement as a tap dancer. This capacity comprises the musculoskeletal functions required to *do* tap dance movements, such as muscular strength and cardiovascular endurance, the fundamental movement patterns underlying tap dance movements, or steps, and skills for creating audible rhythmic and melodic patterns using those underlying tap movements. These elements of the function dimension of flow were not specifically revealed through conversations with the participants, who instead focused mainly on fundamental capacities for inter-acting with others through improvised tap dance. Therefore, to tease out the physiological-physical-kinetic capacities of *doing* tap dancing, I turn to the literature and to my own experiences as a tap dancer and tap dance educator. As tap dance

movements create both aural and visual aesthetics, *doing* tap dancing requires cultivating a sensitivity to the fundamentals of musicality in addition to a movement technique. This inherent musicality and the functions of music fundamentals to *doing* tap dancing were revealed through discussions with the participants.

Phenomenologically, tap dancing is the simultaneous creation of visible and audible patterns and phrases through dynamic shifts of bodily weight that manipulate and play with gravity's downward pull. The dance may be performed alone as a solo tap dancer, with other dancers, or with live or recorded musicians and is always inherently inter-active, driven through the inter-action of the foot with the floor and the body with gravity. To *do* tap dancing, one moves one's body in the performance of steps – a term that has many varied meanings in tap dance, describing a range of movements from the most basic elements to complex sequences. A tap dancer may refer to a step when describing "a simple transfer of weight from one foot to the other," "a combination of sounds that forms a short, identifiable phrase of one or two counts", or "a longer combination of tap steps that make up an eight-bar, sixteen-bar, or thirty-two-bar phrase" (Robbins & Wells, 2019, p. 732). Steps, for example the *paddle-and-roll* (bah ka-dee da) referenced in the introduction, provide the means through which the rhythms and sounds of tap dance are communicated. The complex history and tradition of tap dance, as briefly described in the literature review, is embedded within the steps, rhythms, and sounds that comprise its practice. Though it may not be explicitly apparent in one's phenomenological experience of the form, any bodily-lived experience of tap dance is an engagement with this history and tradition.

At its most basic physiological kinetic dimension, tap dancing requires the muscular strength and flexibility in the joints and tendons of the hips, knees and ankles to manipulate the leg and foot so as to facilitate connection between parts of the foot with the floor in ways that

create sounds of diverse tone, texture, and volume. This movement also requires the manipulation of the body's weight in relation to gravity's downward pull, and thus the strengthening of the core and other muscles required for playing between being on and off balance. One might also require the capacity for cardiovascular stamina to execute such movement patterns over any given period of time, determinant upon the specific performance setting (for example, a two-hour rehearsal, an hour-long show, or a five-minute song). The pedagogical literature reviewed in the previous chapter describes various approaches to cultivating these musculoskeletal functions through tap dance technique training (e.g., tap dance syllabi such as the Al Gilbert Tap Syllabus or the Associated Dance Arts for Professional Teachers syllabus).

To discern the fundamental movement patterns at the heart of tap dance steps, I turn to tap soloist, choreographer and master teacher Acia Gray's guidebook, *The Souls of Your Feet* (1998), wherein she has proposed the five basic movement functions or "skeleton steps" underlying all tap dance steps: fall, drop, pull, throw and lift.[10] This full-bodied concept, which she refers to as "The Creation Five", requires that the dancer work from a relaxed body posture to initiate movement in the legs and ankles from the hip. The hips, accordingly, "are actually the heart of all movement; wherever they go, you go…If you're 'over your hips' you can be grounded and balanced…" (p. 22). Gray's emphasis on the centring of tap dance movement initiation in the hips and pelvis aligns her approach to teaching tap dancing in the art form's roots as an African American form. In *Africanist Elements in American Jazz Dance,* Julie Kerr-Berry includes "Movement Initiated from the Hips" as one of 11 key Africanist elements that

[10] The skeleton steps include: fall ("Movement that shifts your full weight letting your body '*fall*' into the floor"); drop ("Movement that is motivated by '*dropping'* your leg to the floor without a transfer of full body weight"); pull ("Movement that requires '*pulling'* your leg from your hip"); throw ("Movement that requires *'throwing'* your leg from your hip"), and; lift ("Movement that requires *'lifting'* your leg.") (Gray, 1998, pp. 45-46).

characterize jazz dancing (the term jazz dancing is inclusive of tap dance here) (2022, p. 87). Quoting Stearns and Stearns (1968/1994) who describe this element as movement that "is centrifugal, exploding outward from the hips" (p. 15), Kerr-Berry explains that Africanist aesthetics emphasize the pelvis as "a flexible center from which movement originates and radiates outward from this central core to the body's distal points" (2022, p. 87). Thus, Gray's Creation Five method, which emphasizes movement initiation in the hips, reinforces the Africanist tradition that lies at the roots of tap dancing.

The fundamental structures of movement patterns identified by Lloyd and Smith (2021) - pushing, pulling, extending and contracting actions – are embedded within Gray's five skeleton steps. Through falling, dropping, pulling, throwing and lifting from the centre of one's body, one cultivates a kinaesthetic awareness of one's centre of gravity over one's hips to facilitate shifts of weight and movement in the legs. Pushing, pulling, extending and contracting movements are performed in both legs – one leg acts as the "working leg" whereby an extension or contraction of the hip flexor initiates one of the five motions, and the other leg as the "supporting" leg with a relaxed bend in the knee that facilitates balance and stability over the hips. As Gray notes, dancers must cultivate a "knowledge of where [their] body is 'standing' and balanced when making sounds" (1998, p. 46) through these actions. She provides a *warmup* with suggested exercises for "finding" and developing this balance with the weight placed on the ball of the foot, somewhere between a flat foot and a "high" "*relevé,"* accordingly "where a ballet teacher won't let you balance!" (Gray, 1998, p. 63). The *warmup* also focuses on releasing held tension in the knees and ankles before the dancer proceeds to practice what she refers to as the "ABCs" or the "basics," steps that produce single, double and triple sounds (1998, p. 63-65). Gray specifically makes no reference to the use of the upper body in tap dance movement execution unless where

required to uphold the traditional aesthetics of vernacular steps, such as her note that a step referred to as *Shorty George* is "usually accompanied by pointed fingers to the ground" (1998, p. 139). Thus, the fundamental movement patterns Gray has identified facilitate the dual creation of visual and aural aesthetics through tap dance movements, producing both moving shapes and images, and rhythm and melody.

The technical approach described in *The Souls of Your Feet* (1998) provides one perspective on the initiation of tap dance movement and contributes to our understanding of what fundamental capacities are required firstly to tap dance, and then eventually to improvise as a tap dancer. Gray explains, however, that her full-bodied concept for teaching and learning tap dance movement is not the only way one might approach tap dancing:

> Full leg motivation is one of many different styles of tap technique. Many excellent tap dancers motivate their movements from their knees and ankles. However, my teaching and dancing style is based in the movement of the entire body and utilizes a relaxed action of the leg from the hips…The more advanced you become with this technique, in fact, the more you will be asked to actually dance with straight relaxed legs rather than … with bent knees … as many teachers train. This does not mean you don't bend your knees. On the contrary, your knees will bend at times when transferring your weight! Your knees, however, are not initiators of the sounds and action. (p. 71)

Through a focus on the initiation of sound and action in the hips with a relaxed feel, Gray's approach emphasizes the dual purpose of tap dance movements – the creation of aural and visual effects – and roots technique in tap dance's Africanist tradition. It facilitates the cultivation of a technique that is just as musical as it is movement-based. Although her "full leg motivation" approach that breaks down tap dance steps into their "skeletal" versions is only one way of

approaching tap dancing, it provides dancers with a functional basis from which they can then move towards performing combinations of the basics into more complex steps.

As a musical-moving form, tap dance also requires the cultivation of an embodied understanding of the fundamentals of music, namely dynamics in volume, rhythm, melody, harmony, and form. At the heart of these fundamentals are capacities for feeling time, tempo, tone, texture and timbre. In *Ear Training for the Body: A Dancer's Guide to Music,* Katherine Teck (1994) provides a movement-oriented approach for understanding and sensitizing to these music fundamentals. Teck describes each musical concept as it relates to ballet and modern dance experiences and then suggests exercises for engaging dance students in these concepts. Like the tap dance movement reference manuals and syllabi, Teck's guide to music for dancers breaks down technical concepts and presents pedagogical approaches through which teachers may engage their students.

To begin her analysis of sound and silence in relation to dance movement, Teck states that "all sound begins with movement. Something has to move back and forth in order for a tone to be produced; physical vibration must occur for silence to be broken with sound" (1994, p. 73). It is true that in order to create an aurally-experienced sound, physical vibration must occur and therefore some physical movement must precede the sound. But in tap dance, is it possible or even necessary to say with such certainty that movement *precedes* musical creation? Perhaps, as research participant Sarah describes below, an intention for musical creation actually underlies the tap dancer's movement expression:

> I guess tone awareness and playing the shoe as an instrument and knowing what a heel drop feels like and sounds like, and the intention of the heel drop, a heavy bass drum versus a toe tap, and how that can be more high pitched and more relaxed, just the tone of

> it is higher versus the toe knock. The tip of the toe has a deeper tone, and just playing it. I always want to teach my students to scat things, to sing the rhythms, and not just like *da da da da* [Sarah scats this in monotone], but more like *digga doo go da* [Sarah sings this on a descending melodic scale] because that's how [my teacher] Paul Kennedy used to teach us – [Sarah sings like Paul Kennedy as an example]. So, as a kid I was understanding rhythm as melody whether I was actually applying that or not, I just understood that as melody.

Here, Sarah specifically addresses the relationship between the fundamentals of tap dance movements and those of music, particularly rhythm and melody. This comment asserts that in addition to creating rhythms, tap dance movements create tones and textures, therefore an awareness and sensitivity to these fundamentals of music, in addition to the fundamentals of movement, is foundational to *doing* tap dancing. She speaks to the affectivity of tap dance movement and sounds when she refers to the *feeling* of the movement; she says that tap dancing is "knowing what a heel drop feels like and sounds like." Developing this feeling for the sounds – tones, textures, timbres – both created through and driving the creation of tap dance movements is a sensitizing to the nuances of one's instrument. In playing their instrument – their shoe (with or without metal taps) – Sarah's tap dance students are encouraged to *sing* the melody of the music they're playing, rather than vocalizing only its rhythm. Through Sarah's comment, we can begin to understand the relationship between *doing* tap dancing and *playing* music, as she speaks to the musical intent embedded within the tap dance movement expression. Thus, we might argue that, in the phenomenological experience of tap dance, movement and music are mutually dependent and concurrent. Therefore, I suggest we henceforth refer to the fundamental

capacities for *doing* tap dancing as *musical-movement capacities* in order to reflect this relationship.

Through the above overview of the fundamental musical-movement capacities required to *do* tap dancing, we can begin to see the functional dimension of flowing as a tap dancer. Musical-movement capacities for *doing* tap dance steps that create rhythms and melodies are foundational capacities required to improvise as a tap dancer in inter-action with others, but are not the only functional aspects of *becoming* a tap dance improviser, nor of *being* an improviser and experiencing relational flow.

From Doing Tap Dancing to Being a Tap Dancer: A Process of Becoming

"Da-DUM daa DUM sha-doo boom BA-doo da da-doom ga-gun ga-gun." Dianne stands at the front of the room facing the mirror. "Let's start with this – repeat after me" she says as she plays the step again. "Do you know what that is?" she asks the class. Though the exact steps may be foggy in my memory, the rhythm rings clearly in my ears and I know it's the first swinging time step from Leon Collins's Routine 2. She repeats the phrase again – a4 a1 a2 a3 a4 a1 a2 a3 – and the steps come back to me – chug-chug chug-chug brush step stomp brush step stomp brush step flap[11] *flap. It's clear that most of the other students also already know the step because they continue with the second half of the phrase – da-da-da-da DUM sha-doo boom BA-doo da da-doom gah gah gah gah sha dun – Dianne holds her hands up to stop the class. "You know it, but you don't really know it. You've got to let it move you. Forward and back. Forward and back. The step pushes you front and then pulls you back." I repeat the phrase, only this time,*

[11] A 2-sound tap dance step wherein the ball tap strikes the floor as the leg throws forward and out and then rests on the floor with a transfer of weight.

I allow my heels to push me forward as they drop in the chugs, and the back brushes to pull me back.

Through my own training and interviews with the research participants, I became aware of a difference between *doing* tap dancing actions – the physical-physiological motions of steps that create rhythms, tones, melodies, etc. – and *being* a tap dance improviser – expressing and communicating in inter-active tap dance improvisations with others. Further, between *doing* tap dance actions and *being* a tap dance improviser lies a process of becoming – through training, studying and practice with elder tap dance teachers and mentors. Dianne speaks to this process, and specifically its role in developing a dancer's improvisational capacity, as she describes the relationship between foundations for "sameness" and "individuality":

> [My teacher and mentor] Leon [Collins] had developed a process that was so effective that everybody who came through that door, some of the most unlikely to succeed, could succeed. Everybody came through and went through this process and came out and knew how to dance. And, they could all dance and they could all then venture off. After that sameness, they became individual. It's a process, you don't start being the individual, you got to learn your foundations. … If I'm giving you a step, if the reason I'm here is to give you a step, I want you to do it the way I say now. You can say you want dancers to be individual, and there's a time for that, this is not that time. This is the time for you to learn this lesson, and this is why that is important. Look at me and look at you and look at the difference, and we will do it in the mirror…

Accordingly, to *become* an individual improviser, a dancer "takes" lessons from their teacher, lessons passed down from their own teachers or gleaned through their experiences as

improvisers, which build up the dancer's capacity to do the dance steps. These foundations – ways of being a tap dancer gleaned through the experiences of others – provide a starting point from where the dancer may then grow and develop their own individuality, their own approach as a tap dancer. Once a dancer has honed their capacity to *do* tap dancing actions by studying those of other tap dancers, they may "venture off" to *become* their own individual tap dance improviser.

Building a Musical-Movement Repertoire of "I Can's"

Through this process of study, training and practice and of 'taking' or gathering foundations from their teachers and mentors, a dancer cultivates their physical capacity to *do* tap dancing movements. To deepen our understanding of this process and the many lessons embedded within, I turn to Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenology of movement and dance. This process of training and practice builds up what Sheets-Johnstone refers to as a dancer's "movement repertoire of "I can's". Accordingly, a movement repertoire is a "kinesthetic memory" of "familiar and habitual ways of moving" and the "qualitative dynamics that inform those familiar and habitual ways of moving" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2017, p. 12). Such ways of moving are "I can's"; after repetition and practice, I can move, walk, run, wave my hand, ride a bike or drive my car without the direction of attentional energy to my movements, just as I can *shuffle, paddle and roll,* or *riff* after years of training as a tap dancer. From infancy, we learn our bodies and learn to move ourselves by "attending to our own movement... [forging] an untold number of dynamic patterns that became habitual" (2011a, p. 43). These "familiar dynamics … are woven into our bodies and played out along the lines of our bodies; they are kinesthetic/kinetic melodies in both a neurological and experiential sense" (2011a, p. 43). Just as in day-to-day movement improvisations such as walking, eating, and typing on a keyboard one

taps into the dynamic patterns of "primal animation," tap dancers cultivate similar "familiar and habitual ways of moving" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2017, 1999/2011b) through the training, study and practice of tap dance movements, rhythms and music.

Though the movement repertoire of an experienced tap dancer is more specialized than that of individuals without the same training and practice, everyone has cultivated a movement repertoire of "I can's" in some capacity. For example, I have typed so many letters, words, phrases and pages over my many years of schooling that no separation exists between my thinking which words to write and my clicking the keys on my keyboard to make them appear on the screen. I do not *think* – I will write this thought or that thought and then instruct my fingers to type the letters t-h-o-u-g-h-t – rather the thought itself emerges as my fingers brush the keys, a nearly if not exactly instantaneous connection between my typing movements and the thought itself coming into fruition on the page. At first, an inexperienced tap dancer might be cognitively-consciously aware of the muscles in her hips and knees as she lifts and drops her leg to the floor, precisely pressing through the ball tap and then the heel in sequential order so as to create a ball-heel (or toe-heel) drop. This same cognitive, attentional consciousness was focused when I learned to type, as I directed my visual attention to the keys, mentally instructing my fingers to press specific ones before the location of keys on the keyboard became so familiar to me that I no longer needed to direct this visual awareness. Instead, my fingers quite literally *know* where the keys are, and in moving across the keyboard, they *speak,* thoughts forming and streaming at once. A tap dancer develops a similar knowing through repeated practice in lifting and dropping, pressing and weight-shifting movements that become one ball-heel motion that requires no cognitive-conscious thought to perform. The ball heel becomes ingrained in the dancer's movement repertoire – I *can* ball heel, just as I *can* lift, drop and press my fingers into

the keys on a keyboard – I *can* type. Experientially, it is as if this consciousness, which at first may live in my head as a cognitive consciousness, is now in my whole body, and in effect, my whole being.

This movement repertoire of "I can's" constitutes a different type of kinaesthetic memory than the "storehouse of steps" that Robbins and Wells (2019) adopted from Berliner (1994). The storehouse of steps describes a container-like space in one's memory that houses all the steps one has learned over time. To perform specific steps, a tap dancer supposedly recalls a step from their storehouse memory and then actions this step by cognitively directing movements of their body. It's as if one's dance memory is a toolbox, and the steps are the tools one uses to dance. But as Dianne suggested in our interview, learning to tap dance is about more than building one's toolbox of steps:

> I listen to a lot of people, they say, "Dianne teaches a lot of steps. It's just not about steps, it's just steps you know, it's a lot of steps! Blah blah …" And I just look at these people and I say they don't get it; they don't understand. The steps are the gimmick – they are the gimmick to teach the lesson, it's not the step… [dancers] go through a period where, people, I want you to look like me, you're paying me to teach you, you take everything I give you. If I do this (*gesturing with her arm with a soft quality*), don't give me this (*gesturing with her arm with a sharp, hard quality)* that's not what I did … I wanna see you do *that* because *that's* what I gave you to do. If I lift my head or my eyebrow, take that too because that's what you paid for and if you don't take that you've shortened yourself out of what I'm trying to give you. It's everything that I'm trying to give you.

Though Dianne did not specify this, through classes and training with her, I can discern that the steps she teaches are the "gimmick" through which lessons of space, shape, time, tension and energy are passed down and integrated into her students' capacities to tap dance. Dianne shares a unique and specific intention that is embedded within the rhythm and motion of the tap dance steps that she teaches her students. Perhaps the focus is on an intentional energy or weight transfer, a particular quality of sound, or a direction or shape for the movement, which creates a certain visual affect and aesthetic. Lessons learned through studying with Dianne illustrate how the *what* of *doing* tap dancing – the steps, the rhythms, the music – is only one aspect of being a tap dancer. *How* one dances is another element to consider as we build our understanding of the foundational acts for voicing oneself through tap dancing in inter-active improvisation with others.

I turn again to Sheets-Johnstone, who suggests that a movement repertoire of "I can's" comprises more than simply steps or bodily actions for movement; qualitative aspects of movement, referred to as the felt qualitative dynamics of movement experience, are embedded in one's movement "I can's". She explains:

> Tensional, linear, areal and projectional aspects of movement are *qualitative* aspects of movement that together constitute its dynamics. They are qualities apparent in any movement…Being dynamically engendered, each quality is part of a total qualitatively felt dynamic, as in a sustained or sudden reaching for a glass of water, in an intense or relaxed manner of brushing one's teeth … and so on. (2011a, p. 44, italics in original)

As we begin to consider the qualitative aspects of tap dance movements, it is useful to refer to Sheets-Johnstone's expanded descriptions:

> Tensional quality specifies the felt intensity of a movement, an intensity that may well change in the course of the movement … Linear quality describes both the linear design of a moving body and the linear pattern of the movement itself…. Areal quality, like linear quality, has two aspects that again are obviously spatial. They derive from the moving body and from movement itself, areal design describing the former, areal pattern describing the latter… the areal design of our moving body may be anywhere from constricted to expansive, its shape at the one extreme being predominantly small and inwardly oriented and at the other extreme being predominantly large and outwardly oriented. Similarly, the areal pattern of our movement may be generally described as anywhere from intensive to extensive, the spatial amplitude of our movement itself being anywhere from small to large… Projectional quality is apparent in the manner in which our movement unfolds, the way in which its tensional quality is kinetically manifest… four different qualities are possible: abrupt, sustained, ballistic, and collapsing. Infinite degrees of shading are possible within these basic qualities. Moreover, a movement may be a combination of these qualities… (2011a, pp. 45-46).

Accordingly, a tap dancer's cultivated movement repertoire comprises more than actions for muscular contraction and extension that enable the dancer to dance tap dance movements. A movement's temporality is reflected in its tensional and projectional qualities – for example, dynamics in energy and speed – while its spatiality is constituted in its linear and areal qualities – direction and shape, among others. These aspects of movement are what form its *how* or its *ways of being* movement, "its intensity, expansiveness, rigidity, unswervingness, suddenness, and so on" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011a, p. 46). These dynamics constitute movement's mode of being, and describe more than simply its actions or acts, more than its contractions and elongations but

also its characteristics that give it affect. In the quotation above, Dianne demonstrates this difference with a wave of her arm, first as soft and light, and second as heavy and strong. Just as Dianne reiterates that a dance student learns and adopts these 'lessons' through study with their teachers and mentors, Sheets-Johnstone says that these dynamics are learned, become familiar, and "are woven into our bodies and are played out along the lines of our bodies; they are kinesthetic/kinetic melodies in both a neurological and experiential sense" (1999/2011b, p. 469).

Dianne demonstrates the second 8-bar phrase of Routine 2, noting the change from swing to straight time. "This time, you're moving side to side. I go over here, 'hello!', but now this leg pulls me back and side and now I am over here. Don't move your gaze until you're there, really allow yourself to fall over that leg once you get there". She scuffs[12] *her right foot out and across her left, leaving it there as she drops her left heel twice until at the last second, she pulls back her right foot with a brush step, shifting her weight in her hips as she begins to travel from left to right. Her eyes remain fixed where her scuffed leg had been until the third and final flap heel on the right foot brings her weight fully over her right hip. Only then does she allow her focus to shift from left to right and then centre, as she crosses her legs in a ball change to do it again. "The shuffle dig heels turn you, from here (the left), to here (the right). But don't just turn your hips, bring your whole body with you, and that includes your eyes".*

In Dianne's teaching, elements of movement style – for example, qualitative dynamics of movement such as energy, spatiality, and duration – are just as important as the physical manipulations of the feet required to create specific rhythms and melodies through the steps she shares in her classes. Dianne's approach emphasizes the qualitative depth and complex meanings

[12] A 1-sound tap dance step in which the heel strikes the floor as the leg throws out and forward (the foot does not rest on the floor as in a dig but is instead lifted/off the floor upon completion of the scuff).

embedded within each single or collective step she shares. Thus, the steps Dianne teaches are the gimmick through which she conveys lessons of movement style and musicality, fundamental elements that bring a tap dancer from one who *does* tap dancing to one who *is* a dancer. These elements bring vitality into the movements of tap dancing.

These "parameters of movement" bring tap dancing movements to life as they are, according to Sheets-Johnstone, both observable and kinaesthetically felt by whomever is moving (2011a, p. 46). If these qualitative dynamics of movement are both visually and kinaesthetically experienced by the mover, and if, as they relate to tap dance movements, these qualitative dynamics are also related to the production of sound and rhythm – tone, texture, timbre, time – then we must also be able to aurally experience these dynamics. Therefore, while Sheets-Johnstone emphasizes the kinaesthetic-kinetic aspect of the tensional, linear, areal and projectional qualities of movement that constitute our movement repertoires of "I can's", we might also suggest that, in relation to tap dance (and, presumably, other percussive dance forms), we must also be able to hear and listen to at least some of these qualities. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, I take Sheets-Johnstone's theoretical framing of a dancer's movement repertoire of "I can's" and expand this repertoire to propose a tap dancer develops a musical-movement repertoire of "I can's", constituted of musical-movement qualitative dynamics that are experienced visually, kinaesthetically-kinetically, and aurally.

Thus far, I have examined what constitutes tap dance movement actions – including the fundamental functions required to *do* tap dance, and the musical sense and know-how to create sounds that are the rhythms and melodies of tap dancing. I have also shown, through Dianne's assertion that the steps are the gimmick, that *doing* tap dancing is also more than recreating mechanical actions as steps in the creation of rhythms and melodies; to *be* a tap dancer, one

practices the qualitative dynamics of movement that constitute the *how* of one's musical-movement repertoire of "I can's".

Next, I will discuss how one cultivates this repertoire, comprised of qualitative dynamics of musical movement, through study and practice with one's mentors and teachers. Then, I will also propose how this repertoire is a fundamental capacity for inter-action through improvisational tap dancing.

As I have shown through conversation with Dianne, a tap dancer develops their own individual approach to tap dancing, builds their movement repertoire of "I can's" – that is, they *become* a tap dancer – by first learning elements of musicality and movement style through study with more experienced teachers and mentors. Tap dancers integrate the qualitative movement dynamics of their teachers and mentors into their own movement repertoires. As Dianne suggests, study under a mentor is not simply about learning and perfecting tap dance steps; it is about integrating their style comprised of qualitative movement dynamics into one's own approach. Through incorporating many and multiple approaches to voicing as a tap dancer into your own practice, you may bring together many different *hows* to develop your own *how;* your own approach to voicing. Dianne refers to this process directly in the quotation below:

> So, I'm not trying to teach you that this is the only thing. I only take a little section of all of this, this is my little section that I work on, and I'm trying to teach you this. I'm not saying this is going to be your all, but just learn this for what this is and then go ahead and learn that for what it is. And then at the end of all that learning that you had everywhere, you're going to be fantastic as a dancer. You make the choice as to what you want to do, but when you're learning it, you really need to learn it and what it is.

The steps, rhythms and melodies a dancer integrates into their musical-movement repertoire through study under teachers and mentors are imbued with tensional, areal, linear and projectional qualitative dynamics that distinguish tap dancers from one another. To develop their own individual tap dance voice, through which they may inter-act with other tap dancers and musicians in improvisational performance, tap dancers should gather as many approaches to the dance from their teachers as they can. For Dianne, a tap dancer cultivates their musical-movement repertoire through ingraining the movement style and approach – that is, the sensorially experienced qualitative dynamics of tap dance movements – of these teachers and mentors, into their own style and approach.

From Repertoire to Style: Becoming Tap Dancer

1 – Study and Style

In expanding upon the process through which a tap dancer learns from their teachers to develop their own style and approach, Dianne shared a story that illustrates both how a dancer's qualitative movement dynamics may come to represent them as their individual style, and how this style may be transferred from a teacher to their students, indicative of their influence:

> I had a class where I taught a combination and this beautiful dancer … we all know and love … I was teaching something and at the end of the whole thing she, of course I love the way she moves, I said "Come up here and do this by yourself". Everyone applauded and I said, "Hold up! Who does she look like?" and they said "Billy Siegenfeld!" … [He has] beautiful movement, [he's very] stylistic, Billy has these hands … "So [the dancer] did *my* combination looking like Billy Siegenfeld? She looked more like him than he did!" They applauded that, so I said, "Hold that, so how is it that at the end of MY class you take this combination and you look more like Billy Siegenfeld than you look like me? Ain't his,

> it's mine! So how does it happen?" They all went like this (*makes a face with wide eyes and tight lips)* I said, "Are you all paying attention?" It's not like that didn't look good; it was fabulous! But … did she get the intention of what I was trying to teach for that day? No! She missed that intention. "That's what you missed because you've got the Billy thing, you can do that in HIS class, you can't imply Billy's intention over my work and expect it to be correct". So, you gotta think about when you're in class with Billy, you're in class with Brenda or Heather or me, you take THAT class, don't bring ideology from other teachers into that room. At that moment, you're in class, you're not in improvisational, go-for-yourself-moment. So that became more the lesson and I had them do it again, pay attention to it, it goes this way … because the intention is [this] *(moving her arms with a particular quality)* and then you get the style.

This anecdote demonstrates both the presence and role of qualitative movement dynamics in tap dancing. It demonstrates the relationship between a dancer's style and the qualitative movement dynamics that comprise their repertoire of "I can's", and reveals how this style (comprised of particular qualitative movement dynamics) may be adopted and integrated into the musical-movement repertoire of one's students.

Upon closer review, we may discern three aspects about tap dance study and style from this anecdote. Firstly, Dianne's referral to the dancer's style – the 'way she moves', what she 'looks like', and Billy's 'intention', and 'ideology' versus that which she was teaching in 'the lesson' speaks to qualitative dynamics of the movement – the *how* of doing movement that gives it particular qualities that become referent of particular movers – that become a dancer's movement style. Perhaps, in this situation, it was the *way* in which the dancer in Dianne's class used her hands *just so* that *looked* like the way Billy Siegenfeld would use his hands. Perhaps it

is how she projected her body in the space, or the amount of tension and levity she held in her arms. What Dianne is referring to when she speaks of the dancer's style could be any number of qualitative dynamics that constitute the style she associates with Billy Siegenfeld's dancing and his being as a tap and jazz dancer and teacher, and therefore demonstrates the dancer's study under his tutelage. Secondly, this anecdote reveals that qualitative dynamics of movement are not attached to a specific movement or step in one's musical-movement repertoire, rather, they together constitute a *way of moving* that may be transferred from step to step. Thus, one's musical-movement repertoire is more than a toolbox of steps. Tensional, linear, areal and projectional dynamics of moving become ways of being in tap dance motion that infuse a dancer's movements beyond those with which they were originally constituted in one's musical-movement repertoire of "I can's". Thus, they may "come out" even when the dancer may be dancing the movements of another teacher/dancer that have different and even specific qualitative dynamics. Lastly, this story reveals how one's musical-movement repertoire of "I can's", comprised of qualitative dynamics of movement, may infuse one's dancing even when one is dancing the movements of another, and even when these movements, as passed from the other, intend to be constituted of different qualitative dynamics.

Returning briefly to Robbins and Wells (2019)'s assessment of improvisational processes in tap dancing, we might compare the phenomenon described above to that of intermusicality adopted from Monson (1996). Intermusicality, as applied by Robbins and Wells (2019), describes improvisational approaches whereby a tap dancer intentionally "braids" or "layers" well-known steps, rhythms and movement styles into their improvisational performances, often paying homage to innovators of the dance by whom the improviser is inspired. The transference of sensorially experienced qualitative dynamics of tap dance movement from one dancer to

another, as appears to be the case with Dianne's story of the Billy Siegenfeld dancer, is an interaction on a deeper level. Firstly, the reproduction of the dancer's style may be unintentional (as is the case, presumably, with the dancer in Dianne's story), given that the dancer has trained so intimately with a teacher that the teacher's style – tensional, linear, areal and projectional qualities associated with their particular ways of moving as tap dancers, dynamic choices they make in their approach to tap dance movement – becomes ingrained within the developing musical-movement repertoire of the student. The teacher's choice of qualitative dynamics become learned and associated with these tap dance movements and then, in moving from their repertoire, the student resembles (and, perhaps, may also feel and sound like) their teacher. This resembling is more than the student reproducing the steps and rhythms of their teacher. It is the student applying the specific qualitative movement dynamic choices learned through study under their teacher to all tap dance movements performed thereafter. This is why Billy Siegenfeld's student could *look* like him while dancing Dianne's choreography. The student's musical-movement repertoire was so infused with Siegenfeld's style – the choices in qualitative movement dynamics that have become synonymous with his approach as a tap dancer – that she moved in, with and through them even as she was dancing the steps, rhythms and movement choreography of Dianne. One might compare this phenomenon to writing: where intermusicality is akin to one author quoting another author or researcher within their text, the transfer of qualitative movement dynamics would be like this author writing with a similar tone or voice as the other author.

Therefore, through the example of the Billy Seigenfeld dancer in Dianne's class, we have learned how one dancer's habitual tensional, linear, areal and projectional dynamic choices are related to and even become signature of their style, of their *ways* of being in movement. Given

that these qualitative movement dynamics comprise their musical-movement repertoire of "I can's", and given that it is the nuanced and varied qualitative movement dynamics that may distinguish one dancer's influence and presence from another's, I wish to assert that one's individual tap dancing style is akin to this musical-movement repertoire. Thus, through study and practice under elder teachers and mentors, a tap dancer integrates their teacher's style – their musical-movement repertoire of "I can's" – as they grow and develop their own repertoire, which eventually becomes their own style as a dancer.

2 – Shedding and Style

Conversations with research participants begin to illuminate how developing qualitative movement dynamics, cultivated into one's kinaesthetic memory as a musical-movement repertoire of "I can's", are part of the process of becoming a tap dancer and, in effect, developing one's improvisational tap dance voice. According to Sarah, the process of becoming a tap dance improviser includes "shedding" in addition to developing one's foundations through training and practice. Like refining one's handwriting, a tap dancer refines their approach as an improviser through this process:

> That's part of the training … your hours. Show me the hours put in, then … you can get to a point… it's like handwriting. You know, like you can tell a kindergartener's handwriting from an adult, an old person, but I can tell that's an adult who wrote that versus a kid. You know you haven't practiced enough to get your own style and it's your own style, you can tell your own handwriting, [it's] very different from anyone else's. It's very much like handwriting. You're developing yourself, so improvisation is where you develop yourself and that's highly encouraged in tap dancing; to do you and … you

> walk into a tap class, everyone has different coloured shoes, everyone's wearing their own thing versus [in] ballet, everyone [is] in the same tights and leotard and bun and that's that. We [in tap] are the complete opposite, come as you are, I teach you some rhythms and the way you dance it is different from everyone else you know. But the improvisation, that's you, that's all you, so it's a matter of shedding yourself; 'shed yo-self'.

Study and practice, the repeated cultivation of one's musical-movement repertoire, and improvisational exploration through shedding, are the means through which one cultivates one's individuality as a tap dancer. Sarah speaks of the development of one's individual style, which takes time, experience, and practice and comes to symbolize one's identity – to represent them. A handwritten signature on the dotted line of a document certifies one's agreement with the terms outlined in that document. This signature symbolizes their being in agreement with something and represents this being. Expert handwriting analysts are called upon in court to analyze the style of one person's writing against another, so that one might confirm the identity of the writer. These examples demonstrate how someone's handwriting comes to represent them as an individual – just as one's musical-movement repertoire of "I can's" comes to constitute their style, and this style may come to represent them as a tap dancer.

Additionally, Sarah employs the phrase, "shed yo-self" to describe the process through which a dancer develops their own improvisational approach, voice or *signature.* To "shed" one's self in tap dance derives through the term "woodshedding," a phrase commonly employed by both tap dancers and musicians to describe a process of continuous, solitary practice with intense focus on developing and honing one's technique and style. The term derives through the idea of locking oneself in a woodshed, or in the case of Charles 'Honi' Coles, a room (Tap

Dancing on Record, 2018) for an extended period of time. Honi Coles, Brenda Bufalino's mentor and dancing partner, described locking himself in a room and practicing for 12-14 hours a day for an entire year until he emerged with "the fastest feet in show business" (Tap Dancing on Record, 2018).

While the phrase 'shedding' originates through the idea of being out in the woodshed, one might inquire deeper into the connections between "shedding wood" or "shedding" and *becoming* a tap dancer. Tap dancing sounds and rhythms are best articulated when created through the contact of metal or wood taps and solid wood flooring. The sound created through this contact is clearer, crisper, richer and more resonant than if a dancer is dancing on other types of flooring, such as rubber or linoleum. Over time, as the metal tap connects with the wooden floor, it may appear to wear down the floor, sometimes even chipping the wood where it is softer. So, in effect, a woodshedding tap dancer may actually be shedding wood in the act of continuous practice on a wood floor. As I inquire deeper into what it means to shed, I am reminded of a reptile who sheds its skin as it grows, leaving its old skin for a new one. This shedding process releases dead skin cells to create a fresh, vibrant, new layer atop. Its old skin too small, a reptile necessarily sheds to enable growth. Like a reptile, a tap dancer sheds their old skin – their held presuppositions, rhythmic tendencies, dynamic movement qualities, etc., gleaned through practice and study with their teachers, mentors, etc. – so they too may continue to grow and evolve into their own unique dancer, develop their own rhythmic tendencies, dynamic movement qualities, etc., with their own unique, improvisational voice. Perhaps shedding yourself as a tap dancer is the process of peeling away the layers of style, rhythm, and melody cultivated through study and practice with elder mentors and teachers to further develop your being as an individual dancer. Through continuous, solitary practice and focus on one's

individual self as a dancer, a tap dancer sheds their cultivated layers to unearth their individual tap dance voice, their unique way of 'speaking' with their feet – their unique style.

Heather similarly described a process that a dancer must go through to develop their individual improvisational voice:

> If you look at young dancers, you'll see they use a lot more effort than more mature performers. A lot of the times they're not as in control of that effort, so they need to make it bigger. So, if you look at really mature performers like Cookie Cook, Buster Brown and those guys, Honi Coles, they've distilled who they are down to a place of deep groove and time, and they don't need anymore to get out there and wow, you know? What they need is just to express themselves in this distillation of who they are. It's like the difference between wine and cognac.

Heather compares the process of distillation, through which a tap dancer develops into "who they are," to the difference between wine and cognac. While both wine and cognac are made from the juice of fermented grapes, the processes they go through to become what they are, wine or cognac, are very different. Wine, which can be made from the fermentation of the juice of a wide variety of grapes, is distilled once and must only be aged a minimum of two to three weeks before it can be bottled. Cognac, on the other hand, is made from the pure wine of a single grape variety, Ugni Blanc, and requires a two-part distillation process with a much longer aging period. The first phase of distillation separates the alcohol from the highly-acidic, sulfate-free wine to create a cloudy liquid called *brouillis* ("foggy" or "cloudy"). A second process of distillation further concentrates the alcohol volume into *eau de vie* ('water of life'), which is then aged in barrels for a minimum of two years, though it may generally be aged for much longer before it can be bottled.

Like cognac, the greatest tap masters, including Heather's mentors Cookie Cook and Buster Brown, spent their whole lives honing their craft as tap dance artists, taking years to refine their individual tap dance voices until they had *distilled* who they were as tap dancers down to fundamental qualities of, accordingly, *groove* and *time*. They began, like cognac, as a wine – created through one process of study, training and individual practice – and then deepened and developed their approach through an additional process of refinement that sifted through layers of style and technique to discover what symbolized them as unique tap dancers, the greatest of whom are able to literally tap into what makes them stand out.

Heather recalled what it was like to perform alongside her mentors, Cookie and Buster, revealing further details of the distinctions between the wine (youth) and the cognac (elders):

> When I had [my company] Manhattan Tap, we always had guest artists and we had Cookie Cook and Eddy Brown and Buster Brown, Steve Condos, you know all these great dancers who were in their late 60s and 70s. And we would go out there and we would dance our hearts out and present and present and present and push and push and push and everyone would go "YAY" when we left the stage. And then Cookie would walk on stage, he'd look very curmudgeonly at the audience, he'd flip his hat up in the air go to catch it, miss it and everyone would go crazy, all he had to do was stand there he had so much groove, you know, where as we were trying so hard and then he would do nothing and people would fall in love with him… it's the difference between the wisdom and the youth. … the wine and the cognac …

I asked Heather to clarify the relationship between her mentors' ages and wisdom and their ability to connect with their audiences as tap dancers. I asked, what movement, music or performance qualities facilitated their connection with others?

> If you look at any of these performers, these Vaudevillians, I met them in their mid-60s. And if you look at the footage from when they were younger, it's the exact same transition. They're like *voom* they're out there; you feel things differently when you're younger, and I think that's why people … as they age, they sink deeper into their art. … nobody is born, one would hope, 80 years old. You get there, everything is a process… the youth are not going to figure that out without the wisdom of … being able to see what it could be … all of the ego and the 'look at me, look at me' when you're young, which is natural, it's totally natural because you don't have a lot else to work with in terms of musicality, as you become more and more musical, as you start to relax, and you start to trust, as you start to listen, the need for all of that presentation starts to fall away … it was such a mystery to me as to how they [Cookie, Eddy, Buster …etc.] could have so much groove, how does one human being … how do they have such perfect time? How are they so eloquent all the time in their feet? … it just happens with experience and trust and willingness to stick with it … If you can get there and trust that it's okay to be there and trust that you don't need to have 20 years of technique, well that's not true, you do need the time. You don't need 20 *pounds* of technique, you don't need all that technique. You do go through a process of using every bit of technique that you have to get there to find out that you actually didn't need that all along.

This unique individuality, honed and refined through a process of distillation, was not some innate skill her mentors possessed that inherently charmed their audiences. Rather this quality, what Heather refers to as their "groove," was really their musical-movement repertoires, comprised of qualitative movement dynamics, which they spent years developing, perfecting and practicing until they became synonymous with their *being* as tap dancers. The ability of

Heather's mentors to connect with their audiences through simply existing on stage was a practiced, honed approach and style of movement and music-making. Further, these musical-movement repertoires took years to cultivate and refine.

In describing the qualities that enabled these dancers to establish relationality with their audiences through their performances, Heather suggested that one does not need *20 pounds* of technique to do so. Such a reference to the weight of technique alludes to effort and energy use; a heavy weight of technique (20 pounds, specifically) requires a significant amount of effort and energy to carry. To move with and through such a weight of technique requires *trying* to be bigger, better, and more. Perhaps Heather is suggesting that through experience and practice, a dancer begins to release the weight accumulated through years of training, and in turn releases the energy and effort exerted carrying such weight in performance, effectively relaxing into their being, rather than trying to be other or outside of themselves. As a reptile sheds their skin, as wine distills into cognac, a dancer too releases the weight of technique which has built up their musical-movement repertoire of "I can's" and relaxes into their individual movement style to *be* their own unique tap dancer. Such a relaxation into one's musical-movement repertoire, refined and distilled until it is part of one's existence, seems to require less effort and energy exertion as one begins to trust in the musical-movement skills and capacities one has cultivated over years of study and practice. Perhaps, this is about *becoming* through study and practice and *being* comfortable with who you are as a tap dancer and performer.

Through discussions with Heather, she reiterated that it is not her intention to suggest that improvising tap dancers do not need technique or technical training. Instead, she clarifies that a dancer spends years studying and refining their technique until they reach a point or moment where this musical-movement technique becomes, seemingly, *effortless, natural*; embedded in

one's musical-movement repertoire of "I can's". Simultaneously, Heather's comment reminds us that technical proficiency or mastery does not a dancer make; capacities for relationality, connection and inter-activity are deeper qualities of the greatest improvisational performers. I prompted Heather to further describe what she meant when she said, "you don't need 20 pounds of technique … you do go through a process of using every bit of technique that you have to get there to find out that you actually didn't need that all along." What other capacities must a dancer cultivate to connect with their audience, to establish relational flow moments?

> You have to make less sounds, you have to be less loud, you have to *wow* less or you lose the need to do that, you know? … In this environment and this world that we live in, because everything is so packaged … so to get further and further into improvisation in a way that is not very presentational, and a way that is more truthful is not necessarily what people think they want to see. … All these shows with really super young dancers who are extremely presentational, that's part of the world of dance and music but then there's this other part of wisdom that you get as you age and you realize you don't need all that in order to make your statement, and in fact, some of your music gets better and deeper.

The capacity to trust in oneself and to be "truthful" in who you are, rather than what you believe others want you to be, takes years of practice and experience to cultivate. Through the experience that comes with age, Heather suggests, a dancer refines their artistic and performative approach, deepening their connection with their music, their selves, and, in effect, their audience. Emerging artists might step on the stage with a sense that they have something to prove, not only to the audience but to themselves. They may be overly presentational, exerting copious amounts of effort and energy, giving their 'all,' putting everything they have into 'wowing' their audiences – trying to be bigger, better, *more* than themselves. As they gain experience

performing for more audiences, they might begin to sense what qualities or ways of being result in moments of meaningful engagement with their audiences; moments of relational flow. As they identify what about their dancing or performing creates these moments, they might begin to shed away the layers which they have built up through years of study and practice with others, layers of others' styles and approaches, to distill down to these qualities that create these moments of connection between them and their audiences. Heather suggests that dancers who dig deeper into their individual practices, who are 'truthful' with who they are and express their 'truths' through their dancing, those dancers are able to connect with their audiences on a deeper level. Thus, relationality is cultivated through authenticity in performance, when audience members experience the vulnerability of the performer who expresses through and as their own, true voice. Evidently, dancers like Cookie and Buster were able to connect with their audiences through developed, practiced, and refined movement skills and technique that, through years of experience as performers, comprised their musical-movement repertoires of "I can's", which became who they were, individually, as tap dance improvisers. These qualities were not innate, nor ineffable – they just seemed such a part of who they were, that we (as audience members) were unable to distinguish between them as individuals and these qualities that make them unique as improvisational dancers.

3 – Style, Touch and Voice

In the process of *becoming* an improvisational tap dancer, we have so far observed what it is to train and study with elder, more experienced tap dancers to gather the qualitative movement dynamics that comprise their individual musical-movement repertoires of "I can's" so that one may begin to cultivate their own. Through a process of shedding and refining, dancers distill what they have learned into their own individual style or ways of *being* as tap dance

improvisers. Sarah and Brenda further clarified the relationship between one's individual style and one's *being* as an improvisational tap dancer. Firstly, Sarah referenced the ways we may distinguish one dancer from another, including through their unique visual and aural aesthetics:

> You know if I teach you a *time step*, how do you do it, and how are you different from the person next to you, and how do you feel it differently in your style, cause … I can see a silhouette of a legendary tap dancer and I'm like boom that's Jimmy Slyde … Because that's encouraged, the look, but I can also be blindfolded and listen to a tap dancer and be like that's so and so. We want to be able to do both for an artist, that's how much you need to develop yourself. Do you look like yourself and do you sound like yourself? The sound takes forever and that takes improvisation, that cannot be taught. You have to find it.

Sarah reiterates that developing one's unique style – how differently they may 'look' and 'sound' and even 'feel' steps – like the *time step* she refers to – takes time and practice. She states that this style is not something one can be taught, but instead finds, perhaps within themselves, through a process of shedding in improvisation. To illustrate the importance of developing one's individual style, Sarah refers to her ability to recognize the dancing of legendary tap dancer Jimmy Slyde, through merely his silhouette image. This reaffirms the relationship between one's *being* as a tap dancer, and their individual style of performing.

Brenda refers to a dancer's individual style as their "touch" and provides exercises through which one might develop this touch. In our interview, I asked Brenda to explain how she engages her students in cultivating the fundamental movement patterns required for creating dynamics in rhythm and sound, and how this practice relates to one's ability to be an

improvisational tap dancer. In her response, she spoke of her “shuffle series”, an exercise comprising various ways one might perform *shuffles* – front and back brushes through which the ball tap strikes the floor. Accordingly, technical exercises like her shuffle series, which engage the whole moving body in aural and visual aesthetic expression, cultivate a dancer’s sensitivity to the qualitative dynamics of musically-moving as a tap dancer, ingraining such sensitivity into a dancer’s kinaesthetic memory. This approach connects processes for ingraining movements and motions into the physical dancer with an acute awareness of the musical qualities which elicit and are elicited through these actions. Through a process that combines moving and musical techniques for a wholistic approach to tap dancing, Brenda says that her students develop a keen sensitivity to the qualitative differences between energy and feeling:

> It’s very sensitive … I started working with the difference between energy and feeling: There’s a child, [who] works with energy, “oh boy here I am bang bang bang!” As you get older, hopefully, or maybe even if you’re young and you have that unusual sense, you start to desire nuance. And in order to have nuance, you have to feel it… I developed a lot of footwork … all the manipulations of a shuffle scale … how many ways can you use your tap. Well, how conscious do you have to be to think about not only the rhythm that you’re making, the time, but what part of the foot you’re using to get what tone that you want, because each tone and each pitch will produce a feeling. So, it’s more than just going out and “here I am and there’s my dance and see yah later!” It’s a big process, and it takes years… a lot of technical practice and a lot of desire … like when Dianne [Walker] hits the floor she has a touch … I have a touch, [and] Honi [Coles] had an amazing touch…[it is] building up your fibres so that you can have dynamics, you can work *fortissimo* and *pianissimo* and everything in between, that’s huge.

Brenda speaks to the relationship between the physical manipulation of the body, the dynamics of sound and rhythm, and the emotional affectivity of an approach to tap dance that emphasizes and prioritizes this relationship. Cultivating an awareness of or a sensitivity to the nuanced affects of various movement capacities, Brenda's approach connects a tap dancer's musical-movement repertoire to the feelings and sensations that may be experienced and conveyed through such movements. Not only does this exercise reinforce the vital indivisibility of the movement and the music in tap dance, but it also prioritizes the development of a dancer's capacity to *feel* her way into, around and through the nuanced sound and rhythm qualities created through tap dance movements, and the resultant feelings conveyed or communicated. Thus, through a kinaesthetic-kinetic sensing of the various parts of the *ball tap* that may connect with the floor in rhythmic variations of downward-forward and upward-backward *shuffle* motions, Brenda's shuffle series trains the dancer to sensorially attune to nuanced dynamics in volume, duration, tone, pitch, and texture through the most basic tap dance step. Expanding this attunement to the other myriad ways a tap shoe makes connection with the floor cultivates a specific, sensitive way of touching the floor – a dancer's individual *touch* – that becomes synonymous with their *being* as a tap dancer.

We might relate this sense of touch and our ability to recognize or know the way one tap dancer 'touches' the floor from another to our sensorial experiences of physical touch. While this individual quality of touching the floor speaks to the uniqueness in the way a tap shoe may connect with the floor, the way individual manipulations of weight might create varying volumes and durations of vibrations, deep and light tones, smooth and rough textures, such that one's individual touch becomes synonymous with one's identity, we might consider how such touches are experienced by the Other – the audience, or other dancers and musicians. Such touches or,

moments of "vital contact…carnal connection" (Smith, 2014, p. 236) may be as light as a caress "motivated by the desire to reach out to another … informed by the shape of another… being with another most attentively, most lovingly" (Smith, 2012, p. 68-69) or as memorable as the embrace of another, of a place, a time, or of the elements, such as when one is embraced by the ocean's waves (Smith, 2006). Such memorable "embraces" and "caresses", forms of touch and of being with another/Other, leave impressions or affective resonances in us as we experience them. Smith's investigations into the role and experience of touch in pedagogy (2012, 2014) and in equestrian arts (2015a, 2015b) demonstrate that while these forms of touch might originate in tactile, bodily contact, their affects and effects resonate in and within us beyond the single moment of a seemingly surface connection. The unique qualitative dynamics with which an esteemed, renowned tap dancer touches – caresses, or even embraces – the floor and those which become synonymous with their being, such that Dianne *has* a touch, and this touch is her very *being* as a performer – these dynamics, as we have seen, are experienced visually, kinaesthetically/kinetically, and aurally. As Smith states, these moments of touch, "somatics of dynamic attunement … are the sensory, sensitive and sensible means of the many attenuated forms of interpersonal, social and even inter-species communication" (Smith, 2014, p. 234). Though Smith speaks of these somatics of attunement in terms of moving with others through contact improvisation, a form of dance wherein bodily contact between dancers is the driving force of movement performance, I suggest we may also similarly experience the aurality of a tap dancer's touch as co-performers and as audience members: a tap dancer's *touch* may elicit feelings, pressures, sensations, "impressions" (Henry, 2015) of "being in relation to others" (Smith, 2014, p. 234). Relational connections between dancers, dancer and audience, or teacher and student, are formed through these acts of somatic attunement that may or may not require the

physical contact of flesh: famed Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire was said to touch through his look – "Touching with his hand and with his look, Paulo somehow connected his whole being, his reason and emotion, to the whole being of another person" (Freire, A., 1998, p. 3). Thus, such forms of touch, caresses or embraces, that facilitate vital connections between beings, are not only reserved for moments of physical, tactile contact. Inter-corporeal connections may be facilitated through many forms of touch, including through the way one touches tap to floor. These touches are moments of vital reciprocity – of sharing the feeling of being fully alive and immersed in life.

In inter-active, improvisational tap dance contexts, tap dance performers may not physically reach out their hand to the audience, and they may not caress or physically embrace one another in performance on stage (though they may often celebrate an exceptional performance or share a moment mid-performance with an embrace, a caress, a high-five …). And yet, these performers may still *touch* others, the audience member or co-performer, as these others experience the expressive movement capacities of the performer. Just as I might listen to my grandmother tell a story of her childhood, hear a song on the radio, or hear the compliments of an acquaintance and feel affectively "touched" by these aural experiences, feel vital connections with the other through sound, I may experience a tap dance performance, be it performed choreography or an improvisational inter-action between dancers and musicians, and feel physically, somatically, kinaesthetically, kinetically and emotionally *affected* by the experience. Cookie's ability to capture the attention and admiration of an audience with seemingly minimal effort, as described by Heather, alludes to a performer's ability to 'touch' an audience. Such experiences leave resonant, sensorial impressions in us; we *feel* the affectivity of their words, their melodies and rhythms, their being on stage. These moments of relational

connection through sound are not only touching, but moving, in that they move me to experience not only some physical sensation, but some emotional reaction; such inner sensations may bring up feelings of sadness, joy, sympathy, anger… may drive me to cry, smile, or shiver. Therefore, when Brenda speaks to one's cultivated ability to touch as a tap dancer, she is not only referring to the way one physically touches the floor, as Smith describes such caresses (2012) and embraces (2006) of pedagogic relations, but also the way one, through such acts which create aural, visual and felt qualitative movement dynamics, may touch another so as to leave sensorial impressions in that other. Such impressions move in, within and through us in relational connection. A capacity for touch in tap dance resonates beyond where tap meets floor …

Voicing as an Improvisational Tap Dancer

Developing one's capacity to sense and feel and elicit sensations and feelings through tap dancing is to develop one's acts of voicing so that one *becomes* a tap dancer; musical-moving dance motions communicate, express and inter-act as the tap dancer *moves out* to the other just as when one touches another, one *reaches out* to touch. Brenda speaks to the fundamental capacity for feeling one's way through tap dancing, of sensing one's use of weight or physical technique to voice oneself musically and visually through movement, which then conveys emotions and feelings which resonate with the other. This discussion also alludes to the journey a dancer must go through to develop this sensorial attunement, their cultivation of a musical-movement repertoire through study and practice with elders, as described by Dianne. Such a sensitivity in moving-musicality is refined through repeated practice, through 'shedding' as articulated by Sarah, or 'distilling' as per Heather, to one's individual, unique style – their voice, their touch. Just as handwriting is refined over years, and cognac is distilled from wine, sensitivity in effort and energy exertion is nuanced with practice, cultivated into one's touch,

which in turn touches and impresses upon others. What is learned and distilled is the aural, visual and felt qualitative dynamics of movement that comprise one's individual musical-movement repertoire of "I can's". I can voice, touch, and *be* as a tap dancer in and through improvisational performance, and thus I can connect with others through my *being*. The cultivation and invocation of such a sensitivity may be summarized in late tap dance master Chuck Green's well-known quotation, referred to by Brenda in our interview: "You have to know how much dancing to do. You can't just do all you want to do. You got to do what's needed to do."

As Sarah, Dianne, Heather and Brenda's words have illuminated, function in improvisational tap dance interactions consists of building a technical skill through a purposeful practice, which emphasizes not only the execution of physical movements that create and are further created by rhythms and melodies, but also a sensitization to a wholistic approach to tap dancing, whereby the aural, visual and sensorial qualitative dynamics of movement are as foundational to the experience as are the articulation of steps, rhythms and melodies. Further, this practice is one of training and study with elder, experienced tap dancers who have invested significant time into developing their own styles. A tap dancer wishing to develop and individualize their style might first incorporate as many styles from as many teachers and artists as they can, so that they might then learn from and develop their own unique style, effectively their own unique voice. Such styles and approaches are layered into one's musical-movement repertoire that is distilled or shed into one's *being* as a tap dancer. To "distill" a dancer's unique voice from the learned and integrated styles of others, through a process of practice, of shedding oneself, one refines and develops one's own touch – one's musical-movement approach to sound and rhythm creation, and one's way of connecting with others through musically-moving inter-actions. Though it may appear linear and finite, this process of *becoming* a tap dancer is never

complete: one constantly returns to study and practice, to shedding and distillation, as one continues to grow and refine one's individual touch over time (like the reptile who continues to grow, or the wine that only betters with age). As Sheets-Johnstone articulates, we are our musical-movement repertoires in that we engage in and through the world in movement, through and as our cultivated musical-movement repertoires of "I can's". Therefore, a tap dancer's musical-movement repertoire is more than a storehouse of steps from which they improvise, it is their *signature,* their *touch,* their voice – it is who they are as tap dancers to other tap dancers, audience members and musicians.

Functional capacities in inter-active improvisational tap dancing are more than flexion and contraction of muscles, more than building physical skill for balanced transfers of weight. They are a sensing and sensitizing to the visual, aural and sensorial qualitative movement dynamics, which exude and elicit emotions and affectivity and, further, become synonymous with the dancer-artist-self. A tap dancer develops a sensitivity to nuances in sound, direction, time and energy through study with other dancers, through years of experience and practice, and through continuously training and shedding the layers of training to enable growth and refinement. Such processes of *becoming* and *being* are ongoing and continual. Through these processes, a dancer brings into being their improvisational voice, their unique touch, which impresses upon and resonates sensorially and sensually in others, facilitating moments of vital contact – of inter-corporeal connection – of relational flow.

Part 2: The Function of Acts for Listening

Building up one's individual capacity to voice through a musical-movement art form such as improvisational tap dance requires a dedicated and purposeful practice that emphasizes feeling one's way in rhythmic, melodic creation. With acts of voicing through their musical-

movement repertoires, tap dancers effectively bring themselves as dancers into *being* in the relational inter-action. Such voicing capacities give and move out to the other in the inter-action, and therefore may facilitate connection with audiences, fellow musicians or dancers. One might experience individual flow through such voicing capacities, and as we have seen above, we may begin to experience relational flow moments, but these relational connections are incomplete: relationality necessarily involves multi-directional exchange. A second, deeply entwined and connected functional dimension of experiencing relational flow through improvised tap dancing inter-activities is that of listening. As she writes of the phenomenology of improvisational dance practices, Sondra Fraleigh explains that “like music, dance involves acts of somatic attunement: listening (taking in) and voicing (moving out)” (2018, p. 101). Listening and its relation to music make “time for being in the moment of attending without expectations” (Fraleigh, 2018, p. 102). Thus, in acts of listening, I am attending and attuning aurally to the other in relational inter-action. Like the embrace described by Smith, music (through listening acts), “surrounds and powers”, and carries me through time (Fraleigh, 2018, p. 102). Unlike Smith, Fraleigh suggests music (and dance) is ephemeral, stating its “sounds will disappear in time and fade into space” (p. 102-103), though as we know from Brenda’s description of touch, its affect can be resonant and can leave sense impressions in us. Improvising with others as a tap dancer requires not only a cultivated capacity for voicing oneself as described above, but a sensorial openness and receptivity to the other(s) in the inter-activity – that is, a fundamental capacity for listening.

Listening: Being Present with the Other

As an aural/oral dance form, it is no surprise that all participants listed the capacity to listen as a fundamental requirement for improvising as a tap dancer. Sarah spoke at length about the importance of listening to facilitating relational inter-actions between dancers and musicians.

In this quotation, she provides a play-by-play of the unspoken dialogue that often occurs between dancers and musicians, demonstrating that listening is more than simply hearing what the other has to say, but is also the creation of a space within which the other may speak (or play):

> Are you watching me? Are you listening to me, because I'm listening to you, and I'm going to open up for you, I'm going to stop and let you be heard, will you please do that for me? So, there's a little like, are you going to do that for me? Are we going to lock in right here? Because I'm repeating an idea because I want you to lock in with me, okay we're locked in. Okay cool, now what do you want to say? Because I'll join you, that's a great idea, okay cool, you know … like little telepathy thing.

Here, Sarah compares the inter-active experience of improvising with another to one of telepathy – the supposed communication of thoughts and ideas from one to another by means other than the "known senses". This suggests that, though Sarah points to listening and "being heard" as the means through which musician-dancers inter-act, the experience of this communication is perceived and felt as though it is facilitated through means beyond the human body. As though the inter-action is an experience of mind-reading, in that when one feels 'heard', it is as though one's mind has been read. This suggests that what Sarah refers to as 'listening' describes an experience that is deeper and more complex than simply hearing each other with the ears.

The participants also described many moments in their careers where it was clear that their improvisational partners (whether either musicians or other dancers) were not listening to them, or where they witnessed dancers who were not listening in the moment. Dianne's story of the dancer who danced like Billy Siegenfeld after an hour-long class with her is one such example – was that dancer fully *listening* to the lessons embedded within the movement Dianne

was teaching? I asked Sarah to describe what it is like to listen in inter-active improvisations, and specifically, how does she know when she is not being *heard* or *listened to.* She said,

> The main thing is to listen and be very aware of what's going on, if someone says something or plays a specific lick or something, and repeating it, you want to jump in on it. The thing is, you want to listen, but you also want to be heard, and so I can even complain about certain musicians that I know don't even listen to me, so I'm like "why aren't you even listening to me?" … They're not reacting – and 'cause they can't, like I always tell drummers, "why are you splashing that cymbal? You can't hear me!" They can't hear me, I can't hear myself when you're splashing that cymbal. So, where's the respect? So … I always tell drummers ahead of time, "no cymbals please, keep it open, if you can't hear me, I can't hear myself either."

The foundational role of listening in improvisational inter-actions is demonstrated in Sarah's description of a key request she makes with drummers: she asks drummers not to use the cymbal when playing with her, as the loud, vibrant sound drowns out the sound of the tap dancer and makes it difficult for dancer and drummer to sustain a conversation. Akin to yelling over-top of someone when they are speaking to you, when drummers "splash" "that cymbal", they take up too much musical space and leave none for the tap dancer. This description further clarifies the relationship between acts of voicing and acts of listening: to be able to voice, one must listen to both the other and to one's own voice. These acts are interconnected and facilitated through and by each other and are equally important to facilitating the inter-active moment.

Heather also emphasized the capacity to listen to others as fundamental to facilitating relational inter-action. For her, listening is being present in the moment-to-moment inter-action with the Other:

> Listening is listening, you're either listening or you are not, and I mean it's as simple as that. So, when you see dancers who get lost or who don't really connect to other people when they are dancing, they're just not listening, you know… it's listening – you either know how to listen to someone else and accept new ideas in the moment and respond to them or you are really only concerned with your own dancing or playing and you shut out everything around you and that kind of works against the whole concept of music because music, often times, is played with more than one person, unless you are always a soloist, which I suppose you are still listening to other stuff; you are listening to your instrument. It is just counterproductive not to listen…

In the inter-active improvisation, a lack of listening results in dancers who appear "lost", disconnected from others, "shut out" from everything around them. On the contrary, when dancers are listening, they are accepting and responding to new ideas "in the moment." As noted by Heather, music and improvisational tap dancing are inherently inter-active activities involving more than one entity. She discusses how playing music requires a listening *to* something – the other person, or one's own instrument. Even when performed alone, improvisational tap dancing is an inter-action between the moving-self and the sound created through this moving-self. In our moment-to-moment inter-actions, listening requires a letting go of the ego to make room for the other, releasing one's pre-conceived notions or perceptions of what that moment *should be* and being willing to truly hear and consider what the moment *is*. Heather says,

> Listening is meditation, it's the willingness to not be who you are while you immerse yourself in something other than yourself. It's a willingness to go there, so I don't have a practice for listening, I just have a willingness. So, I couldn't describe a practice because… if I'm doing my job, if I'm listening, then every moment is going to be

different because I'm not in control. I'm allowing another entity in my life to be in control because I am listening.

Listening, as such, is more than opening the aural sensory organ – the ears – to hear the sounds created by the other. Listening is a presence; it is a state of being with the other(s) in the inter-action, a state within which one must fully relinquish egotistical control to the other(s). In improvisational inter-actions, to listen is to be present with the other(s).

In this way, perhaps listening is less an act one *does* and is rather a state of being one *is in* during inter-activities. Philosopher Lisbeth Lipari describes this state of listening as "listening being" (2010, 2014). Listening being aligns with Heather's call for willing acceptance in inter-actions with others through listening. Lipari explains,

> … in *listening being* I come to the conversation empty—not empty of my experience or history—but empty of the belief that my experience or history defines the limits of possible meaning and experience. Thereby, in *listening being* I am being empty of possession and of all intentions other than the intention of engagement with you and of the what-will-happen. (2010, p. 355, *italics in original*)

In listening being, I am not hearing through my ears alone; as a listening being, my entire self, my *being* is listening, listening is something I am, not an act I do. Thus, just like when I have cultivated my musical-movement repertoire my individual *touch* as a tap dancer becomes synonymous with my being as a performer, my state of being in inter-active improvisational engagement with others is listening; I do not *do* listening acts, I am listening in my being in the inter-action.

Brenda's concept of three-way listening provides a concrete approach for *being* in listening being as a tap dance improviser. Through three-way listening, the dancer is fully implicated in the hearing-listening experience:

> I developed [the concept of three-way listening] myself in my solo work with my musicians, but then I carried that over and it reached its climax with [my company, the American Tap Dance] Orchestra…Practicing that three-way listening by doing that, that's really feeling and hearing your sounds – you need to hear your sounds, if you can't hear your sound then nothing is working – so this [*gesturing to her sternum, her core*] is listening to your sound, and then so by that process you're going deep inside yourself to get there. And then here [*gesturing to her ears and reaching her arms out around herself*], you're listening to your other dancers, you're listening to your music, so you're using all your centres. When you use so many centres simultaneously, you have a very sensitive organism. You become an organism, you become more than one, which is even when I'm soloing, I think of that as being more than one. Even if there's no band, you know, because …a big part of what I do is listen to myself.

Being listening is a state of becoming more than one. In this being, a dancer opens oneself to their sound, the sounds of others around them and the sound of the music as it is created. Furthermore, this 'sound' is not solely experienced aurally; as Brenda states, as a sensitive organism, the dancer experiences sound sensorially – they *feel* the sounds, their vibrations, and resonances, through their kinaesthetic-kinetic sensing of their own movement and the resultant sounds. A three-way listening experience immerses the self in the symphonic orchestration of musical-movement creation. As Brenda says, even when there is no band, she is listening in her

tap dance improvisations. Again, we do not *do* listening acts, we *are* in a state of being in listening; I say I *am* listening.

Inter-Acting as Listening Being

Heather provides an analogy that illustrates the feeling of listening and being listened to in the inter-active improvisational experience and further reveals listening as a state of relational being with the Other:

> It's like, if you're having a conversation with somebody and they keep cutting you off. It's not a conversation that most people are happy with. If we are cutting each other off, I don't know that we are really listening – in order for you to respond that quickly, you have to have been thinking the whole time the other person was speaking. Whereas it's the willingness to give the other person some thought, like to actually consider what they said without thinking about what you're going to say while they are saying it […] If you have a conversation with somebody who stops and thinks about what you just said before answering, you feel honoured.

Heather makes a comparison between improvisational inter-action and conversational exchange to reveal the foundational role listening plays in facilitating these interactions. Of course, inter-acting through improvisational tap dancing with another (dancer or musician) is a form of conversation. Tap dancers will often refer to their improvisational solos as moments of "saying something" in rhythm, melody, and movement. But in this quotation, Heather is comparing the feeling of the absence of listening in improvisational exchange to that experienced in conversational dialogue with others.

Heather's comparison between improvisational inter-action and conversational dialogue reveals listening as more than an action one does in relation to another, but as a state of being

with the Other. Here, Heather says that listening in inter-active improvisation is a state of willing consideration of the other that requires setting aside one's own concerns to honour the Other in conversation. Similarly, Lipari says listening "entails the recognition of another self, the startling presence of another being, a not-self" (2014, p. 176). This willingness to consider the other in inter-action is further described by Lipari, who says that "listening … offers unfamiliar vistas and new mis/understandings, it offers cycles of perpetual enfoldment, the coming together and coming apart, of human being" (2014, p. 174). In this way, listening in conversation provides opportunities for *being* with the other, in and out of harmony.

In addition to supporting our understanding of the experience of listening being with the other in inter-active, improvised tap dancing, and specifically our understanding of how the absence of listening may *feel,* Heather's comment also asks us to consider the relationship between thinking and listening. Here, she proposes a disconnect between states of thinking and listening and suggests that in some conversational inter-actions, thinking overrides the ability to listen. Perhaps you yourself have experienced this during a heated political discussion with another who's views differ from your own. You exhaust yourselves searching for the right words to describe your passionate perspectives in hopes of leading the conversational partner to see things your way. But, instead of your partner considering your perspective and its affects on their own views, they respond by restating their views and perspectives, seemingly having given no thought to yours. And perhaps, in the same vein, as they repeat their values and opinions, you, having predetermined your opinion of their views, focus your attentional energy on whatever clever retort or argument you can project back at them, that is once you notice their lips have ceased movement and there is sound space for you to respond (because you are not *really* listening to their sounds, anyways). In effect, neither of you is really participating in a

conversation with the other; instead, you are talking to yourselves. The words you say have no effect/affect on the other, just as the words they say go heard, but not listened to, by you.

As prompted by Heather, a similar experience might occur in inter-active, improvisational tap dance performances. In these scenarios, tap dancers might be *thinking about* or *concentrating* attentional energy on what they themselves are saying (e.g. playing with their feet), that is, they are focusing on their individual voicing capacities, rather than on being present (being *listening being*) with the musicians or other dancers with whom they are inter-acting. One may suggest they are "in their head," though this phrase reinforces thinking as a cognitive/mental process. Instead of attuning their senses to the inter-active moment, opening themselves to listen to the other in the inter-action, the dancer is closed off, listening only to the voice inside their own head. Listening, here, is more than an act that is relegated to the ears. It is instead a sensorial attunement, that is a sensitizing of one's bodily being to the aural-kinaesthetic affectivity of the other in the inter-action. Listening as sensorial attunement requires a willingness to set aside one's egocentrism and Cartesian dualist views of cognition and thought to instead sensorially open oneself to the other and to trust in one's cultivated musical-movement repertoire of "I can's" to *think* in movement. By sensorially opening, I am referring to opening more than one's eyes and ears to the inter-action – rather, opening one's whole being in kinaesthetic-kinetic relation with the other. Just as Sarah suggests that a drummer who is splashing their cymbal is unlikely to hear her taps and therefore cannot be listening to her, dancers and musicians may be directing more energy towards expressing themselves individually than they are to expressing collectively. Such misdirection of energy may inhibit a relational flow connection.

As Heather suggests, perhaps the dancer or the musician is "thinking about" what they are going to "say", rather than "listening" to what the other is "saying". Thinking, in this process,

is cognitive; relegated to mental processes through which one might pre-emptively reflect on which actions, rhythms or melodies one might play once the time comes. Like the "storehouse of steps" and "scatting rhythms" described by Robbins and Wells (2019), such an emphasis on thought as cognitive reinforces the Cartesian disconnect of mind from body. Take my own experience improvising with the Toronto Rhythm Initiative dancers, as described at the beginning of this thesis: I was stuck in this mental, cognitive way of thinking. My mind's eye mentally searched through steps and ideas and I tried to 'tell' my feet to play them. This thinking process literally drowned out and blocked my ability to feel the music. Thus, such thinking about action denies the knowledge embedded within one's kinaesthetic memory, cultivated in one's musical-movement repertoire of "I can's". This Cartesian view of thought suggests that one must be cognizant and perceptually aware of one's actions in order to act, and yet as we have so far demonstrated, one's musical-movement repertoire becomes synonymous with oneself in both everyday and dancing experiences. My signature, my touch, my improvisational voice as a tap dancer becomes *me* in the jam or performance. Phenomenologically, I do not experience myself as thinking about something in order to *be myself*, rather in my moving engagement with the world, I am me, the one who is moving. When I try hard to *be myself,* exerting effort and energy (perhaps "20 pounds" of it), I am less *being myself* than I am *trying to be myself*. Not only do such cognitive processes disconnect the self from the moving body or the self from the coming into being, but they also inhibit a dancer's capacity to *listen*, as thoughts of the self consume one's being and become a barrier, blocking one's sensorial capacity to take in information from the outside. Thinking of or about movement, the dancer is unable to listen in inter-active relationality with the Other.

Listening Being as Thinking-In-Movement

As a means of correcting the blockage to relational flow reportedly caused by "thinking about" something in improvisation, Heather suggests that tap dancers practice as musicians do, so that they can get to a place in their art where "they're not thinking about [their technique]". Accordingly,

> [musicians practice] to enhance their skill set, so that they're not thinking about it when they do it … [they] work enough so that they are in a state and can find a state when they're in balance with their skill set … years and years of practice, I mean that's why when I teach I don't tell people how to do it, and I teach very repetitively because you have to repeat these skills over and over and over again until you get better, just like a musician practices, you just have to keep listening, being comfortable with space, being comfortable taking in other people's ideas and letting it inform your work

A thinking mind, one that reflects on one's actions in the moment-to-moment inter-actions of improvisation, may inhibit a dancer's abilities to experience relational flow moments by blocking one's ability to listen to the Other. That is, instead of listening and being present in the inter-active moment, a dancer is "in their head," *thinking* about what is happening. Or rather, they are *cognitively thinking* about the inter-action, as it happens. Their cognitive, attentional awareness is directed towards their own movements, rather than to the inter-active moment itself. This cognitive thought, I believe, is the type of *thinking* Heather is referring to when she suggests that dancers, as musicians, practice until "they're not thinking about it when they do it". Cartesian dualism separates mind from body and relegates thought to one's head, reserving thinking for cognition and doing or moving for the body. But what if we consider that thinking is not something reserved for the brain only, and is instead enacted through the body in motion?

I once again turn to Sheets-Johnstone, who suggests that in movement, and improvisational movement in particular, dancers are "thinking *in* movement" rather than thinking *of* or *about* movement (1999/2011b). This is possible as a dancer moves in and through a cultivated musical-movement repertoire of "I can's". This repertoire, their kinaesthetic-kinetic memories of moving mechanics, dynamics, and sensations, is ingrained into one's being as a moving body through repeated, habitual practice. In movement improvisation, then, the dancer does not think of or about movement, but thinks-in-movement, whereby

> movement and perception [or our awareness] are seamlessly interwoven; there is no 'mind-doing' that is separate from a 'body-doing.' My movement is thus not the result of a mental process that exists prior to, and is distinguishable from, a physical process in which it eventuates, nor does my movement involve no thinking at all … the separation [into a mind and a body] would deny what I experience myself to be: a mindful body, a body that is thinking in movement and that has the possibility of creating a dance on the spot. (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999/2011b, pp. 422-423)

While at times, thoughts of movement or rhythm and melody may arise in a dancer's *thinking mind* (and the dancer becomes consciously aware of these thoughts), Sheets-Johnstone says these thoughts "are experienced as discrete events …they are spinoffs of thinking in movement rather than the result of an ongoing process of thinking in images while moving or the result of any deliberative thinking" (1999/2011b, p. 423). A dancer is not thinking by seeing images or hearing inner-speech while moving, though such types of thoughts may arise, brought up through the musical-movement created, evoked through the dancer's presence and listening to herself, the other and the musical creation.

If we, as have many theorists and researchers since Descartes' mind-body split, conceive of the relationship between thought and movement as separate, such that a dancer thinks of or about movement as it is happening (as is effectively proposed by the theory of tap dance improvisation put forth by Robbins & Wells, 2019), we suppose a separation between the thinking mind and our moving bodies that is not experienced in musical-moving improvisational flow moments. But, as Csikszentmihalyi's research on flow demonstrates, in flow moments, we experience ourselves as indivisible from our movements (1975). Therefore, separate thoughts about actions are not possible if we are truly immersed in the flow experience. One might suggest, then, that in flow moments experienced through improvisational movement practices such as inter-active tap dancing, we may truly experience ourselves thinking-in-movement. Furthermore, perhaps it is in these moments that we experience the indivision of being from action, for example, in running I am not a being who is running or is *doing* running, but I *am* my running; I *am* running. Just as in conversational dialogue or improvised musical-movement exchanges, I am not a being who is doing listening or a dancer who is doing dancing or a musician who is doing musicking; I am listening, dancing, musicking. I am *being* in these states.

As such, studies on improvisational processes that suggest improvisers experience thoughts *of* or *about* tap dance movements, rhythms and melodies in the moments of movement do not encompass the full experiential reality of flowing inter-actions in improvisational tap dancing as described by the research participants. One's thinking-in-movement experiences facilitate the cultivation of relational flow, whereby one 'trusts' in one's musical-movement repertoire of musical-movement, one's individual *touch* and approach as a tap dancer which has become synonymous with oneself, and therefore one is able to be a listening being in the inter-activity. As Heather has explained, one must practice enough to get to the point where one is no

longer *thinking about what one is doing*. Such a practice cultivates one's musical-movement repertoire of "I can's"*,* whereby our musical-movement becomes synonymous with our being. Dianne, Sarah and Brenda all described similar practices of studying, training, and sensitizing that cultivate a dancer's individual capacity to improvise as a tap dancer with their own unique voice. Through these processes, a dancer builds their musical-movement repertoire, comprised not simply of *actions* for moving, but of the qualitative dynamics that bring that movement to life. And it is through this musical-movement repertoire that a dancer may trust in the capacity they have built to voice, trust in their ability to think in improvisation, and to think in movement. With this ability to think-in-movement, a dancer's attentional energy need not focus on their own being and instead they can be a listening being with the other(s) in the inter-action, open to their conversational offerings.

Dancing from a Musical-Movement Repertoire Facilitates Thinking-in-Movement

To help us better understand the process of thinking-in-movement in relation to *listening being* in inter-active, improvisational tap dancing moments, I turn to Travis's description of his current practice as an artist. Here, he alludes to his cultivated musical-movement repertoire of "I can's" and the necessity to be in listening being – to be sensorially attuned in the moment of inter-action – in the improvisational experience:

> The philosophy that is now really feeding me is the path of the warrior, which is a person that prepares to not be in flow. So, what do I have to do? What do I have to practice? What do I have to engage in for when I have to perform, or go to war, and something goes wrong? I go to battle and my shoulder is out of place, I have a pain in my leg, my significant other has just passed away … war is still happening. The conditions are rarely ideal, and I think that's where scarcity shows up. A person that still does the damn thing

> when the weather is foul, when they don't feel well, when everything and everyone around them is telling them no, you're still doing the thing. And I think, in terms of long-term strategy, that's where I'm trying to get to, I'm talking about discipline… It's never ideal, it's so rarely ideal … when I was young, I used to fret, complain about whatever went wrong. [for example] "I worked on this arrangement with the musicians and they did an extra chorus, they missed the tag, the floor sucks, the microphone…" Something outside of myself impeded me from doing the damn thing.

Such an immersion of the musical-moving tap dancing self with one's environment enables one to experience relational flow moments despite, and perhaps because of, any moment-to-moment inter-actions that may arise. An ingrained, practiced musical-movement repertoire of "I can's" enables a dancer to release their thinking of/about movement, to thinking-in-musical-movement, and to listen in the present-moment to the inter-action itself. *What is required of me now, in this moment? What, who, how, do I need to be?* Such a listening, such a practiced repertoire, enables a dancer to take in the voicing acts of the other(s), and in turn to respond in such a way that allows the continuity of the relational flow moment, rather than impedes it.

Functions for Relational Flow: Becoming Voice, Listening Being, a Listening Touch

Relational flow moments in inter-active, improvisational tap dance exchanges are facilitated through the cultivation of fundamental, functional capacities required firstly to *become* a tap dancer by building one's improvisational voice, one's sensorial-musical touch, through study and training with others. Secondly, budding tap dance improvisers shed layers of influence and technique to distil down the qualitative dynamics of sound, rhythm and movement expression into their *being* as a tap dance improviser. Finally, relational flow moments are

experienced by improvisational tap dancers through a listening being in musical-moving inter-action with others, which requires a sensorial openness whereby they think-in-musical-moving creation and expression. Through a listening touch, these experiences are intertwined, and a tap dance improviser develops a sensorial awareness – an attunement – to the energetic fluctuations, emotional resonances and responses of spectators or other musical-moving creators. A listening touch is a sensitivity cultivated through repeated practice and experience and becomes ingrained in a tap dancer's musical-movement repertoire of "I can's". It enables the dancer to be what is required in the moment-to-moment ebbs and flows of the inter-action. Such functional capacities extend beyond conventional definitions of movement function – the flexion and contraction of muscles, joints and tendons – to functions of being musically-moving bodies in inter-active experiences. These capacities facilitate the emergence and experience of relational flow moments with others. This chapter demonstrates that acts for moving out or voicing and acts for taking in or listening are not merely acts one does in musical-moving inter-action with others, but are states of *becoming* and *being* one moves in and through in relational flow moments with others. To experience relational flow moments in inter-active, improvisational tap dancing, one first establishes the fundamental capacity to *become* one's improvisational tap dance voice and to be listening in inter-action with others.

Chapter 5: Forms of/for Relational Flow

This chapter considers the aesthetic dimension of movement, form, and its relationship to relational flow experiences of improvisational tap dancing inter-actions. According to the Function-to-Flow model proposed by Lloyd and Smith, form provides the bodily shapes and structures for flow experiences, and through attuning to form in phenomenological terms, such as considering how it manifests in relational connection with others and objects in play, the notion of form shifts “from something fixed and external to a vibrantly unfolding interaction” (2021, p. 8). Such a focus on the form dimension of movement comprises outer bodily postures in the analysis, teaching, and assessment of movement, and encompasses the physical alignment, patterns and shapes created through and by the body in motion. Lloyd and Smith suggest researchers “investigate the various ways in which forms may manifest and what meanings such forms hold” to consider “how such nuanced attention to form informs the experience. What meanings do such postural comportments carry and how does this postural and positional awareness relate to the feelings that manifest?” (Lloyd & Smith, 2021, p. 8). In addition to an exploration of the bodily shapes and structures that manifest in and through improvisational tap dancing, in this chapter I have expanded on Lloyd and Smith’s form dimension to include other elements that form and in-form relational flow experiences of improvisational tap dancing inter-actions.

I open this chapter with a brief reminder that the formal dimensions, though presented herein as separate, are intertwined and connected, particularly the audible and visible dimensions. Discussion in the next section primarily focuses on what we might consider the visible form of improvisational tap dance, or as what Lindsay Guarino (2022) refers to as “what can be seen” when we visually experience a rooted jazz dance form (in this case, improvisational

tap dancing). This includes the aesthetics of tap dance as an African American vernacular dance form through an overview of the Africanist elements of rooted jazz dance as described by Julie Kerr-Berry (2022). Next, I expand on Lloyd and Smith's form dimension to encompass other sensorially experienced forms that, as revealed in conversation with the research participants, are essential aspects of the relational flow experience of inter-acting through improvisational tap dancing. These include elements that form and in-form[13] improvisational tap dance inter-actions, such as the audible form (what forms we hear), the animatable form (what forms we do), and the tangible form (what forms we feel). The forms we hear include the musical and rhythmic form and structure that is simultaneously shaped and shapes the performance, while the forms we do include both the setting or environment within which the inter-action occurs, and the many and varied approaches to improvisation employed by individual dancers. Finally, through descriptions provided by the participants, I investigate what forms we feel in relational flow inter-actions. I draw on Tiger Roholt's phenomenology of the groove (2014) and Henry's life phenomenology (1990/2008) to philosophically frame the participants' experiential descriptions and continue to develop upon Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenological perspectives on dance (2015b) to explore the various dimensions of form as it pertains to relational flow experiences of improvisational tap dancing.

Forms of Improvisational Inter-Actions: What We See and Hear

A crunching sound, like boots in snow, joins a low, droning hum that permeates the darkness. The metal echo of finger slapping steel calls out to a series of deep thumps that punctuate, yet do not provide a predictable pulse. The lights rise to reveal Heather Cornell, master tap dancer,

[13] I have chosen to hyphenate the term 'inform' throughout this chapter to highlight the active use of the form dimension of flow of the Function2Flow model (to in-form), as well as to emphasize essential or formative qualities that are given and structure the inter-action or relational flow experience

standing center stage in a shallow wooden box of red sand. Her bowed head and weighted arms bounce up and down and the fringe on her dark bell-bottom jeans dangles as scraping scratches of sand rub against wooden taps and rebound off the floor. To her left, Jesse Stewart, percussion musician, sits on a cajón with a steel hand pan drum on his lap and a wooden box tilted on its side at his legs. Controlled by a pedal under his foot, one side of the box opens and closes as the drone inhales and exhales, the volume rising and fading with each breath. A flick of his wrist and Jesse's fingertips pat and poke the hand pan, ringing out a hollow metal echo. Heather and Jesse's heads cock towards each other – an acknowledgement – but eyes focus down and away as they listen in improvised play. Heather's left shoulder pulls slightly back, angling towards Jesse so that her body, grounded yet light, both opens to the audience and receives the calls of the hand pan. Through loose wrists, fingers sharply slapping on the metal drum grow brighter in pitch and the rocking from heels to toes in leather soles sits into a steady groove. Heather's entire body lifts as a leg scuffs up with a crack, her left palm pressing lightly through air in balance. Lead by his bobbing head, Jesse's torso rocks side to side as his accents align with hers. It's difficult to decipher whom calls to whom and who responds - rhythms harmoniously weave in and out, are picked up, carried and then dropped for the next in this exchange of sound that runs between free and steady time. A fleeting moment of clear synchrony as Heather jumps up on the balls of her feet and Jesse slaps the drum is caught in a giggle from Heather and she tosses her head back.

The above vignette portrays my experience as an audience member during one of Heather's improvisational performances. Through this description, I aim to articulate how we can *see* the rhythms, tones and textures created in and through Heather and Jesse's inter-active improvisations, just as we can *hear* their motions as they move together and separately in

musical-movement creation. As has been previously discussed, improvisational tap dancing is a musical-movement form in which both visible and audible rhythms and patterns are created and articulated. Though in the following section I have separated the visible and audible forms of relational flow experienced in improvisational tap dance inter-actions, experientially – that is, phenomenologically – these elements of the form dimension cannot be so concretely disconnected.

Visible Form – What Forms We See

The visible forms of relational flow moments experienced between improvising tap dancers in inter-action with dancers, musicians, and audiences comprise what we see when we view such performances as either co-performers or audience members. Aspects of the performance, such as how connected the performers' styles and approaches are to the roots of tap dancing as an African American vernacular dance form, the degree to which it is improvised or choreographed, and the artistic intention of the performers (e.g., creation of music, depiction of character or storyline, style, etc.) all influence the physical shapes and forms visible to the viewing eye. In both choreographed and improvised tap dance performances, there are as many shapes and forms a tap dancer's body can make and take as there are tap dancers, perhaps even more, given that each dancer may create any number of shapes with their body in and through each movement. For example, in one performance, a dancer may present with an erect spine and upright posture, eyes lifted to the spectators or musicians, arms raised gently at chest height, suspended in the air, sweeping from side to front with a slight bend in the elbows and open palms, as if swirling in a waist-height pool of water. The dancer's shoulders may curve and roll as their hips twist slightly, manoeuvring each step. In another performance, that same dancer may round their spine slightly forward, tilt their hips back and drop their chest over their feet,

eyes focused down and away from spectators, musicians or other dancers. Their hands might hang loosely, elbows bent at their sides, arms lifting up from the shoulder in sudden jolts of accented movement or transfers of weight, or thrown up, out, to the side to catch the dancer mid-air as they bounce through their knees, jumping from one foot to the other, playing with gravity's downward pull, extending the duration of one movement only to shorten that of another. The divergent visible images moved in and through by the same dancer in these two described performances represent varied approaches to tap dancing, differing intentions, and play between moments of choreographed and improvised movement. Evidently, the form a dancer's body takes and makes in inter-active tap dancing performances may vary from erect, rigid, and stiff to curved, fluid, and soft, with every combination therein between, both and neither in any given performance.

The shapes a dancer makes and moves in and through in musical-movement creation with others are dependent upon the forms integrated into their musical-movement repertoire of "I can's", their aesthetic and expressive intentions and choices, and the requirements of the inter-active moment. While arguably there may not be an anatomically *correct* or *right* posture for a tap dancer, there are particular shapes and postures – 'aesthetic elements' – that more authentically connect tap dancing with its origins and roots as an Africanist art form, what Brenda Dixon Gottschild has referred to as "signposts of the Africanist aesthetic" (as cited in Kerry-Berry, 2022, p. 79). Drawing from the work of African art historian Robert Farris Thompson and others who have since expanded upon this work, Julie Kerr-Berry provides a glossary of the Africanist aesthetic within jazz dance in *Africanist Elements in American Jazz Danc*e (2022). According to Kerr-Berry, encoded in the bodies of enslaved West Africans, these Africanist elements, or "dense and overlapping rhythms, a weighted response to the earth,

improvisatory structures, and a spine that responded like a central link to its articulated parts" formed the "bedrock of jazz dance in the United States" (2022, p. 89). Kerr-Berry states that there are many dimensions of Africanist elements that indicate what is referred to as a 'rooted' dance form, or a form rooted in African American history and culture. For the purposes of Kerr-Berry's discussion on American jazz dance, which mirrors the present discussion on tap dancing, the most pertinent dimensions include:

1. Asymmetry: "polycentric isolations when the feet may move to a duple rhythm and the hips … to a triple."
2. Call-and-Response: "relationship between dancer and drummer, soloist and chorus … it creates an overlap and garners an interconnectivity in which the body responds to a drum or bell rhythm, or a vocalist to an ensemble";
3. Coolness: "aesthetic visibility and lucidity … luminosity, or brilliance … oppositions, asymmetries, and traditional juxtapositions … an attitude";
4. Ephebism: a quality of youthfulness … lack of separation between performer and spectator … exhibited in the body through 'rhythmic speed, sharpness (as in sudden or abrupt changes in dynamics), force, and attack";
5. Flat-Footedness: the full surface of the foot makes continuous contact with the ground … 'gliding, dragging or shuffling steps'… a giving into weight to maintain… contact with the ground … a smooth and flexible style of delivery and an ability to quickly shift in direction, rhythm and intensity";
6. Get Down: a giving into weight in which knees act as springs that release into and rebound from the earth … 'an orientation to the earth … bends slightly toward the

earth, flattens the feet against it in a wide, solid stance, and flexes the knee … the body's weight is directed into the earth and does not resist it;

7. Improvisation: both a state of mind as well as a dancer's physical response … promotes individual expression as the dancer responds to various musical stimuli … allows for the constant innovation and evolution of an Africanist movement vocabulary;
8. Movement Initiated from the Hips: movement originates and radiates outward from this central core (the pelvis) to the body's distal points;
9. Polycentric Isolation: dancer embodies two or more rhythms simultaneously while moving, using a series of movement isolations as in the head, shoulders, or hips;
10. Propulsive Rhythm: the body swings through time and in space, riding the infectious drive of syncopated rhythms;
11. Supple and Articulated Spine: 'moving like your back ain't got no bones' … such suppleness is both attitudinal and embodied... (2022, pp. 82-96)

These sign-posts of the Africanist aesthetic are only indicative of a rooted dance form when they are connected to the continuum – that is, when they are rooted in the movement form's African origins. While we might see any individual Africanist element in non-rooted dance forms, such as in contemporary modern dance practices where we may find moments of *Flat-Footedness*, S*upple and Articulated Spine*, and *Improvisation*, for example, in rooted dance forms we recognize these elements in connection with the Africanist continuum. Therefore, something like *Flat-Footedness* in tap dancing (a rooted jazz dance form) "refers to movement that is gliding, shuffling, striking, and simultaneously pressing into and rebounding away from

the earth" (Guarino, 2022, p. 106) and not simply the contact of the full foot with the floor. Guarino cautions that, in considering these elements of the Africanist aesthetic within a dance form, the viewer recognizes the connection between each element in relationship to its roots and not generically apply the term to any particular movement form.

The Africanist aesthetic elements described above, when considered in relation to the jazz continuum, are indicative of a rooted jazz dance form. While I have intentionally described these elements in the section on 'what forms we see', these elements are also experienced audibly (for example, we can *hear* the *Call-and-Response* dynamics between musicians), they are elements of what we do (we *Improvise;* we exude a quality of youthfulness or *Ephebism*), and they are elements of the tangible form that we feel (we feel ourselves *Get Down* into the earth; we feel supported and sitting in the swing of the *Propulsive Rhythm*) and are therefore relevant to the below discussions. Additionally, these elements, serve a functional purpose in musical-movement creation. In the previous chapter, we discussed how *Movement Initiated from the Hips* functionally facilitates tap dance movements and sound creation. Other elements, such as *Flat-Footedness, Get Down, and Supple and Articulated Spine* similarly better enable the improvising dancer to create rhythms and melodies as well as images through tap dancing movements. By maintaining contact between foot and ground, directing the body's weight into the earth rather than resisting it, and keeping a flexible spine, the dancer may "quickly shift in direction, rhythm and intensity", moving more efficiently and with more ease. European aesthetics, such as those of ballet-based forms, require a "stilted and erect spine" which actually "stops the flow of movement energy that is essential to embodying the multirhythm and multitextural aesthetic" of a rooted jazz dance form, like tap dance (Kerry-Berry, 2022, p. 89). Thus, while many variables may influence the forms and shapes that tap dancers move in and

through in their musical-movement improvisations, these Africanist aesthetic elements root tap dancing to its origins as an African-American art form while also, arguably, better facilitating the musical-movement improvisational experience, and thus the inter-action with others.

The dancer's connection and engagement with these Africanist aesthetic elements is linked to their pedagogical experience – that is their training as a dancer – as well as their aesthetic and artistic intention and the degree to which the performance is improvised. Further detail as to how the dancer's intention and approach to improvisation form the inter-active experience of relational flow will be provided below through interviews and discussions with the research participants. Given the focus of this section on the visible forms of relational flow moments experienced in tap dance improvisation, I will now inquire further into what we see when we view improvisational performances of tap dancing.

An improvising tap dancer's form is precisely *not* static, as it shifts and flows through, in and because of the seeming spontaneous rhythmic, melodic creation of their improvisations. Each step, brush, slide and heel drop shapes and flows through forms as the dancer seems to teeter between falling and landing, slipping and sliding, lifting and dropping, as if one split second longer and they might lose grip of the floor or miss a step. And yet, at the same time, the dancer appears grounded, deeply connected to the earth, dancing through where tap meets floor, even when this contact is so light they appear to float atop the floor as a butterfly. With each transfer of weight initiated in the hips, a tap dancer's image emerges and fades, the visible reflecting the audible and vice versa, dependent upon the dancer's artistic and/or aesthetic intentions. Choreographed tap dance performances may call for particular arm positions, posturing, facial expressions, or other expressions of qualitative movement dynamics in upper and lower body movements evoking period-specific styles. Within improvisational contexts, a

dancer's posturing and physical shape may, at times, be less planned or intentional and instead reflective of the needs of the dance at any given moment, whatever manifestation is required to efficiently create particular rhythms, tempos or melodies, or to centre the dancer before they fall off-balance. Upper and lower body movements may by rhythmically in-sync, playing the same time and feel, or may portray the many and multiple rhythms of the audible music. The arms might sway and swing softly while the feet fire off a series of quick, syncopated sounds. Improvisational tap dance shapes are created through the dancer's shifting weight as she simultaneously plays with rhythm, melody, and gravity: arms lifting, falling, knees bending, stretching, hips thrown front-side-back in accommodating bodily stability as it plays between being on and off balance with each drop, lift, throw, or fall, articulating audible accents, harmonies, musical feeling … The improvising tap dancer may appear to bob side to side, forward and backwards, rising, falling, crossing, twisting and turning as they navigate shifting weights from ball to heel, toe to flat foot, left to right …

Audible Form – What Forms We Hear

The forms we hear in improvisational tap dance inter-actions are the audible creations of the musical-movement of both dancers and musicians. In music, form has a distinct meaning. As defined in *Rooted Jazz Dance* (Guarino et. al., 2022), the term *form* is used in music to describe "(1) The organization of a composition or arrangement" (p. 278). A tap dancer improvising with music follows the organization of that piece of music, which in turn shapes their improvisation. In jazz music specifically, form may refer to:

> (Harmonic/melodic structure): Traditional jazz pieces utilize a repetitive structure of melody and harmony comprised of sections. These sections are often labeled A, B, or C. One complete structure is labeled a "chorus". Common forms include: AABA, ABAC, or

can be: 12-bar blues, 16-bar tune…The traditional jazz song employs the overarching structure comprised of several choruses. The most common form is: *melody/head – soloist – additional soloist or soloists – reinstatement of the melody/head.* The form of a tune may also include an intro, use of interludes, and an outro or tag. Note: Other structures exist in contemporary jazz, and this structure can be significantly modified or expanded on. (Guarino et. al., 2022, p. 278, italics in original)

For example, a standard jazz song, like Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's 1939 tune "Take the 'A' Train", has a basic chorus comprised of 32-bars of music, which are organized into four, 8-bar phrases. Harmonically/melodically, these 8-bar phrases follow an AABA pattern, where 'A' is an 8-bar phrase reflecting a specific rhythmic and harmonic/melodic pattern that repeats twice, 'B' reflects an 8-bar phrase that breaks from the 'A' rhythm and harmony/melody, and then with the final 8 bars, the 'A' returns, though sometimes with a slight variation. When playing the song, jazz musicians might decide to open with a 2-, 4- or 8-bar introduction, proceed to play the AABA 'head' of the tune for the first 32-bar chorus (that means, play the standard melody, rhythm and harmonics of the song) and then from there might break out into improvised solos before coming back to the head for one final round. In traditional jazz music and when playing 32-bar standard jazz tunes, musicians organize their solos in phrases that align with the form and structure of the song; experienced musicians and tap dancers might solo in sets of 32-bars, taking one or more full choruses before passing off the solo to the next musician. Less experienced musicians and tap dancers, or those jamming in larger groups, might solo in smaller 8-, 4- or even 2-bar phrases, but these smaller phrases are always equal divisions of the larger 32-bar chorus structure – one would not solo for 3-, 6-, or 9-bars at a time as this would

leave the phrase feeling unfinished (more on this feeling below). Brown et. al. (2018) provide a similar overview of the structure within which improvisations occur in “mainstream jazz”:

> A ‘head’ – usually based on a 32-bar jazz ‘standard’, such as ‘Body and Soul,’ or a 12-bar blues pattern – is played over once, or perhaps twice, framing improvised solos. Typically, the improvised melodies are played on the harmonic and rhythmic foundation provided by the head. Alternative chords are often allowed, depending upon style. After a sequence of solos, the performance will normally end with a reprise of the head. There are many variations to the basic pattern (p. 182).

Musical knowledge of this jazz form and structure is necessarily shared between jazz improvising musicians and dancers, in that such “rules” or “understandings” provide the framework within which musical creation and exploration can occur between improvising musicians and dancers. The form of a jazz tune is like a path both musicians and dancers may follow; without this path, in most cases, musicians and dancers might get ‘lost’ on their journey to musical-movement co-creation as they each venture off on their own without a map to guide them together. Therefore, this path or shared knowledge structure supports the forming of relational flow moments between inter-acting tap dancers and musicians.

Dianne spoke of how a dancer develops this musical knowledge or know-how in relation to her study under Leon Collins. Through an approach wherein the musical form and structure is embedded within the tap dance steps of Collins’s routines, Dianne says, “[students are] training their ear, they don’t even understand that their ear is getting a level of sophistication that is part of an ingrained sensibility that grows more intense as they grow this.” This “ingrained sensibility” is a sensitivity or sensorial awareness to music form and structure – to musicality. It is a bodily-based understanding of the connection between the learned tap dance steps and

phrases and the musical form and structure within and through which these steps are performed. Embedded within the steps is the music, and by learning the steps, one also learns the music.

Dianne explained that as Collins's student, she was prepared through the routines to eventually improvise or jam with musicians. In addition to the steps and phrases required to dance tap dance, Collins's routines gave his students an understanding and awareness of jazz music, familiarity with how musical form and structure are used to shape the inter-actions between musicians in improvisational performances, and the important role of the tap dancer in a musical jam setting. Collins's routines provided the mechanism through which his students could develop their movement and musical repertoires, so as to engage in musical-moving co-creation with musicians. As I discuss above, familiarity with the structure of jazz music, the time, form, melodies and harmonies of specific jazz tunes, the role of each musician and the "rules" or "norms" of improvisation is vital for a tap dancer wanting to improvise with jazz musicians. Thus, these routines provide tap dancers with the tools or "language" they need to communicate with musicians. Dianne explained that through this approach, she and the other students could enter an improvisation circle, or a jam, and:

> … know where that introduction is, how long is that intro, that was 4 bars … let's take a longer intro. What does that feel like? Then you have to set yourself up. How do you set yourself up? What are you thinking about? We talk about process, and so now we are ready for the jam session [and] we find that we can just jam. We didn't know that we could jam, so the first time that you decide you have to call a tune, well we knew enough music to get out and tell them what we wanted. And [Leon] didn't bring them [the musicians] in until we were ready to talk to them and speak their language and go up to ask them something if we wanted to.

This “knowledge” or “understanding” of jazz form and structure, as learned and honed through a tap dance movement practice within which it is embedded, becomes a sensorial, bodily knowledge, not simply a knowledge which is cognitive or “brain-based”. Ingrained within Collins’s approach to teaching tap dance steps and phrases through the study and practice of his routines, this musical “information” is felt and becomes a bodily ‘knowing’ of the relationship between movement and music – ingrained within the dancer’s musical-movement repertoire of “I can’s”. Dianne emphasizes the *feel* of a musical element – the introduction to a song – and how this contributes to the experience of improvising with musicians. Such knowledge is not simply “thought” or “known” cognitively, but is *known* in that the body feels it, recognizes this feeling and therefore *knows* it. The body moves in, within and through the feeling of this musical element, which then becomes something more than what the dancer simply hears – something that they kinaesthetically-kinetically know. Thus, the sensations of the musical downbeat pulling a dancer in, moving her to sit within the beat, and pushing her up, lifting out of the beat as a phrase rounds to a close and leads into another … these sensations *are* the beat, in that they are the *how* of the beat appearing to the dancer. Through the pull of the dancer into the musical space, the beat reveals itself to the dancer and becomes *known.* Feelings of musical connection are embedded within the movements – the drop of the foot or a deepened bend in the knees sink deeper into the down of the beat. Movements at the end of a phrase complete the rhythm or transfer the weight so as to lead into the next musical-movement phrase.

Through repeated practice of Collins’s movement routines, within which these musical feelings are ingrained, this musical knowledge or know-how becomes one with the tap dancer’s musical-movement repertoire. This repertoire provides the dancer with the “words” they need to “speak” the “language” of musicians. This ability to communicate with musicians, through a

shared knowledge or understanding, facilitates inter-activity, reinforces the dancer-musician role as co-creator in the improvisational experience, and enables the cultivation of relational flow moments by providing a shared path along which dancer and musician may travel – a guiding map to follow. By embedding this musical knowledge in his routines, Collins created opportunities for his students to learn experientially and phenomenologically about jazz music form and structure. Through practice, this experiential knowledge became embedded within their musical-movement repertoires, which then informs their improvisational inter-actions with musicians and other dancers.

Form-ing Improvisational Inter-Actions: What We Do

As discussed above, the formal dimension of relational flow experienced in improvised tap dance inter-actions includes *what we see* (the visible) and *what we hear* (the audible), given that tap dance is a musical-movement form. Relational flow experienced through improvisational tap dance inter-actions is further shaped and formed through *what we do* in such experiences. What we do in these experiences may be split into two actions – how we inter-act with the performing other, and how we improvise. These actionable elements shape and form relational flow experiences in improvised tap dance inter-actions. The first action, how we inter-act, is shaped through the setting within which the inter-action occurs: the tap dance jam, the jazz jam, or the stage performance. This form of inter-action shapes the second actionable element, how we improvise. The form of improvisation is further shaped through the approach of individual improvisers to musical-movement improvisation, which may also include dropping the form altogether. These aspects of the form dimension, while outside of Lloyd and Smith's original intention, which focused on the aesthetics of physical form, are experienced in and through movement and are integral to relational flow as experienced through improvised tap dance inter-

actions. They are experienced sensorially, aurally, and kinaesthetic-kinetically, and therefore align with the formal dimension of the inter-active Function-to-Flow model.

Animatable Form – What Forms We Do: Part 1 – The Form of Inter-Action

Relational flow moments experienced in improvisational tap dance inter-actions are formed through what we do in these performances, which is shaped in part through the setting within which the inter-action occurs. The setting within which the improvisational performance takes place shapes both the relationship between performers/audience and thus the dynamics of inter-action, and also the approach to improvisation taken by performers. As noted in the literature review, improvisational performances are not always in jam settings like the one I experienced with TRI; they might also occur on the proscenium stage in front of non-performing spectators. Sarah described three distinct scenarios within which improvisational inter-actions between tap dancers and musicians may occur. Her descriptions reveal the clear roles and responsibilities of the participants which structure the relationship between dancers and musicians in these different settings. As I review each setting, I will first turn to descriptions of what we *hear* and *do* in these settings gathered through interviews, and then I will describe what we might *see* when we view or experience the improvisational inter-action.

1 - The Tap Dance Jam

The first setting Sarah spoke of reflects the tap jam, sometimes referred to as a "cypher", and is similar to the jam I participated in with TRI. In these settings, tap dancers exchange bars of steps and rhythms with one another, improvising atop rhythms that are often created by the other dancers or sometimes created by musicians (either live or recorded). Dancers are encouraged to steal steps and challenge one another in these settings, and often take liberties by experimenting with new musical ideas or movement steps that are not fully ingrained within their

musical-movement repertoires. These jam environments are spaces for growth and exploration through improvised musical-movement. Sarah explains:

> I grew up in L.A., the dance studios I grew up at never did improvisation or if they did, it was like I had to be pushed into the circle because I was scared and I didn't know what that meant, I just knew I was on the spot and I didn't like that as a kid, until I met [tap dancer] Jason Samuel Smith. … He experienced improv in New York with Savion Glover, that was a big part of being in [the Broadway musical Bring in da] Noise, [Bring in da] Funk … there were the cyphers they called them, jam sessions before the show. That was their way of warming up, getting the juices flowing before the show. So, when he moved to L.A. he wanted to keep that going, so he started this tap jam every Monday night and I was 12 years old at the time and I started going. And again, I hadn't really been exposed to a jam session like that, so what he was exposing me to was my complete understanding of what [improvisation] is. He started off with a circle and no music, we would all keep a little groove for each other: *ba-doo ahhhhh ... ga-goo ahhhhh*, or more intricate … g*a-goo ah ah ah ga-goo ah ah ah* … and we would just keep holding that down for each person and there was no set amount of time, "okay everybody we are taking 8 bars", it wasn't like that at all, it was like, "go as long as you want", which is a little much because I'm in a circle now, I'm 12 years old, I'm amongst mostly men. Jason was 21 at the time, people … in [their] 60s, 70s coming in and killing it. [Tap dancer] Chance Taylor, one of my other mentors, came and was killing it, and everyone would go for an average of 7 minutes! An average! So, my understanding was, okay I'm going to go until I'm tired, until I can't dance anymore … I got in a state of practicing just like seeing where my mind goes, seeing where the flow goes I guess ten minutes in, I'm kind

> of over it, I'll pass it on, and then 30 minutes later I'll go again because everyone is taking a long time. It was a cool thing to watch these incredible tap dancers go, there was never a point where it was like 'come on, wrap it up!' I would watch Jason … being my guru at the time, he is giving everyone respect so then I am giving this person respect whether they go 5 minutes or 20 minutes, you will have my undivided attention and it was great because I got to steal steps and I got to be inspired and pushed by these killer amazing talented tap dancers. So that was [what] my start was like [in] these jam sessions. Then I was very comfortable with improvisation in my teenage years.

In tap dance jam sessions like the one Sarah described above, tap dancers take turns improvising for set or open amounts of time in the exploration and creation of tap dance rhythms and steps. The physical shape of this form of improvisational inter-action is usually a circle, wherein performing members stand side-by-side and face inwards, each taking turns soloing to a groove or rhythm created by the dancers (as described by Sarah) or to a recorded musical track. The spectators in this jam situation are often the other performers, though there could be an audience of non-participants. The shape of the jam circle may shift, depending upon the movement patterns of the participants. For example, a soloist might improvise in place, travelling very little from their spot in the circle, or they might travel forward into the centre of the circle, side to side towards the dancers to their left and right, or back away from the centre of the circle. Such travelling movement patterns may be practical, in that the dancer's improvised movements might lead them to travel in particular directions, or they may also be intentional, with aesthetic or communicative aims.

As per Sarah's description, musical-movement explorations in tap dance jam settings may evoke sensations of immersion with the experience, so that the dancer experiences

themselves carried off by the improvisational moment as they "see where the flow goes" (as described by Sarah), or perhaps *feel* where the flow goes. In Sarah's experience, improvising soloists were not constrained by time – meaning they were not restricted to improvising for a set number of musical bars, or for a set number of minutes. This lack of time constraint contributed to a sense of freedom to flow through improvisational exploration, which was further facilitated through the respect and support of the non-soloing participants. The unlimited amount of time for improvising provided Sarah, and the other dancers, with the freedom to explore, create, steal and try-out rhythms and steps without the constraint of adhering to a particular length of time. And in turn, one respectfully provides the space and support to the other participants as they take their own solos. This form of improvisational inter-action between tap dancers presents many opportunities for experiencing relational flow moments. Relational flow moments might occur as the non-soloing dancers support the soloist with an underlying groove or rhythm created by the other dancers, upon and within which the improviser might 'play'. Moments of connection or synchronicity between this baseline groove and the improvising soloist might spark sensations of relationally flowing together. Other moments might emerge as one improviser steals and alters a step or rhythm of another, which may elicit vocal shouts of encouragement, joy and approval from the others in the jam or what Kerr-Berry (2022) describes as *Ephebism*. The functional capacities identified in the previous chapter – listening being, shedding oneself for growth and developing and honing one's own style or touch – are developed through such improvisational tap dance jam settings, wherein dancers are encouraged to experiment, try-out or try-on steps and phrases, and listen and engage with one another in the inter-active moment.

This tap dance jam setting is similar to my first improvisational experience with the Toronto Rhythm Initiative dancers as described in the Chapter 1. Though there are some

differences, for example, in the Toronto Rhythm Initiative jam, we were improvising to a recorded musical track, whereas in Sarah's experience, improvisations were set upon an underlying groove created by the other dancers, there are also some similarities. For example, dancers in both experiences were expected to show respect for the soloing dancer by providing the musical space within which the dancer could solo (that is, waiting for your turn to dance), and by being attentive and engaged during the solos of others. This respect and attention extended to dancers of all skill and experience levels so that everyone was allotted their 'space' to solo. Even in situations wherein dancers appeared to 'challenge' one another by stealing/copying or embellishing upon the steps, rhythms or phrases of another soloist, this was done in a respectful, playful manner. Between these two jam experiences, the "rules" or "boundaries" were different; in the Toronto Rhythm Initiative jam, there were clear time limitations to each dancer's solo based in the form of the musical tune, whereas for Sarah, the only limit set on the dancers appeared to be one's own limitations – that is dancers were encouraged to dance until they felt they were done. Evidently, the form of improvisational inter-action in tap dance jams may vary slightly, though what remains consistent is the emphasis on the exploration and creation of tap dance steps, rhythms and sounds, and mutual respect between dancers.

2 - The Jazz Jam

Improvisational jam experiences may include musicians, as well as tap dancers. In these settings, the creation and expression of music, particularly jazz music, is generally the focus of the inter-action, rather than the trading and exploring of tap dance steps and rhythms as in tap dance jams. In jazz music jams, the role of the tap dancer is often as a percussive musician. Sarah explains:

> Jason also started these jam sessions once a month at a jazz club and this was great to then expose us to tap dancing with live musicians. They have a list of jazz standards you can choose from, there's a song called Autumn Leaves, I don't know it but I know there's a song. Things getting into my mind, I'm like okay, well I'll call that tune, I like it, maybe I'll learn the lyrics to it or learn it better and tap to it better… That was awesome too, to get to jam with musicians, however, there was no proper teaching of the proper protocol. The only thing that I was watching everyone do, you go up, you call a tune, and you tap dance the entire time. Is that real life? No! That's what I had to learn the hard way, and I even went to other jazz jams in [Los Angeles] by the time I was about 15 or 16 at the World Stage, it's a jazz club … and I'd go and just call a tune and tap the entire song. So, this means I'm tapping over saxophone solos and piano solos, which, if it's a tap festival and you're the star, that's okay, but if it's a jazz jam you want to be just like another musician so you take your little chorus or two and you back off and let the sax player take it… But I heard other musicians talk about tap dancers that do that I remember hanging out with musicians, they're like, "I hate when tap dancers come, they tap over everything, they don't know the proper etiquette, if you want to be respected as a musician, play like a musician."

In jazz jams like the one Sarah describes, tap dancers create music with jazz musicians and are expected to participate in the inter-active experience as musicians, rather than solely as dancers. As she describes her experience improvising at jazz jams, Sarah refers to a specific jazz jam etiquette that, as a tap dancer, she had not learned prior to improvising at the World Stage Jazz Club. Accordingly, she quickly learned that in these improvisational environments, tap dancers should not attempt to tap dance for the entire song, as if they are the star of the show.

Rather, tap dancers should play with the musicians in jazz music creation like an improvising jazz musician would, that is, they should take improvised solos in accordance with the jazz musical form and structure of the tune. Sarah suggests that this involves taking "your little chorus or two" and then "back[ing] off" to give the other musicians their turn to solo, just like the piano player or the saxophonist (or any other musician in the jam) would. This approach aligns with the musical form and structure as described in the section on audible forms above. In jazz jams, the experience is about musical co-creation and expression. Unlike in the tap dance jam of Sarah's description, wherein there were no restrictions on the amount of time for which a dancer may improvise, a jazz jam amongst musicians is typically formed through adherence and respect for the form and structure of jazz music. In many jazz jams, participating musicians may have never before played together. Their shared knowledge of jazz musical form and structure, and their familiarity with jazz standard songs, such as the song *Autumn Leaves* as referenced by Sarah, in-form and shape their improvisational inter-actions. In inter-active jazz jam moments, tap dance improvisers are musical co-creators, and the shared knowledge and understanding of jazz form and structure inform and shape the cultivation of relational flow moments.

Jazz jams typically occur in restaurants, social clubs or bars with the establishment's patrons serving as the audience. In these instances, the jam serves to both provide entertainment for the patrons and to facilitate musical co-creation among participants. Jam participants usually stand beside one another with their instruments on a stage or in a cleared space in the establishment. Musicians with mobile instruments (such as the saxophone or trumpet) typically stand to the side of the group while musicians on the drums or piano, less mobile instruments, are centred. This includes participating tap dancers, who may bring a tap dance board (typically made of wood) upon which they can dance. Although in some jazz jams, tap dance boards, and

in effect tap dancers, are placed in front of other musicians, dancers may step on their board for the duration of their solo, and then, like other musicians, may stand aside or sit down to enable spectators a more direct line of sight to whomever is soloing. Like other musicians, tap dancers might also play a groove or add flourishes during the solos of other musicians. This is often referred to as 'comping,' a jazz term short for the word 'accompanying' which, according to Mark C. Gridley in the *Concise Guide to Jazz* (2010), describes a "syncopated chording accompaniment for an improvised solo" (p. 12), or a "playing accompanying chords as accents behind the soloist" (p. 69). Alternatively, participating tap dancers may only dance during their solo and then stop completely to provide musical space for the other musicians. According to Sarah, tap dancers should avoid "tapping over everything" if they choose to play during another musician's solo. When tap dancers participate in jazz music jams, they do so as primarily jazz musicians, and therefore should shape their improvisational inter-actions through adherence to the standard form and structure of jazz music.

3 - The Stage Performance

The third form of tap dance improvisational inter-action described by Sarah was performances on the proscenium stage featuring dancers and live musicians and/or recorded music. In her description, Sarah refers specifically to improvised performances that occur as part of tap dance festivals, though such forms of improvised performances take place in many types of proscenium stage shows. Tap dance festivals are large venues for training and performance in many areas of the world. During the time of this research, we have two recurring tap dance festivals in Canada: *The Vancouver International Tap Dance Festival* in Vancouver, British Columbia, and *the Rhythm, Body and Soul Tap Dance Festival* in Calgary, Alberta. Two additional festivals have run on occasion: The *Toronto International Tap Dance Festival* is

intended to be a bi-annual event in Toronto, Ontario, and the *Montreal Tap Dance Festival* ran for a time in Montreal, Quebec. Tap festival performances are opportunities for festival participants – including students and their parents – to view their teachers in-action. In some instances, these performances are not improvised and instead are used to showcase new choreographed works. Dancers like Sarah, however, typically improvise their performances, and do so with live musicians who perform alongside them on stage. She said that performances at festivals are, "the experience when I can take the whole song … when it's like 'Here's Sarah Reich! Here's her performance!' Then nobody wants me to stand aside and listen to the piano player, they want to see me tap dance, so that's the only scenario where I'll do that now…" Her role, in these improvised performances, is different than her role in tap or jazz jams. In these performances, she is the featured performer or "featured [speaker] and temporary [leader] of the group's journey" (Berliner, 1994, p. 358). In this role, Sarah is expected to 'take the whole song', which means to dance on stage for the entire duration of a song as the soloist. Although the other performers – musicians – are engaged in performance, they are not dictating the direction of the performance in the same way that the soloist is. As discussed in Berliner (1994), soloists typically rely upon the rhythm section, such as the drums or the bass, "to provide signposts for the performance's direction…[and] [at] times … interject punctuations and unique melodic figurations between the soloist's phrases" (p. 358). The role of non-soloing musicians, in these improvisational inter-actions, is to support the soloist and to follow their lead (Berliner, 1994). Sarah clarifies the difference between her role as a featured performer or soloist, and as an improvising musician in a jazz jam:

> …otherwise [in a jazz jam] I'll just comp, you know. But that's what I teach now in my intensives, I will actually teach the stuff … "guys, know the difference between a jam session

> and a tap fest.” [I’ll] show making an arrangement, and how to talk to a band, and communicate because you don’t want to be that tap dancer who taps over everyone. But going to jazz jams all the time, I would see that, that was always the protocol. Why should I be any different because I am a tap dancer?

When tap dancers are soloists performing alongside musicians on the proscenium stage, there are still many opportunities for co-creation and collaboration in the inter-action. While describing her approach as an improvisational soloist, Dianne emphasized the importance of mutual respect in these inter-actions, and reiterated the value of a shared knowledge of music form and structure to shaping relational flow moments between musicians and dancers:

> [Musicians will ask me] “Do you have a chart?” and I say, “No, do you have a favourite waltz you can do?” and they’ll say, “something like this?” and they’ll play and I’ll say, “Perfect! Let’s do that!” I’m not stupid here, I gotta survive [by being flexible/open with the musicians] “I tell you what, I’ll set up my tempo. I always set my tempo, I need my tempo.” They look at you like, maybe you don’t trust us, and I say, “I’ll set the tempo because I’m going to eat my tempo if I take it too slow. I’m not going to come off and say, ‘they played too slow or too fast.’ It’s on me.” So … I always set up my tempo … I’d say to the musicians … “you wanna run through once?” … so we run through, I’m pitter-patting, I have no idea, I don’t really know … what I’m going to do but I … know basically I’m going to improv on some [chore]ography so I’m comfortable. I don’t know where it’s going to be, I don’t know. It’ll go wherever we will go, but whatever it is, it’ll be us. … what it’s going to be is whatever we’re going to be. Regardless of what the tune is, it’s really how we’re going to interact, because that’s how I’m working.

Dianne's approach to improvising with musicians in performances on stage is rooted in their shared musical knowledge, as well as in a sense of openness and flexibility to the relational experience. In these performances, though Dianne is the soloist, she engages with the musicians not as her accompanists, but as co-creators of the performance. Before her performance even begins, Dianne demonstrates her willingness to interact with and relate to the musicians through their shared knowledge and understanding of jazz music: when she is asked if she has prepared set music for the musicians to follow, she asks instead if they have music with which they would like to play. This not only demonstrates her care and consideration of their role as co-collaborators, but also her openness to the performance as an inter-active improvisation. By offering the musicians the choice of tune, Dianne further demonstrates her vast knowledge and experience with jazz music. This opens herself to the myriad possibilities of songs to which she could end up dancing. This is risky, given that an important technique for improvising with jazz musicians is knowing the form and structure of the tune to which you are dancing, and is not necessarily a recommended approach for novice improvisers who may be familiar with only a few jazz tunes. Given Dianne's expertise and experience, she likely is familiar with a broad catalogue of jazz tunes, structures, and aesthetics and therefore will likely know at least one of the options proposed by the musicians, or will be able to quickly grasp the structure, feel and sentiment of an unfamiliar jazz tune. Further, by stating that she will set the tempo, she takes responsibility for the performance – as a dancer, the tempo of the song can significantly affect her ability to perform – the tempo of the song typically determines the speed at which the dancer is dancing. By taking responsibility for this tempo, she releases the burden from the musicians of having to guess or assume what tempo she would like to dance at or can dance to. Here, she also refers to the structures through which she will shape her improvisation – "I am going to improv

on some 'ography" – meaning she is going to take the steps and rhythm phrases and ideas from the choreography she has ingrained in her musical-movement repertoire, perhaps through the routines of Leon Collins, or perhaps her own pieces of choreography, and improvise using them – rearrange and mix and match elements of the steps, play with the timing or accents of the rhythms. More details on this approach will follow in the next section. Through the above quotation, Dianne demonstrates the intersection of her approach as both an improviser (through 'improvography') and as a musician (open and willing to interact in the improvisation), and states that "what it's going to be is whatever we're going to be." Her embrace of the moment of the improvisation and her willingness to accept the life that the inter-action of the improvisation presents demonstrate how the inter-action between musician and dancer can shape the relational flow experienced through the improvisational performance.

As soloists, tap dancers may perform with the full band, or may, like Brenda described in our conversation, solo with only one other musician at a time, so as to enable the creation of a deeper inter-active connection:

> Trading is interesting for the audience to hear the relationship of you and the musician, but mainly it's to develop your chops… [Dancers and musicians] have fun trading. Occasionally on stage I'll do it, mainly I do it now because I can't catch my breath, I use it as a device. What I prefer, rather than trading is to pull one musician out at a time and solo with them, I like soloing with other musicians, you know, and have nobody else playing [from] the band, just the bass player and me [for example], so we can really listen to each other. That's what I like to do, I trade occasionally but it's not my favourite thing.

In the quote above, Brenda refers to two separate inter-active exchanges between musicians and dancers. Soloing with one musician at a time is a similar approach to the role of the soloist as

described by Sarah and Dianne, in that the tap dancer is the primary lead in the inter-action. Such inter-actions are usually lengthier than shorter inter-actions, such as trading, which refers to the exchange of improvisational ideas between performers in two or four-bar sections (Gridley, 2010). As Brenda says, soloing with one musician at a time allows the performers to "really listen to each other". Once again, we can see that despite the term "solo" often meaning "a performance in which the performer has no partner or associate: something undertaken or done alone" (Merriam-Webster, n.d. b), it also may refer to performances involving more than one performer, but with one individual particularly leading or "featured". In the latter definition, the other performers are not silent, but are co-contributors in the inter-active experience.

In expressing her preference for soloing with musicians, Brenda refers to trading. An additional approach to improvisation and one that is based on the *Call-and-Response* characteristic of Africanist aesthetics, trading may occur between improvising dancers and musicians as well as between individual dancers. In these scenarios, performers take turns "leading" or alternating solo exchanges of improvised sound, rhythm and movement (Gridley, 2010, p. 106). Trading experiences can be competitive as dancers and musicians attempt to outdo one another by stealing, copying and embellishing on the steps, rhythms and melodies of their inter-active partner (as discussed in Valis Hill, 2003). These experiences can also be friendly with growth and development as the goal: trading affords the chance to practice technique, such as steps, rhythms, and phrases, and improvisatory skills and strategies (Brenneis, 2013). Trading dancers might pick up and try out new and more challenging steps in cooperative exchanges that also entail the sharing of the history and values of tap dance culture (such as those between tap dancing mentors and mentees at the "University of La Cave" as described by Peters [2010]). Trading sessions are often described as "conversations" between performers, as "participants

introduce novel melodic material, respond to each other's ideas, and elaborate or modify those ideas" (Donnay et al., 2014, p. 1).

Evidently, inter-actions during staged performances may occur between individual improvising tap dancers as well as between dancers and musicians. In describing her experiences with improvisation, Brenda referred to instances of improvising with other dancers as "simultaneous improvisations". Simultaneous or collective improvisation occurs when two or more tap dancers improvise at the same time. Brenda links this approach to improvisation with the New Orleans jazz tradition, and with the work of bebop-style jazz musician Charles Mingus:

> I kind of look back because I also like Dixie Land [style music] … I was listening to [Be]Bop, I was … listening to New Orleans [jazz]… I have very good friends who were playing New Orleans jazz and … I loved New Orleans jazz because it's simultaneous improvisation. That's the only place you're going to hear it until Charles Mingus [the American jazz double bassist and composer], who was my musical hero. But, generally with Mingus' improvisations, they sound very chaotic. … I have a feeling because he said once on one of his albums, "Why do we all have to dance in the same time signature?" So, I think his improvisations with his groups were people working in different time signatures. Although I have done collective improvisations built on ideas, not rhythms, I worked out of time for a long time, so Mingus uses simultaneous improvisation.

Inspired through Charles' Mingus's "chaotic" collective improvisations, Brenda suggests that tap dancers might similarly improvise at the same time, though in different time signatures, or, as she has used previously in her choreographed routines, using different ideas. Brown et. al. (2018) discuss Mingus's style, stating he "sought 'an equalization of instrumental voices' in collective

improvisation, facilitating 'an extraordinarily high amount of group interaction'" (p. 183). Thus, inter-action between improvising tap dancers may be facilitated by providing opportunities for simultaneous improvisations. Though these improvisations may sound random or chaotic, like "an argument with instruments" (Shatz, 2013), it may actually be quite structured, with each musician or dancer improvising upon a set rhythm, idea, or other musical element such as a time signature. Performers are not necessarily improvising in a free-for-all fashion where there are no established boundaries or limitations. Mingus referred to this approach as "organized disorganization" (as quoted in Brown et. al., 2018, p. 189). In moments of simultaneous improvisation, "the individual musicians are attending to each other as the music progresses, and both their individual contributions and their interactions betray considerable local coherence" (Brown et. al., 2018, p. 189).

Staged presentations of improvisational performances take various visible forms. Due to spatial limitations in staged performances of improvisation, sometimes the physical location of the dancers in relation to the musicians is pre-determined, whereby the musician may be stationary in one corner or position on stage, and the dancer may perform in front of the musician throughout their performance. Other times, musicians and dancers may perform side-by-side, with the dancer amongst the musicians as a member of the band, or with the dancer moving in and around the musicians throughout the performance. In any of these scenarios, the dancer and musicians may turn to face one another, face away or towards the spectators, and any combination of the above. Just as a dancer's upper body motions or their travelling in space might be either aesthetic or practical in nature, such acts of 'facing' similarly might arise unintentionally as a result of the dancer's movement choices or might be used to intentionally convey different meanings to spectators and performers alike. For example, turning towards an

audience, the dancer may invite deeper engagement with the spectators or may appear more 'presentational' in that they are presenting their performance directly to the audience. Turning towards the musician or other dancers, the dancer may open pathways for visual communication with the musicians or may gesture appreciation for their contributions. Such inter-active moments may reveal differences in approaches between a dancer dancing *to* music played by live or recorded musicians, and a dancer and musicians *performing together* in musical-moving co-creation.

The Setting Shapes the Inter-Action Which Forms the Flow

The above descriptions of tap dance improvisation in three distinct performance settings demonstrate how the environment within which the performance occurs shapes the inter-action between performers, and, in effect, shapes and forms the relational flow experience between dancers, musicians, and audience members. Though the inter-activity, musical-movement creation through improvisation, remains consistent, we may presume that relational flow experiences in these various settings would be experienced differently. In the following chapter, we will elaborate further upon experiential differences felt by the participants in such relational flow experiences. Through Sarah, Brenda, and Dianne's descriptions, it is clear that the setting within which dancers and musicians are improvising together in-forms the dancer's improvisational approach to the inter-action, which in turn forms the relational flow experience.

Animatable Form – What Forms We Do: Part 2 – The Form of Improvisation

As we have seen above, the setting within which the inter-action occurs in-forms the form of improvisation, which shapes the relational flow experienced in improvised tap dance inter-actions. Additionally, the form of improvisation is shaped by the approach taken by the performers, both individually and collectively, as they inter-act in performance. In both dance

and music performances, the form of improvisation varies on a continuum from completely choreographed or structured (with the exception of expressive qualities such as, in music, "tempo, the use of vibrato, dynamic" [Brown et. al., 2018, p. 190] and in dance, the qualitative dynamics of musical movement as discussed in the previous chapter) to completely improvised or free. Typically, structured music and dance performances are shaped through completely defined "structural properties" such as, in music, "melody, harmony, or length" (Brown et. al., 2018, p. 190), and in the case of dance, movement choreography, spacing, and timing. On the other end of the continuum, where performances are intended to be completely free and improvisational, one might suggest that one's ingrained repertoire – musical for musicians, movement as described by Sheets-Johnstone (1999/2011b, 2015b) for dancers, and musical-movement as I have proposed in the case of tap dancers – informs and supports any musical-movement improvisation, regardless of intention towards free or unstructured performance. While arguments exist on both ends, interviews with the participants suggest that most music and movement performances exist somewhere between these two extremes, formed through some combination of choreography/structure and improvisation/freedom. In considering the form of improvisation that shapes improvised tap dance inter-actions, I suggest that the following quotation from Brown et al. (2018) with regards to jazz music improvisation applies to that of tap dance: "Jazz improvisation involves choices about the music one is playing as one plays. Although they can be characterized as spontaneous, these choices are not random. They are shaped by musicians' shared knowledge, goals, and intentions" (p. 196). Thus, tap dance improvised inter-actions are formed through the choices about the musical-movement one plays as one is playing. These choices are not random; they are shaped through the dancer-musician's

shared knowledge, goals, intentions, and – as we have seen – their musical-movement repertoires of “I can’s”.

Before I consider approaches to intentionally improvised tap dance performances, I will first explore further the role of improvisation in intentionally non-improvised performances, or those on the choreographed/structured end of the spectrum. In these intentionally non-improvised contexts, inter-actions between dancers and musicians are shaped and structured through both choreographed and non-choreographed moments. Just because improvisation is not necessarily intentional in choreographed performances does not mean there cannot be moments of relational flow. A choreographer may include specific moments of visual connection between dancers and musicians, or of visual contact with the audience as the dancer turns to look directly at the spectators. Similarly, a choreographer may compose tap dance steps to create particular rhythmic and melodic affects at certain moments in the music, which elicit spurts of connection between dancers and musicians as their sounds and rhythms synchronise or harmonize. Improvised moments occur in these choreographed performances to varying degrees: tap dancers performing set choreography may integrate improvised facial expressions, improvised individual movements or small sections of movements, or even improvised responses to mistakes or accidents mid-performance. Improvised moments may be choreographed in to the performance – that is, the choreographer may indicate sections within the piece where dancers are required to go ‘off script.’ Non-choreographed moments of improvisation in such experiences occur as dancers and musicians adjust to the tempo, which might fluctuate and differ throughout a performance, given the live-played nature of the music. Similarly, if dancers or musicians make mistakes or slight adjustments mid-performance, such as missing certain melodic bars, holding notes slightly longer than practiced, or any other variety of nuanced musicality, performers must be aware and

listening to adjust in the moment. These adjustments are improvisations in themselves. While discussing the role of improvisation in performances of the Nicholas Brothers, Valis Hill (2003) points to the various ways improvised and choreographed movement may interact:

> While the dances were arrangements of popular jazz standards that specified the number of choruses, the tempos, and the musical segues, there were always differences, however slight, in the manner the music was played, in the manner the brothers responded to the music being played, and most of all, in how the audience was responding to the musicians and performers. (p. 96)

Thus, while their routines were set in advance, improvisation did play a role, however small, in the tap dancing acts of the 1930s and 1940s such as those of the Nicholas Brothers.

In our interview, Dianne similarly spoke to the relationship between spontaneity and improvisation, and highlighted what she saw as the challenge of teaching improvisation to tap dance students:

> I think true improvisation… we experience that here and there. Moments of true improvisation are fleeting, I think. And they're wonderful and you hope that you can have longer experiences, but … I find improvisation hard to mold, manipulate, teach, create. I have a hard time with these quote-un-quote "improvisation classes". I understand that people need to understand the concept and the idea of improvisation, but I find an improvisation class, first of all the word is intimidating to people. Immediately, they're like this *[demonstrates a nervous, tense facial expression]*. So, I never use the word because I have found that word is so intimidating. So, I always say "holding time, we're gonna hold time, pass the 8 around, do the 4 …" I never use the word…because I find

> that word alone locks them, gets them fearful of improvising. …When we do have a conversation about improvising, I talk about all the ways that one improvises, and there's no one way.

The above quotation demonstrates the elusiveness of defining or capturing what improvisation means, and points to how experiencing improvisation as a tap dancer may in-form and form relational flow moments. There are three key ideas in this quotation I wish to unpack. Firstly, Dianne alluded to the connection between relational flow experiences and what she referred to as 'moments of true improvisation'. Additionally, as she described improvisation, her choice of language speaks to the relationship between space and time. Finally, she reminds us that there is no one specific way to improvise, but that it is possible to 'talk about' the ways one might improvise.

Prompted to describe her approach to improvising and teaching her students to improvise, Dianne clarified that, for her, 'moments of true improvisation' are 'fleeting'. What is 'true' about such moments of improvisation that equates their ephemerality? Is it that these moments are perceived to be purely spontaneous in that the music and movement are completely created in the moment? But, as I have shown previously, one's improvised musical-movement is never completely random nor 'out of nowhere' – it comes from an ingrained musical-movement repertoire, established through a process of training and practice. Perhaps instead it is that in these moments of 'true improvisation' the dancer is so caught up in the flowing experience of inter-action with the other so that they feel a complete immersion of self with experience. Rather than perceived moments of purely spontaneous movement, instead, maybe these moments of 'true improvisation' are those when our cognitive consciousness is so completely engaged in the inter-action that we are fully moving and musicking through our musical-movement repertoires

of “I can’s” – we are thinking-in-musical-movement. By thinking-in-musical-movement, the dancer may experience themselves as ‘truly’ improvising, in that they are not cognitively conscious of this thinking process, and musical-movements seem to flow *effortlessly* through them, as they exist as their bodies in inter-active motion. These moments of ‘true’ improvisation are, then, moments of being in relational flow. Here, perhaps the verb ‘to improvise’ is synonymous with that ‘to flow’. Of course, everyone’s experience of ‘true improvisation’ may differ, given that what it means to ‘truly improvise’ is, as we have seen in the literature, difficult to define. Instead, maybe true improvisation is when one experiences oneself in relational flow with the inter-active other? In the next chapter, we shall delve deeper into feelings of relational flow moments experienced by the participants in improvisational inter-actions to better comprehend what this means. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I believe it is important to note what I have interpreted as Dianne’s equation of improvisation with experiencing flow moments.

Dianne also refers to a structural element that informs her approach as an improviser in describing how she introduces improvisation to her students. She says that, instead of using the term improvisation, she refers to “holding time … pass[ing] the 8 around … do[ing] the 4”, which are all references to musical time (as here she is referring to 8 or 4 bars of music) and its relationship to danced movement. She suggests that improvisation is difficult to ‘mold, manipulate’ and provides means for doing so through the reference to ‘hold[ing] time’ as a structure within and through which the improvisation may occur. Time, ‘the 8 [bars]’ or ‘the 4 [measures]’, creates limitations and boundaries within which flow moments of seemingly spontaneous musical-movement creation might be experienced.

What is it to ‘hold time’? One might visualize literal fingers clasped firmly around a stopwatch, or perhaps more abstractly, an image of the world, cradled in the palms of two hands. In the midst of the most wonderful, most flowing moments of life, wouldn’t we all like to ‘hold time’ – that is, press pause on the moment – so that we might savour every last second before the moment passes? For improvising tap dancers, however, holding time does not indicate freezing the moment. Instead, it is an occupying of the notes within the bars, filling particular lengths of music with tap dancing rhythms and melodies (or, sometimes *not* filling time, leaving it *empty*, that is, without sound) and then ‘passing’ the next 4 or 8 bars of music along to the next dancer to hold – that is, to dance *within*. Holding time in tap dancing is literally moving in and within time, not stopping or pausing. It is the maintaining of a consistent tempo and rhythmic feeling while improvising. As I reflect on *holding* time, I am reminded of time’s materiality, and specifically the relationship between space and time. In *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996/2017), David Abram provides an overview of phenomenological conceptualizations of time and its relation to space, arguing that “separable time and space are not absolute givens in all human experience” (p. 193). Our preconceptual experience of time is not so neatly distinct from that of space. Abram refers to space as place and adopts Martin Heidegger’s conceptual structure of the three ecstasies of time – past, present and future – as horizons towards which we are carried (Abram, 1996/2017, p. 209). Similarly, Sheets-Johnstone says that temporality and spatiality “are rooted in man’s foundational pre-reflective awareness of himself, and not in the more abstractly refined notions of ‘real’ time and ‘real’ space: the immediate lived experience of time and space is epistemologically prior to our notions of objective time and objective space” (2015b, p. 11). In other words, in our living experiences, time and space are interconnected and interdependent,

and our experiential engagement with time is prior to distinctions between objective time and objective space.

Dianne's comments on 'holding' and 'passing around' musical time provide us with a living example of how time and space are interconnected in our experience of them. One could just as easily say that in improvisation, a dancer or musician 'holds' or 'takes up' space. In its written form, musical time is represented visually as bars or measures on a page with notes indicating rhythm and melody written between two parallel, vertical lines. Symbols and musical notations represent the music, tempo, time signature and feel that is played – chords that together create the harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic sounds we hear. This includes the sounds of silence, indicated by the blank spaces between the notes on the page. These musical notes *occupy* or *fill* the spaces between the bars, and the absence of notes also fills the space with the sound of nothing. Written music embeds and solidifies the relationship between space and time as it literally 'takes up space' in writing on the page and demonstrates the materiality of musical time. Further still, the notes which occupy the spaces between the bars represent the movements in space of a musician (or of a dancer) in the playing of the musical instrument (tap shoes included!). Thus, as Dianne speaks to holding or passing time through improvisational tap dance inter-actions, she also references the immediate lived experience of time and space as interconnected, dependent phenomena.

There are many forms of improvisation that shape tap dance inter-actions between dancers, dancers and musicians, and performers and audiences. The degree to which a performance is improvised varies on a scale or continuum from set or pre-planned to free, though I argue that there is some degree of improvisation inherent in every performance, regardless of intention. As Dianne indicated, improvisation can mean different things to different performers,

but it entails playing with and experiencing the relationship between space and time through musical-movement. The form of improvisation we take – that is the degree to which we improvise our movement – in-forms our approach to the inter-action and therefore shapes our relational flow experience.

Approaching Improvisation

The degree to which a performance is improvised, as described above, is in-formed through the many different approaches to improvisation a performer may take, and it is through these approaches that the improvised inter-actions between performers are formed. Brown et. al. (2018) describe some of the forms of improvisation employed by jazz musicians, which may also be used by improvising tap dancers:

> Several musicians may trade off with each other. Or, as in classic New Orleans jazz, many musicians can improvise collectively, individually augmenting and varying their contribution to the shared performance of a familiar tune. The basic pattern was challenged by the rise of so-called "modal" jazz in which, instead of improvising on melodies that fit a set of chords, soloists would create wide-ranging variations within a single scale. The free improvisations of the "New Thing" of the 1960s and the ensuing avant-garde movement pushed the envelope of collective improvisation. Meter, line length, duration of solos, and every other structural "given" are up to each musician. The crucial point is that there is no one practice that counts as jazz improvisation, and the amount and degree of improvisation that we can ascribe to different jazz styles and periods will depend on the description of improvisation that is adopted from several contending definitions. (p. 182)

In the above quotation, Brown et. al. align approaches to jazz improvisation with the type of jazz music being played – for example, in New Orleans jazz, many musicians might improvise at the same time (what Brenda called 'simultaneous improvisation'), or with 'modal' jazz, wherein improvising soloists played within a single scale rather than a set of chords. Free improvisation, when musicians "give up" the structures that typically guide jazz improvisations, is also noted as an approach to jazz improvisation. Evidently, jazz musicians may employ a variety of approaches to improvisation, in-formed through a relationship (or lack thereof) to jazz form, structure, and style. Albert Murray, in *Improvisation and the Creative Process,* (1998) suggests jazz musicians approach improvisation through "a very specific context and in terms of very specific idiomatic devices of composition" (p. 112). These compositional devices within and through which musicians may improvise include the vamp, an introduction, a series of choruses and the break. Of these devices, the break or a "disruption of the normal cadence of a piece of music", is "an extremely important device from both the structural point of view and from its implications". Like the moments of "true" improvisation described by Dianne above, the break, for Murray (1998), "is precisely this disjuncture which is the moment of truth. It is on the break that you 'do your thing'. The moment of greatest jeopardy is your moment of greatest opportunity. This is the heroic moment … it is when you establish your identity; it is when you write your signature on the epidermis of actuality" (p. 112).

Tap dancers, like jazz musicians, employ a variety of techniques and approaches to form their improvisational performances, including those described above by Brown et. al. (2018) and Murray (1998). Valis Hill (2003) provides examples of the many ways a dancer might approach tap dance improvisation: "the dancer can either embellish and enhance the 'theme' of the previous statement with complementary steps or play within the realm of the rhythmic

statement... the dancer can follow the direction of the music … or shift direction while playing. The dancer can choose to trade on two, four, or eight bars of music in a structured exchange with another dancer or musician, or can improvise, or riff, off of a chorus or a break" (p. 97-98). Many of the approaches described by the participants mirror those provided by Valis Hill. These approaches form their improvisational inter-actions with dancers, musicians, and audience members. Notably, the approaches described in this chapter are not exhaustive; they simply represent those described by the participants in our interviews. As Dianne emphasized, there are many diverse ways through which a tap dancer may approach improvisation and there is "no one way" to do it. These examples do, however, begin to reveal the role that a tap dancer's improvisational approach plays in shaping and forming relational flow moments in inter-active tap dance performances.

Forming Improvisation: Structuring Spontaneity

In my interview with Dianne, she described approaches to improvisation through which dancers might use known or learned phrases of movement (choreography) to structure more spontaneous or 'unknown' phrases of movement (improvisation). She referenced the approach of her friend, the late tap dancer Gregory Hines, known as 'improvography'. Hines coined the term to describe an approach through which tap dancers may play with the relationship between improvisation and choreography. Through improvography, tap dancers combine sequences of choreographed tap dance musical-movement with phrases of improvisation. Regarding his approach, Hines stated: "When I dance, I like to use steps I already know, but also like to discover new things along the way" (as quoted in Duffy, 2016, p. 11). Through our discussion, Dianne reiterated that tap dance improvisation is not formed through either/or relationships – that

is, either choreography or improvisation, rather through both/and relationships – both choreographed and improvised movement.

As she described Hine's approach, Dianne explained how the known, practiced steps of choreography scaffold and inform the spontaneous creation of other steps. She said:

> Look at Gregory for example, one of the greatest improvisational dancers. I mean, he could *go*. When he got there … a lot of the stuff he did was improvography; it was stuff he always did [*scatting a rhythm typically played by Gregory*] … and if you look at his dancing over the years, there were lots of hook steps that he used and it was where he went from there. So, this was the same always, and all that stuff in the middle was stuff that varied from time to time, and sometimes it was explosive or consistent and that's how I sort of see improv, based on a whole lot of things … I use Gregory as [an example] because Gregory was very cool … and he was very clear, because … he was like the king of improvisation, at one point he was the only one doing it that way. People were looking at him [like], "wow what's that? We want to do it like that." He was very earnest with his talk in our generation that he said "true improvisation are fleeting moments. You hope for those moments and you try to get them to be as stretched out", but, he said "if you see me in Chicago then probably you didn't see me in Sacramento, so you didn't know I was pulling from the same source, but once you got to know me, you followed me around, you felt 'oh he's pulling … you can see what he's pulling from.'" You pull from this and go off on a journey, or he could pull from this and go right to here and pull from this or this and go off on a journey but that off on a journey part, that's the part that you spend your life trying to hone. That's the true improv.

Dianne contrasts Hines's set steps or phrases, the 'hook steps' he 'pulled from', with the 'off on a journey part … that [a dancer] spends [their] life trying to hone' – the 'true, fleeting moments of improvisation'. Once again, Dianne suggests that relational flow experiences when dancers are 'pulling' from phrases and patterns they have integrated into their movement repertoires of "I can's" are different from those when dancers are 'off on a journey' in their improvisations with others. Perhaps, it is in these journey moments, like those of the break described by Murray (1998), when dancers experience what it truly means to, as Sheets-Johnstone says, think-in-movement (2011a, 1999/2011b, 2015b). In thinking-in-movement, when steps seemingly spontaneously emerge and flow into and through the dancer, a dancer is off on a journey, dancing, playing, and listening-being in inter-action, rather than experiencing themselves as 'doing' pre-determined steps or phrases.

The approach to structuring moments of improvisation with choreographed, planned sections is similar to the pedagogical approach known as scaffolding. With scaffolding, the expert or educator provides limitations or boundaries to a task, or completes some aspects of the task while leaving others for the student to complete independently. Scaffolding, which David Wood, Jerome S. Bruner and Gail Ross first defined as "a process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (Wood et al. 1976, p. 90), is a pedagogical technique that calls for a system of exchange between teacher and student through which supports or guides are employed to reduce the student's freedom and maintain direction in the task at hand. Scaffolding puts into practice theorist Lev Vygotsky's learning construct, the zone of proximal development, or the perceived distance between the student's actual development as determined through independent problem solving and the level of potential development determined once adult guidance or collaboration

with more capable peers is available (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Scaffolding "does not involve simplifying the task during the period of learning. Instead, it holds the task constant while simplifying the learner's role through the graduated intervention of the teacher" (Greenfield, 1984, p. 119). Such a technique may support student learning by reducing uncertainty and providing a means through which attention and activity may be organized so as to avoid overwhelm in unfamiliar situations. Once the student or novice becomes more familiar with the approach and task, teacher support or the limitations provided to the student are slowly dissolved, to provide the student with more freedom and independence in accomplishing the task. An approach to improvisation like improvography, wherein dancers combine phrases of choreography with moments of improvised movement, aligns with a scaffolding technique in that the choreography provides a structure within which improvisers might organize their activity. Through scaffolding, tap dance improvisers may begin with something they *know,* that is something – a step or phrase – they have integrated into their musical-movement repertoire of "I can's", and then gradually move from that pre-determined step or phrase (structure) towards more improvisation (*freedom)* or spontaneous movement, as participants indicated in their interviews. Starting with something familiar provides an entry point through which tap dancers may begin to improvise and then further play or experiment. This form of scaffolding enables the dancer to gradually introduce spontaneity into their movement practices, beginning with known steps, rhythms and phrases and then opening to more spontaneous, in-the-moment play and creation. As is demonstrated through Dianne's description of Hines's improvography approach, scaffolding improvisation with choreographed movements is not only a valuable tool for introducing improvisation to beginners but can also be a useful approach for all levels of improvisers.

Dianne's recollection of improvising with other students studying under her mentor, Leon Collins, demonstrates how his routines could be used as a type of scaffolding to shape relational flow moments between inter-acting dancers and musicians:

> Those of us who are comfortable with this, we are the performers and we could do things together because you knew [Leon's routines]. So, it might be me and you and somebody else, we decide we are going to do Routine 2 … open with that, but maybe only 2 choruses, and then you take a chorus by yourself. … [we] each take a chorus, go to the last chorus, but do the last chorus of [Routine] 1 … and that's how we were introduced to performing and not being afraid to be there, because you had stuff in your pockets, and you had stuff you could do.

The phrases of movement, rhythms and melodies learned through Collins's routines become 'stuff in your pockets' to more freely 'play' with in improvisational performances. In Dianne's description, we understand the role that these routines played in facilitating relational flow moments through improvisational inter-actions between dancers by providing a shared structural knowledge from which they could play. This shared knowledge and their mutual familiarity with the structure of the routines (e.g., 8-bar steps following AABA form) enabled the dancers to utilize known movement, rhythmic, and melodic phrases to scaffold or support pathways for more spontaneous musical-movement exchange.

Dianne explained that in these performances, a dancer might take phrases or steps from different routines and mix them together. For example, they might add the break (the B step) from one step to the A steps of another. These steps and rhythms, the 'stuff in your pockets', are not always *played* the same way in improvisational performances; a dancer might manipulate the rhythm or timing of a particular step or use different steps to play the set rhythm of another

section. The dancer might take an element of a step and use it as inspiration for another step (e.g., crossing shuffles or riffs), or might take ideas embedded within the steps, such as the idea of dancing on a horizontal plane, or of playing with light and strong energy use. The rhythmic patterns and movement combinations learned through the routines, along with the qualitative dynamics of these movements, become ingrained within the dancer's musical-movement repertoire. By "pulling" or "referencing" rhythms, melodies, and steps from this repertoire, an improvising tap dancer is employing a form of scaffolding to form and shape their improvisational inter-action. And, as demonstrated in Dianne's description of improvising with Collins's other students, this form of scaffolding may shape moments of relational flow experienced between improvisers as it provides them with a shared knowledge base from which to play.

Evidently, these routines are valuable tools for teaching not only tap dance technique, but also for preparing tap dance students to improvise. They provide students with a solid base of rhythmic phrasing and ideas from which to expand their improvisational voices. This base provides a supportive structure through and within which the inter-action between improvisers can occur. It is evident that this base supports Dianne's own improvisational approach:

> If I say 'well Dianne is an improvisational dancer' some people would say 'she does the same thing all the time that's not improvisation!' For me it is, because yah I'm improvising on some ideas, so when I'm teaching my philosophy, which is to build a strength and then for you to then take it, go in and out of that, it's for longevity, 'cause then you've got a solid base and I don't care where you go, you can explore over there but you've got this that will always be there for you, because time. That's consistent, that's what you've got.

As we have previously learned, relational flow moments may be facilitated when a dancer thinks-in-movement through their musical-movement repertoire of “I can’s” and is therefore able to be in listening being relation with the other in the inter-action. According to Dianne, Leon Collins’s routines facilitate an improvisational practice by providing a structure or base within and upon which the dancer may improvise – they support the development of one’s musical-movement repertoire of “I can’s”, essentially they *are* the what of this repertoire – and as an ingrained repertoire, the student may then move through and from this repertoire of set or pre-determined musical-movement to increasing spontaneity. This base supports relational flow moments in improvisational inter-actions by scaffolding moments of more spontaneous improvisation with moments of less spontaneous musical-movement. In Dianne’s words, an approach of learning routines of steps and rhythms provides the dancer with enough material to begin with and then from which to, as she says, “venture off” of or “explore over there” and eventually to experience “true improvisation”.

Playing with Ideas: Theme and Variation

In addition to scaffolding through improvography, spontaneity in improvised tap dancing inter-actions may be structured through an approach known as “theme and variation”. Sarah spoke of this approach and how she uses it to engage her students in improvisation:

> An exercise I do, and it’s a basic exercise anyone can do it: Everyone’s improvising at the same time, but I’m calling out a step for you to improvise with: shuffles. And everyone’s shuffling in their own way, almost better than a jam, there’s no pressure, you’re in your own … Take 8 or 16 bars of just shuffles. You can do other steps but focus on shuffle ideas. … Rhythm turns, pull backs, travelling, slides, go! Everyone’s sliding around the room. It helps them get out of their head. Often, I think the main struggle is constantly repeating the same

things, they want to do new things. I say think of one idea, a step, and just play with that, and if anything, it will help you focus more on your musicality. You're like 'oh now I have the step', now what? Now the musicality, [*scatting different sounds for cramp rolls*]. I didn't think cramp rolls could be funky like that. Isolate ideas like that, or use concepts of phrasing, jazz standard, three and a break, AAAB, AABA, etcetera, ABAC … coming back to an idea you've already done versus continuation, which is just different rhythms all the time and how it makes sense to do phrasing ideas in jazz, especially you want to come back to it. It's more digestible to the ear. So, things like that, things with musicians like, I'll have them trade with the musician and I'll say, 'give it exactly back' [*demonstrates this with scatting*]. Listen to it, grasp it, instantly shoot it back. … Quick training, that's not easy to do it accurately and not only that, but matching the pitch, things like that. There are some exercises I'll do with improvisation.

Through her description of how she engages her students with techniques and approaches to improvisation, Sarah is also pointing to many forms and structures through which improvisational approaches are shaped, and which in turn shape the inter-action between dancers and musicians. For example, she suggests that a dancer might approach her improvisation through theme and variation around a basic step, such as a *shuffle*, which is a two-sound forward and backward brush of the ball tap. Such a step is so basic that it is likely one of the first to be ingrained within most dancers' musical-movement repertoires, and therefore one towards which they would likely need to direct the least amount of attentional energy in performing. Improvising with and through this step allows the dancer to think-in-movement, rather than of their movements in action. By removing the thinking of or about movement barrier to improvising, the dancer can direct attentional energy elsewhere; they can *listen* to the possible

rhythms, tones, and textures which might be created or elicited through variations in the tempo, volume, duration of each brush, or in varying parts of the foot in connection with the floor. Beginning with a theme – a simple step – and varying upon that theme through any number of ways one might vary a musical-movement gets “them out of their head”, and into the musicality of their movements.

Closing my eyes, I open my ears to the crisp, light sound of my full ball tap connecting with wood as I throw it out and forward for 1 count and pull it back and up for another – front brush 1, back brush 2, front brush 3, back brush 4 – sha, shuh, sha, shuh. The musical bar fills with two complete shuffles, each sound drawing out one complete beat. I play with where the brushes take me – crossing my working leg out over my supporting leg in the pull back, or, with a deep bend, throwing my working leg as far to the back and behind as I can reach. The sound is quieter, more scrape-y and scratchier back there as the very inside edge of my tap barely meets floor. My body movements quicken as I cut the space between each note in half, my shuffles playing straight 8th notes – 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 – sha-shuh, sha-shuh, sha-shuh, sha-shuh – which feel very mechanical, almost robotic. I swing instead, condensing the two brushes of the shuffle into a1 and then a2 – sha-shun … sha-shun – the back brush lingers ever slightly on the downbeat. This feels juicier and flows more freely through my body, into and up out of the floor. I experiment with tone by kicking out from my heel instead of my ball tap, a deeper sound, almost like when a large heavy branch falls from an old tree with a CRACK! This contrasts with the higher tone of the ball tap as it SPANKS back and up. GAH-shun, GAH-shun. My hips twist, opening my knee out and I graze the wood with the outermost edge of my ball tap – a light flick. With a sharp twist in the opposite direction that jerks my knee, I pull my toe in, back, but to the side, the inner edge of the tap scraping wood.

As demonstrated through the above vignette, a single shuffle might be played in any number of ways – for example, drawn out into quarter notes (1 – forward brush, 2 – backward brush) or quickened through straight 8th notes (1, &), or swung 8th notes (a1). The tone might be altered by brushing the heel tap forward and slapping the ball tap back or twisting in the hip and knee to strike the floor with the inner or outer part of the ball tap, the top tip or the flat centre. Thus, the rhythmic and tonal possibilities are practically endless with shuffles, with many different ways one might divide the beat, create emphasis or accent, or alter tone and pitch. This example of theme (the shuffle) and variation (rhythm, tone, texture, time, volume, etc.) is just one of the many ways a dancer might approach improvisation through the structure of theme and variation.

The theme and variation approach to tap dance improvisation can be applied beyond steps and variations in musicality. As Sarah states, a dancer might take the form of a jazz standard (AABA) as a theme and vary the steps and rhythms played within this structure. For example, a dancer might play *paddle and rolls* in straight 16th notes for the A's (1e&a, 2e&a), pause on the 3 and stamp on the & for the B (3**&**) and then return to the *paddle and roll* for the final A (4e&a). The dancer might repeat this bar twice (A, A), insert some variation of the step for the B (e.g. *paddle and roll,* pause stamp, *paddle and roll* pause stamp – 1e&a 2**&** 3e&a 4**&**) and then return back to the main phrase for the final A. This complete four-bar phrase follows the AABA form at a micro level (each bar is an AABA) and macro level (2 bars of A, 1 bar of B, 1 bar of A). Evidently, the opportunities for structuring improvisation through form and variation are endless.

Sarah further explains that in trading or exchanging bars of music with musicians, a dancer might employ the theme and variation technique to facilitate a dialogue with the musician

employing the Africanist aesthetic element of call-and-response (as per Kerr-Berry, 2022). The dancer might listen to the music and choose certain rhythmic patterns, tones, or melodic lines from what they hear to incorporate into their improvisational tap dancing. Carlos R. A. Jones (2022) states that call-and-response is an important aspect of rooted jazz dance technique (p. 98). Accordingly, call-and-response moments are when dancers or dancers and musicians:

> respond to one another in a conversation… [just as in spoken conversation] you listen for vocabulary … and continue to listen for tone, inflection, intonation, emotion, and other qualities…there is skill in staying present, being in the moment, especially with the massive amounts of stimuli surrounding the [performance] space… it is not plausible to stand still and stare, affixed on the action until your turn to move. In a snapshot, the dancer must receive the visual and aural information, and in a nanosecond, analyze, synthesize, and express a movement response… the goal [can be] to perform the original phrase with witty embellishment. (Jones, 2022, pp. 99-100)

In inter-active performances between dancers and musicians, call-and-response moments might entail the musician 'calling' out to the dancer with a rhythmical-musical phrase and the dancer 'responding' with a musical-movement phrase that sounds similar or complementary. It is as if the musician asks the dancer a question, and she responds. As Sarah says, the dancer could "give it exactly back" to the musician, meaning she might attempt to play the exact same rhythm and melody as the musician (the theme), or she could vary upon what is given while maintaining some connection – rhythm, tone, energy, etc. – to what was first played (the variation). Brenda, who also spoke of call-and-response in her improvisations, shows us that dancers may also call out to musicians in these inter-actions. She stated that her goal in such inter-actions was to "listen and respond or to initiate and get something back". Such inter-active exchanges between

dancers and musicians facilitate audible relational connections and demonstrate that dancer and musician are listening to one another, present in the moments of the inter-action, and are co-creators in the musical-moving performance.

Theme and variation may in-form a tap dancer's improvisational approach as a means of structuring spontaneity in a variety of ways – in the way the dancer uses movement, rhythm, or melodic phrases, or in the way they inter-act and respond with other participants, including musicians. This approach to improvising shapes and forms the inter-action, and thus facilitates relational flow moments between improvisers.

Sound, Music and Movement

As a musical-movement form, improvisational tap dancing is inherently in-formed through sound composition. In the previous chapter, I questioned which came first in musical-movement creation – the sound and rhythm or the movement – and it was this question that led me to deduce that tap dance is a musical-movement form, wherein music and movement are equally valued and co-created. Music and movement creation, however, is not always equally intentional in this form. Not all improvising tap dancers intentionally improvise to create music through tap dancing movements, just as not all improvising tap dancers intentionally improvise to create visible images. In some cases, the creation of sound, and thus the composition of music, is a by-product of the improvisational performance. For Brenda and Travis, however, the rhythm and music created through and in their improvisations drives their inter-actions with musicians and is therefore a formative element of their respective improvisational approaches.

Travis spoke of the role of the sound of a step to his approach as an improviser. He refers to a pivotal moment in his training as a tap dancer when he began to recognize the importance of

sound versus that of sight in his experience of tap dancing, and explains how this has shaped how he approaches his role as an improvisational tap dancer:

> I noticed when I started to get disenchanted with taking class, I was able to pick up steps without necessarily looking at what was happening. I could hear the paddle versus the shuffle versus the toe versus the heel, and that's still with me. So, when I am dancing and playing the song, I am not necessarily thinking about the steps… having said that, steps are happening.
>
> [I'm not thinking of the steps] but I'm thinking about what I want to hear and how I want to feel. Ohh… ohh… yah… sometimes it works out *(laughs)* but steps come out, and a lot of steps that are specific to me come out often. But I think that's like saying there are licks or phrases or approaches that are very, very, very specific to John Coltrane. It's what makes that saxophone player different from Charlie Parker. I don't think that there's anything at all wrong with having that sense of, like I know there are certain steps that contemporary tap dancers pull out that we all know come from Jimmy Slyde. Yay! But those steps, those ideas, inform you as a musical being that tap dances.

Travis's reliance on the sound and feeling of the tap dance steps as he developed his musical-movement repertoire as a child translates into his approach as an adult tap dancer, whereby his improvisations are shaped by and through his sensorial attunement to his movement – what he hears and what he feels and what he wants to hear and feel – rather than through the articulation of specific steps or step ideas. These sensations simultaneously guide and are guided by Travis' musical-movement improvisations. In this quotation, Travis is describing attuning through his listening senses to the musical-movement experience of tap dance, and how this sensorial attunement has since shaped his approach as a tap dancer. Travis expanded upon the difference

between intention based in steps versus that in sound as it relates to his improvisational approach. In doing so, he said steps “come out”, and often these steps are ‘specific’ to him in that they are steps we might associate with him specifically as an improviser. Just as a dancer’s touch, their style, becomes synonymous with their identity – their *being* as a performer – the sounds and rhythmical phrasing through which one tends to shape one’s improvisations also become signifiers of one’s style. These steps or musical phrases shape and form one’s identity as an improviser, as do the musical “licks or phrases or approaches” specific to legendary jazz musicians. These steps, and one’s musical expressivity through them, are the dancer’s voicing capacities that shape and form a tap dancer’s improvisational approach. Brenda also spoke of this phenomenon:

> Bunny [Briggs]… was an improviser but he was an improviser with steps… You would recognize – there’s Bunny doing this or doing that. Same thing with Jimmy Slyde, he’s an improviser… and you’re going to recognize his figures. I don’t even call them steps because he has his cramp rolls that he tends to get into things with all the time. Everybody has their way of getting into things – where their pickups are – I have my pick up other people have their pick ups…

As discussed in the previous chapter, a dancer cultivates their unique voice through study and training with their mentors and processes of shedding and distillation through which they “find”, “reveal”, or become their improvisational voice. As demonstrated through both Travis and Brenda’s comments, this voice also plays a pivotal role in the form of the inter-action, in that it can inform the dancer’s approach as an improviser. Their tap dance voice, simultaneously seen and heard, is their recognizable visual and audible form as a dancer. A witness to a dancer’s improvisation may recognize that dancer through the particular steps or ways of doing steps and

rhythms – through their use of *Get Down, Polycentric Isolation,* or their ability to exude *Coolness*. Their tap dance voice shapes and forms the means through which a dancer relates with and to other dancers or musicians in the inter-action. Just like the tone and pitch of my voice become synonymous with my being, so too does a tap dancer's approach to improvisation, including how they *do* – rhythmically, melodically, or even physically – or simply *what* they *do,* e.g., particular steps or musical-movement phrases. Just as when we converse with others by speaking and our words and tones convey meaning, intention, and emotion effectively shaping and forming the inter-active dialogue, so too do our improvisational tap dance voices.

When I asked Travis to describe his approach to improvisation, he emphasized the relationship between tap dancing sounds and music. He said:

> I'll say this again, and again I want you to believe it: I have no idea what I am doing. I'm about to turn 36, I've been dancing for 26 years, I have no idea. I recently spoke to [legendary jazz pianist] Dr. Barry Harris, and he just drove the point home: We're just playing songs. That's all we are doing. We're just playing songs. Prior to that conversation, improvising to me was … tappa tappa tappa. The reference that I was using was steps that I had learned from [tap dancers] Dianne Walker, Ted Louis Levy, Bril Barrett, Van Porter, anybody that has taught me ever in my life … It was this swirl of information … Buster Brown through Heather Cornell … that I was just kind of spitting out in different ways. Maybe I was trying to be impressive, maybe I was trying to be fast or it was just, I was *trying*, without an idea of what I was trying *for*. Then Dr. Barry Harris, a musician, goes, "We're just playing songs man, play the song. You play the head, then you improvise around the song". I recently read the [biography of jazz pianist and composer] Thelonious Monk … The author said time and time again, Thelonious, in

> terms of his improvisation style, would improvise based off the melody. A lot of musicians improvise based off chord changes, but he specifically always improvised based off the melody. And it guaranteed that, although, he was criticized for playing his compositions – 80 some compositions, 90 maybe – again and again, at a certain point in his career [they'd say] "why aren't you writing new material?"… [it guaranteed that] When he sat at the piano, it was always different and new and exactly what he was feeling at that time based off the melody of the song that he was playing.

For Travis, the structures which shape and form his inter-active improvisational experiences are dictated through his connection to the music, and specifically the piece of music with which he is playing. To 'play songs', as instructed by Dr. Barry Harris, an American jazz pianist who is renowned for his bebop style, Travis suggests tap dancers improvise around the melody, rhythm, and feeling of the main chorus of the song itself, so to remain within the song and true to its intention, even within moments of improvisation. Such an approach sounds simplistic but is actually quite difficult in practice and requires an intimate knowledge and familiarity with the tune with which one is improvising.

As an improviser, Travis says that his aim is to be the 'spiritual embodiment' of the music. I interpret this to mean that as he dances, he *forms* the music as a visual form, he *embodies* the music's aurality, becomes the physical, tangible *thing* that is expressed by the music. Through this physical forming of the music, Travis's approach to dancing is in-formed. That is, as he becomes the music's physical form, this form is formed through the music itself – the sounds created through his dancing are in-formed through his relationship to the tune with which he is playing, which is formed through these sounds. He described what this means with

reference to his practice at the Jazz United Jam, a weekly jazz jam between musicians and tap dancers he organized for some time in Toronto, Ontario:

> I feel like I am the spiritual embodiment of the music. I think that's what tap dance is. And, so for that reason, in my practice at the [jazz] jam [I run in Toronto], it's taken on many different forms. It started with me wanting to figure out, how do I contribute sonically in a way that feeds the music? Because the music is doing fine without me. So, how do I insert myself positively? Then, I would play the head and then play time until it was my turn to solo and then solo. Which, okay, you want to call that tap dance, sure, fine. But when I think about the spiritual embodiment of the music, oh, oh, then my approach takes on a different form. Yes, structurally I may be playing the head, may be holding time, and then ripping during the solo. But the entire time, I am trying to really feel what's happening, which is why I have started to put up a board at the back of the room during the jam because sometimes, usually around 9:30 just before it ends, something happens and the room just explodes with music. That back board becomes essential. I want that room to be alive from the house set. I want the people not to be sitting observing the music … but to [be up dancing and feeling the music] (*Travis does not say this, but instead shows this by standing and moving his body, portraying an audience member dancing to/ feeling the music*).

Like Dianne, Travis also refers to time – musical time – as a guiding principle in his improvisations and outlines three approaches an improviser might take in relation to musical time. In these approaches, he emphasizes his role as a co-contributor to the musical-movement experience, reflecting the relationship of respect between musicians and dancers described previously by Sarah and Dianne. To "play time", a dancer might reinforce the tempo, feel, and

time of the music by playing something simple alongside the other musicians. Rather than playing over time – which might involve embellishing on the rhythm or groove of the song, playing around the groove or rhythm, or playing an alternate rhythm or groove – when a dancer plays time, they stick to the set rhythm or groove to strengthen and enhance it, usually so other dancers or musicians can hear and feel it clearly. Travis contrasts playing or holding time to playing the "head" of the tune – the thematic melody of the song that comprises its chorus. Often, when a dancer plays the head, they stick to the rhythmic and melodic sequencing of the tune as it is stated, without much improvisation around this statement. For example, if I am playing the head of the tune "Take the 'A' Train", I might appear to "sing" the lyrics of the song with my feet, so that someone who knows the song would be able to hear its melody come through my tapping feet. Finally, Travis refers to "ripping" during the solo – that is, "going off" during his improvisational solo. In these moments, Travis says he is trying to "feel" what is happening, perhaps instead of forcing something to happen with his improvisation, he is allowing his improvisation to be guided through the inter-active experience itself. In these moments, the inter-actors are not only Travis, the musicians, the music they are playing together, and the audience members, but also the musical tune – the specific song they are playing, the specific sound, feeling, and intention of that song itself. Travis follows the musical tune and its time, which guides his inter-active approach.

Travis says that, informed through the aim to spiritually embody the music as a visual, dancing form, his musical contributions through tap dancing 'cannot be wrong'. Guided through his connection to the music, Travis's approach as an improviser is to inter-act, through musical-tap dance movement, with the particular tune he is playing: "If I am actually the spiritual embodiment of the music, then whatever I play on my feet cannot be wrong. If I am actually

doing the damn thing, then it can't be wrong. Why does it fit? Because it is relevant to what is happening, to the whole."

Sound and music also in-form Brenda's approach as an improviser. She spoke of improvisation as an act of composition and began our discussion highlighting what she sees as the differences between improvisation in tap jams and other moments of improvisation wherein the dancers are composing. She said:

> Well, I mean, with jams, with tap jams, it produces a certain quick wit. The big benefit of responding quickly, you know, besides learning your bars, learning all that stuff, [the jam] gives you a shot for [your] synapses, it does have a physical fact, because you have to hear it, but I would say for the most part, I don't see a lot of interaction. The most interaction I have seen in improvisation is [American Tap Dance Orchestra members] Barbara Duffy and Margaret Morrison's improvisation in the [choreographed piece] American Landscape – it's the most brilliant simultaneous improvisation … it is first of all so compositional, they're so in tune with what the other person is doing and also not only interacting but making choices to move the conversation in different directions … [in improvisational inter-actions, when] so and so is doing something, in the best of worlds, I would answer that and add onto that, or if something has been going on for a long time and everybody's playing very fast 16th notes, which they tend to do now, I might come and change the conversation to triplets or quarter notes … I think probably the biggest thing that's exchanged or interacted with is energy.

In the above quotation, Brenda refers to two important approaches that may inform tap dance improvisation – composition and, as discussed previously, simultaneous improvisation. Brenda suggests that tap dancers might approach improvisational inter-actions through the intention of

creating musical compositions – that is, with a focus on the piece as a whole, overall, rather than simply on their individual contributions as soloists. With this intention, a dancer's improvisational contributions are informed through what has *already been said* in the conversation. For example, she says Duffy and Morrison were 'so in tune' with what the other person was doing in their improvisation that their interactions enabled their 'conversation' to 'move in different directions'. To further elaborate on what it might sound like when one tap dancer 'moves' the conversation in a different direction, she suggests one might 'change the conversation' from fast 16th notes to triplets or quarter notes. This demonstrates an improvisational approach based in the musical composition of the inter-action, wherein the improviser considers the whole of the inter-action to inform their individual solo choices.

This approach reflects Brenda's primary focus as a choreographer; in our interview, she clarified that she really only worked in improvisation for the first 20 years of her career, as a dancer in the avant-garde period (circa 1955-1980). During this time, Brenda says she often worked and performed with a saxophone player, which informed her approach moving forward as she was "very influenced by the melody line and very astute at listening". This focus on the melody line carried over into her approach as a choreographer once she began "setting things" on her company, The American Tap Dance Orchestra (1986-1999). She further elaborated on how the act of composing musical-movement relates to her approach as a choreographer:

> It's a composition. I'm not just doing a bunch of steps and putting them together for two choruses, okay let's try this step and that step … rather … my pieces have this section, this section … I don't like it when, 'oh we'll just use that section' [of a composition] … Does it have a beginning, middle, and end? It has to tell a story… Are you playing a melody? Are you creating a song? … What I love about [Charles] Mingus is, Mingus

> does it in his compositions, that's why I study him. In one composition he'll go from a swing into a ballad … tacit time into a rumba. He's a composer, that's the difference between, to me, between a composition and a tune. Mingus doesn't really write tunes, he writes compositions. I don't necessarily write dances, I do compositions.

Although in the above quotation Brenda is referring specifically to the relationship between composition and creating choreographed tap dance works, one might just as easily apply this concept to tap dance improvisation. Through this approach, tap dance improvisers focus their improvisations on forming cohesive sound and music creations. Thus, improvised tap dance inter-actions between dancers and between dancers and musicians may be shaped and formed through an approach intent on creating a musical-movement composition. These works are structured such that each individual part of the improvised inter-action would contribute something specific to the whole. Musical-movement compositions tell a story, with each phrase or section purposefully flowing into the next. Compositions that make sense, that feel complete or whole, create flowing experiences for both performers and audience members. Therefore, the form of the interaction may be shaped through such an approach that aims towards a specific storyline or goal, when musician and dancer work towards this goal together, and the dancer approaches her craft as a musician, not simply as a dancer on top of the music. What is perhaps key to this is that the dancer is responsible for contributing musically to the storyline as well and is not just going along with it for the ride.

For both Brenda and Travis, a focus on the sound and music created within and through their musical-movement in-forms their improvisational approaches, which in turn shapes their inter-action with the other performers.

Dropping the Form

Sometimes, a seeming absence of relationship between dancers, musicians, and the musical form may actually contribute to and shape the relational flow experience. Like the 'free improvisations' of jazz musicians in the era of the "New Thing" as described by Brown et. al. (2018), Heather spoke of similarly dropping musical form in improvised inter-action, illustrating how an absence of form may also structure improvised tap dance inter-actions. For Heather, dropping the form with the right musician might be more conducive to relational flow moments than if she were to stick strictly with the form. When I asked her to describe a time when she felt completely immersed in her performance experience with another musician, she described the following experience of dropping the form – of playing outside of the jazz structure dictated by the piece of music:

> I don't remember a lot when I connect, you know. There's an old show from like 20 years ago where I worked with this sax player in … a small club … somewhere in Austria I think, this sax player and I were just doing a duet in front of an audience and we were doing some kind of a ballad, I can't even remember which ballad, and we just decided to go really far out, or it happened that it went really far out … we played a single tune for about 20 minutes. And we both had no experience of time in terms of duration, we had no clue that we had played for 20 minutes. It wasn't really an issue for us until people started to tell us about it.

I asked Heather to elaborate further on what it means to go 'really far out' with the saxophone player. She explained:

> We were working in jazz at the time. In jazz structure there are rules which are all based on form, so the form of the tune you respect at all times when you are improvising in

> jazz, unless you decide to drop it. So, we chose to drop it for a while and, apparently, we chose to drop it for quite a while.

As previously discussed, jazz musical form and structure are integral to shaping the inter-active experience between musicians and tap dancers; a shared knowledge of this form and structure enables the dancer and musician to move to and play music seemingly effortlessly together. The form and structure of jazz music is typically the guiding force, the map, or the path that aligns jazz musicians and points them toward a common goal – musical creation. Tap dancers seeking to improvise with jazz musicians must develop an understanding of jazz structure, and, as demonstrated through Travis' approach to "playing tunes", a familiarity with the form of the particular jazz tune with which they are going to play.

When Heather spoke of dropping the form and of losing her cognitive sense of temporal time, she alluded to relational flow-like moments of being immersed in the inter-active, improvisational moment. I will further explore this notion of cognition in the following chapter. Here, I am interested in the use of form, or in this case, the dropping of the form, and whether this was something that was predetermined or seemed to occur organically through Heather's inter-action with the saxophone player:

> I'm not sure if we discussed it or not, that's not something you have to discuss because if it's going to happen, it depends on how comfortable both players are and if it's going to happen, it kind of happens if you have really free players. I can't remember if we discussed it, we probably said, "let's just really play and have fun, let's not worry about structure too much".

This response reveals the sense of freedom and play one might experience when inter-acting musicians and dancers share musical knowledge and understanding, such that they might

simultaneously respect musical form while also dropping it. The comfort and freedom Heather experiences in improvised interaction with musicians is not always reliant upon a strict adherence to and relationship with the form and structure of the played music. Rather, her vast experience with jazz music and her resulting musical-movement repertoire become her being as a musically-moving improviser and it is through this repertoire that her approach as an improviser is in-formed. Thinking about or reflecting on these elements in her improvisational experiences is not something she is cognizant of, but ‘thought’ is happening in and through her body in the moment of musical-movement creation. As she plays with musicians who share this musical repertoire, their shared understanding creates opportunities for extension beyond the confines of jazz standard form and structure, opening pathways for exploration outside of the boundaries typically created through these musical structures. While some dancer-musicians rely on form, Heather often works outside of it, pushing the boundaries of what it means to play jazz music. Thus, while jazz form and structure create a scaffolding within which jazz musicians and dancers may build a musical-movement experience in inter-active improvisational creation, these layers can also be peeled away to reveal only the frame – a rough outline of the ‘tune’ – which guides the improvisers, rather than structures or forms their improvisations.

The animatable elements of the form dimension of relational flow experienced through inter-active, improvised tap dancing encompasses the form of improvisation, the setting within which the improvisation occurs and the various techniques that in-form a tap dancer’s approach to improvisation. What forms we do in improvisational tap dance performances form the inter-active dynamic between dancers, dancers and musicians, and performers and audiences. Furthermore, they form the musical-movement that is co-created through these inter-actions, which in turn in-forms the relational flow experience.

Tangible Form: What Forms We Feel

Thus far I have explored the visible, audible, and animatable forms that shape relational flow moments in improvised tap dance inter-actions. In this final section, I will describe the tangible forms experienced in improvisational tap dance inter-actions, that is, what forms we feel in relational flow moments. When asked to describe the shape and form of their relational flow experiences, the participants all described a phenomenon of multiple entities coming together, a merging of many into one.

Sarah and Travis spoke of the coming together of multiple forces into a separate entity, though one that is created by and through the performers in inter-action. For Sarah, the experience of flowing with other dancers or musicians in musical-movement creation is like the coming together of winds into a tornado. She said that when dancers and musicians are improvising together, it is as if "some force is bringing us together, creating this one thing of multiples into a crazy energy – a tornado. I think that's what it feels like". Travis similarly spoke of a *thing* or *force* that is separate from the dancer and musician but is the very experience of relational flow itself. For Travis, this "thing" is the means through which dancers and musicians communicate in the inter-action. This "thing" both shapes and is the shape of the inter-action itself:

> So, I think the communication would be the expression itself, [that] would be all the communication necessary. The idea in my mind that I have about these experiences is the connection is so rich that there is so much information there to play off for the musicians that there is no need for a conductor, no band leader. The thing is there, it's already present, the thing is present.

This connection or “the thing” between musician and dancer at once facilitates and *is* the experience. In his reflection, Travis equates the noun (the experience itself, the ‘communication’) with the action that creates the experience (dancer and musician communicating with one another). Just as the swirling winds of a tornado at once create and are the tornado itself, the communicating that occurs between the dancer and musician in improvised musical-movement experiences is both what creates the experience and is what is created by the experience.

In his phenomenological investigation of the groove in jazz music, Tiger Roholt similarly describes ‘the thing’ that simultaneously shapes and is shaped by the interaction. For him, this thing is the groove:

> A groove is not merely a matter of what musicians do … not merely a certain collection of nuanced sounds performed by musicians live or occurring on a recording … ontologically, a groove is a phenomenon of experience. A groove emerges, between musicians and listeners, when music is engaged with in a certain [bodily] way. (Roholt, 2014, p. 129)

Musical groove is both the means through which the inter-action emerges and occurs (as the “shared sense of the beat” between musicians/dancers [Berliner, 1994, p. 349]), and also the inter-action itself, or the thing that occurs (the musical-movement experience). Travis and Sarah’s experiential descriptions align with Roholt’s assessment of the groove experience. In coming together in musical-movement, musicians and dancers create the groove, which in turn is the very experience itself. This description is similar to Sheets-Johnstone's equation of the dancer with the dance. She says:

> Both the dancer and the dance exist in an *ekstatic* relationship to themselves; they are both their own past, present and future, spatially and temporally, in the mode of not being any one of these at any one moment or point; they are both always in flight, always both ahead of and behind themselves … Because the dancer is pre-reflectively engaged in the creation of the dance, because she is not reflecting upon it as something apart from herself, her spatiality and temporality do not exist apart from the dance, nor do the spatiality and temporality of the dance exist apart from her. There is but one spatiality and one temporality, and each is founded upon the dancer's lived experience of the dance. So long as the dancer exists her body in movement as a form-in-the-making, that form-in-the-making spatializes and temporalizes itself, such that the illusion which it creates and sustains is spatially and temporally all of a piece. (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015b, pp. 29-30)

The dancer and the dance are one and the same – in the moments of dancing, the dancer is the dance. Thus, the dancers and musicians in the inter-action creating the groove are simultaneously creating the groove in their moments of improvisation and are the groove itself. The groove is the thing through which the inter-action occurs and is the inter-action itself, just as the spatiality and temporality of the dancer and the dance are one and the same in the moment-to-moment movements of the dance.

Now that I have established that in the experience of the inter-action, the groove is both created by and creates the inter-action, I can return to Roholt's phenomenology of the groove to further explore what it means that the groove is a bodily phenomenon. The experience of the groove is engaged with as a bodily being and is only known through this bodily being: the groove is sensed in and through the body in motion – it is heard, seen, felt and ultimately, lived,

and it is the shared experience of this bodily phenomenon that brings musicians and dancers together in community, or relational flow moments. Guarino (2022), in her investigation of what can be felt when experiencing rooted Africanist dance, defines groove as:

> a term that jazz musicians use to describe propulsive rhythms that inspire the musician and listener alike to move, sway, bounce, pat a leg, clap hands, etc… Groove is evident when the inherent pulse of the music is made visible in the body, and is also a distinct feeling that connects the viewer to that same pulse. (p. 107)

In Africanist dance forms such as tap dance, groove is inseparable from movement. It is the driving force behind movement to music and is the tangible element of the musical form. Roholt (2014) argues that, though we might understand the groove as a musical relationship between the rhythm and the beat, this explanation does not provide us with an understanding of what it truly means to experience the groove, to move within and through the groove, to be affected by it physically and emotionally. A description of the temporal relationship between the beat and rhythm does not illuminate the meaning of the groove itself. In order to grasp the meaning of the groove, you must feel it in the body, feel the relationship between the beat and the rhythm as it pulls you into its grooves, as it *moves you* to *groove* along as well. You must be moved by the groove.

The groove is not simply some*thing* that exists, it is also a thing that *does* something; it inter-acts and affects the inter-action. The groove, the “communication”, the “thing”, the “tornado”, – these experiences are those which both *do* and *be,* and we come to know them through our sensorial engagement with them. The groove is the tangible form created through the improvisational tap dance inter-action. The groove is an experience that is created through the coming together of more than one, into one: the coming together of multiple performers into one

performance, of musicians and dancers into one musical-movement inter-action. And, although these multiple things (for example, multiple musical instruments played together) create one thing (the groove, the sound, and feeling of the music), they do not merge completely into one another and lose their individuality, rather, they create another being altogether. For example, as I listen to a jazz tune, I hear the song itself *as a whole* overall – melody, harmony, and rhythm converge into the song that I listen to, the sounds that enter my ears, pulse through my body, and incite me to bounce, shuffle, rock, etc. At the same time, I also hear the piano as it plays the melodic line, the bass as it 'walks' the pulse, the drums as they swing the rhythm. On a macro level, the groove or the thing of the experience is created through the coming together of multiple entities – in this case, of multiple musical instruments played by multiple musicians. On a micro level, the groove or the thing is created through a relationship between individual parts – the parts played by the individual musicians on their individual instruments which, while they retain their individual, unique sounds, together, they create the whole.

Sarah's description of the relational flow experience being a tornado reveals the swirling together of multiple entities – musicians, dancers, and the music created through their movements – into one phenomenal experience. Similarly, Travis' 'communication' or "the thing" is a coming together of multiple forces into one, and each of these forces maintains their unique individuality. The act of communicating is the communication itself. For Sarah and Travis, the inter-active experience emerges through a coming together of multiple entities into one, and is simultaneously a thing that acts and affects as well as a thing that is.

Brenda's descriptions of the shape and form of the relational flow experience in inter-active, improvised tap dancing similarly reflect the coming together of multiples into one. In her descriptions, however, the thing which is created is less the experience itself (that is, the

experience of communication or of a tornado), but a "container" within which the experience may occur:

> It's a container … we can give a mode, we can give a rhythm, now the band is going to interpret that anyway, okay, that's a swing rhythm. But like with a jazz band, the piano player might play ahead of the beat… the drummer usually plays ahead of the beat, bass player plays behind the beat. Rarely does everybody have the same feel, even in a rhythm section. So, you'll often notice… that's why introductions are so important. It's a little wobbly before they get together, they have a nice introduction, they know who they are, then they hit the tune.

Brenda's description of the container she experiences in relational flow moments reveals the unique role played by each individual in the experience in cultivating and creating the inter-action. She refers to the divergent approaches to the beat that each musician may take – playing ahead of or behind the beat – and how these divergent approaches define each individual within the collective experience of the whole. Through the song's introduction, the musicians come together, determine their roles and responsibilities within the tune, define their individualities in the collective, and then they 'hit the tune'. This establishes the container within which the inter-active experience – the tune – can occur.

Brenda described an improvisational inter-action in which she experienced relational flow that alludes to the tangible form of the container and its role in the inter-action:

> I work with a man named Joe Fonda, and I've worked with him for 30 years. We toured Europe together just the two of us, bass and taps, and he does very *avant-garde* work besides the swing work, again with a great pocket. Listen, he can really listen, he really

> listens, and I really listen to him. It's like … you're in an envelope and you have the confidence because that is solid, that container is solid, you have the confidence to do what needs to be done because the container is solid, your mind is free, your expression is free, you don't have to worry about the container… It's not going to go anywhere unless I decide to take it. I can break the time anytime, he can break the time anytime, I'm going to hear it, he's going to hear it, we are going to do something really interesting in another vein. It's like a weave. When it's right its like a weave… The more that happens, the more relaxed you get. You get a feeling of confidence, you get a feeling of freedom, you can't do anything wrong. It's a feeling of ease, of confidence, of freedom, and a container has been created that will accommodate anything you will do. If you want to play straight 8ths, swung 8ths, all of a sudden you start singing, the container will accommodate you, you have that confidence.

The sense of freedom and confidence that emerges through experiencing musical inter-action is derived through the dancer-musician relationship. By listening to one another and knowing that they are listening to one another, the musician and dancer create a space wherein they can feel as though anything is possible; the space created is "a container" or "a weave" that sustains the inter-action while it is also simultaneously created through the inter-action. The feeling of buoyancy that comes from the "weaving" of musicians, like strands of coloured thread woven into a tapestry, was similarly described by Roholt (2014):

> [a]s a drummer, with a groove under you so to speak, supporting you, you feel emboldened to try things that you would ordinarily not try. The complex notes of difficult drum fills effortlessly fall in with the time-values and accent structure laid down by the

> groove. This is the buoyant feeling, the sense in which a groove is like an athlete's zone [of flow]. (p. 113)

This buoyancy, the support created through the container, is akin to the flow zone an athlete enters, like that described by Csikszentmihalyi (e.g., 1975; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). But instead of a single zone, occupied by the athlete alone, the relational flow experienced in the groove is communal, inter-active, and life-giving. Guarino (2022) compares this feeling to a community:

> Shared groove, among dancers or between dancers and audience, inspires community... Community in jazz transcends space and time and manifests as an energy, an atmosphere that supports individuality within a shared groove, uniting music, dance, and genuine human connection. (p. 107)

Shared groove is an energy that supports and sustains the inter-action. This energy, force, or zone is not experienced as some purely psychological phenomenon; Roholt (2014), Guarino (2022), Sarah, Brenda, and Travis provide descriptions of this experience that reveal its tangible affects – the feelings and impressions it leaves on the body as a bodily-sensed experience.

An experience that is simultaneously life-giving and life itself, one that creates the phenomenon and is the phenomenon of creation, and is experienced sensorially through impressions on the body, is described as a "pathetic community[14]" by Henry (1990/2008,

[14] Translator's note: "… in speaking of the passive dimension of auto-affectivity, Henry often uses the term *pathétique,* which has been translated here simply as "pathetic". In spite of the negative connotations that this term may have in ordinary English, the reader should keep in mind its etymological link to the Greek *pathos,* meaning feeling or passion. So in speaking, for example, of the pathetic flesh of life, Henry is placing an emphasis on the passive and affective dimension of the flesh" (2008, xv).

2000/2015). Henry illuminates the invisible, omnipresent force of life that joins us together in a shared experience of living life – the life that is both giving and given:

> Life is not a thing, a being of a certain kind … life is a how, both a mode of revelation and revelation itself … they have in common the way in which things are given to them … Life is self-givenness in a radical and rigorous sense, in the sense that it is both life that gives and life that is given. Because it is life that gives, we can only have a share of this gift in life. Because life is what is given in this gift, we can only have access to life in itself … life is absolute subjectivity inasmuch as it experiences itself and is nothing other than that experience.… this is what constitutes the essence of every possible community. Again, what is shared in common is not some thing; instead, it is this original givenness as self-givenness. (1990/2008, pp. 119-120)

Henry's force of life that joins the living in a "pathetic community" is akin to Sarah's swirling of winds into a tornado, Travis' thing that is the phenomenon of communication, and Brenda's container that is and sustains the inter-action. Henry explains:

> … that by which a Self becomes a Self, the way in which it expands and grows on its own, is also the way in which everything that can affect it originally arrives, including the 'being' of the other. The ego and the alter ego have a common birth, a shared essence. Through this, they 'communicate' as living beings. Would it be a surprise then if life were a transcendental affectivity that all intersubjectivity, by drawing its essence from life, would inevitably take on the form of a pathetic community? (Henry, 1990/2008, p.4)

That is, our experiential being in relation with one another is driven through the force of life itself and is life. We are joined through this life and in this life as a community of auto-

affection, in that we are continuously being in relation – in *pathos-with* (Henry, 1990/2008). The present inquiry into the formal dimension of relational flow reveals the feeling of relational flow forms as a feeling of this “pathetic community”.

Forming/In-Forming/ Forms of Relational Flow

The form dimension of the relational flow experienced through improvisational tap dancing inter-actions comprises the forms we see, hear, do, and feel. The visible forms of such inter-actions can be varied depending on the approach to tap dancing, though as a rooted jazz dance form, tap dancing is connected to the elements of Africanist aesthetics described by Kerr-Berry (2022). The audible forms consist of the musical form and structure which shape and are shaped through the inter-action and which are bodily knowings that are shared between performers. This shared knowing guides the improvisers in their inter-action. The animatable forms which shape relational flow moments consist of things we do that shape the inter-action – in-formed through the degree to which the performance is improvised, the setting within which we are improvising, and the things we do that shape our improvisations – the various approaches to improvisation. These approaches include structuring spontaneity through improvography or scaffolding, employing theme and variation, and through an intention towards sound and music creation. Inter-active performers may also choose to improvise *without* form by *dropping* the form altogether, relying on their ingrained musical-movement repertoires as well as their sensorial attunement to one another and to the inter-active moment to guide their inter-actions. Finally, the various elements which make up the improvisational inter-action form the tangible form, or the forms that we feel in relational flow moments. The participants described feeling the coming together of multiple entities into one as a tornado, as the ‘thing’ itself, which simultaneously is and creates the inter-action, or as a container within which the inter-action of

multiples may occur. This form of the relational flow phenomenon is the groove. Though separate for the purposes of discussion in this chapter, the visible, audible, animatable, and tangible forms of relational flow are interconnected in that they are not formed, nor do they form, individually. They are not distinct, separate aspects of the formal dimension of relational flow and instead together form and in-form the experience of relational flow.

> *Deep, dark bass notes strum out in the auditorium of tap dancers and their parents, attendees at the tap dance festival. Brenda stands upstage and gestures to the bassist with an open hand, offering him the chorus. Low strokes of string paint warm, broad lines across the stage that spill out into the theatre. Eyes meet, Brenda smiles with a nod, encouragement to take another chorus. Smooth chords seamlessly flow into and out of phrases an octave darker than to which our ears are attuned. The third chorus pulls Brenda into the stage lights and bright metal taps dot the canvas of low bass tones. As weightless taps float atop the strong basecoat, rhythmic and melodic shades of contrasting colours shape new harmonies. Definitive heel notes brush up against – but do not bleed into – bass; dynamic tones afford each instrument distinctive colours, textures, and forms. The result: a sonic Kandinsky.* (Inspired by an experience described by Brenda)

Chapter 6: Feelings of Flow

Before I turn to the final realm of relational flow in inter-active experience – *feeling* – I will review the functional and formal elements of relational flow that I have thus far described. The functional aspects of relational flow experiences of inter-active tap dancing identified through this inquiry are the fundamental capacities required to improvise with others in a musical-movement form – building a movement repertoire of "I can's", becoming a tap dancer through distillation and refinement of a unique touch, developing one's improvisational voice, and listening-being with the other in relation through a cultivated sensorial openness. The formal dimension of relational flow experiences in inter-active, improvisational tap dancing comprises visible, audible, animatable and tangible forms that simultaneously shape and are shaped through the improvisational inter-action. Visible forms consist of elements of Africanist aesthetics indicative of a rooted jazz dance form. Audible forms include musical form and structure, which becomes ingrained in one's musical-movement repertoire of "I can's" and in-forms the inter-action between musicians and dancers. The form of improvisation as well as the setting within which the inter-action occurs forms the improvisational approach, which consists of various techniques such as scaffolding, theme and variation, and musicality. These animatable forms can also include dropping the form altogether. The tangible forms of relational flow experiences described by the participants refer to phenomena through which many become one – a tornado, a conversation or thing, a container – akin to the experience of the groove within which many musical elements combine together to create something seemingly other than and beyond the individual elements themselves. This groove, like a container, forms, supports and shapes the relational connection between musically-moving improvisers. The container is both life and life-

giving: as life it is the experience of improvising inter-actors, and also gives life to and in effect creates the experience of relational flow moments.

The elements of relational flow functions and forms in inter-active, improvisational tap dancing described above are already rooted in the affectivity and sensorial engagement in the musical-movement of dancers and musicians, or what constitutes the feeling dimension of flow. Functionally, relational flow moments are facilitated through the sensitization of musical-movers to the musical-movements of others in inter-active performance. This sensitization requires a sensorial attunement, a practice of being with the Other in listening – listening-being. Formally, relational flow moments are shaped through cultivated, embodied knowings of the visible and audible aesthetics and the animatable approaches to forms of improvisation. These knowings are not so much *known* in the traditional, cognitive sense of the word, but are felt, lived, sensed, understood, and applied in and through the body in motion. They are experientially known in that through bodily, motile engagement with musical knowledge and improvisational approach this information becomes ingrained within our movement repertoire of “I can’s” to become our musical-movement repertoire. Further, the forms of these inter-actions are described as bodily experienced forms – sensations of buoyancy, of feeling supported in and through the music, of feeling the swirling and twirling together of forces, like the winds of a tornado. These moments of life, brought forth through inter-activity, resonate in the bodies of the inter-actors, leaving them hungry for more such experiences. Thus, the sensorial realm – the *feeling* dimension – has already been woven throughout the present analysis of relational flow experience. As I move further towards this final dimension, I bring forward the already cultivated understanding of musical-movement repertoires, of voicing and listening-being, and of the experience of the groove, which are the sensorially-experienced dimensions of flow-function and flow-form.

In this chapter, I will explore the final dimension of flow as per the Function-to-Flow framework – feeling. Through descriptions of relational flow experiences provided by the participants, I will discuss some of the sensations and impressions of relational flow moments experienced through inter-active, improvisational tap dancing. As with the other dimensions, this analysis is not meant to be exhaustive, but should open pathways for further inquiry into the feelings of relational flow in many types of inter-active experiences, particularly those which are improvised.

My final questions to the participants prompted them to inquire into the feelings of relationally flowing with others in improvisational tap dance inter-action to discern the meaning of relational flow to their practices. Thus, this chapter combines the feeling and flow dimensions of the Function-to-Flow framework. According to Lloyd and Smith's framework, questions for the feeling dimension focus on sensations of breath, heart rate, alignment and balance to encourage participants to "explore kinaesthetic awareness more phenomenologically" (Lloyd & Smith, 2021, p. 9) and to consider how this internal awareness might affect one's movement practice. Lloyd and Smith suggest researchers pose questions that recognize where emotions and motions are connected to attend to the "various ways joy and other pleasurable or even painful sensations manifest … [and to challenge] how emotions are understood as reflective states" (2021, p. 9). Through this lens, researchers consider the *movement* of emotions as they are experienced as verbs rather than nouns – how they seem to well up, grow, burst, infect, overpower, ache, etc. Emotions are feelings experienced in the moment of action, their affectivity sensed and palpable in the moment as one lives these emotions and senses their affective registers. Thus, the feeling dimension of flow challenges researchers to consider emotional sensations in their moment of being as verbs rather than as nouns one notices or

reflects upon following the lived experience in which the emotion is called forth. The feeling register of movement consciousness is what is "kinaesthetically sensed and felt in poses, postures, positions, gestures, and expressions … the inner sensation of movement, such as musculoskeletal tension or elongation, the quality and sensation of breath, the proprioceptive qualities of balance, as well as the expressive possibilities that such sensations afford" (Feeling, n.d.). Feelings and sensations of movement emerge in one's muscles, joints, and bones and in one's emotions and moods. Movement forms, such as improvisational tap dancing, communicate emotion and affect feeling through "the effort qualities of the movements enacted, the spatial arrangements and relationships created in the passages of play, and in the body shapes taken to convey specific intention" (Feeling, n.d.). Lloyd and Smith suggest that competencies for communication through movement involve "a more primary, visceral sense of the body and its 'expressive possibilities' based on the movement exploration of breathing, balancing, timing and touch" rather than on cognitive concepts of self-expression and bodily awareness (Feeling, n.d.). When one begins to describe the feelings experienced in relational inter-activities such as improvised tap dancing, one is better able to identify these moments, feel towards, into, and through these moments, and, ultimately, is one step closer to understanding what meaning these moments have in movement practices. This chapter combines Lloyd and Smith's focus on the feeling register of consciousness with the motions and emotions of relationally flowing with others. If one can identify and speak to the visceral sensations of the body, including one's physical and emotional feelings, one might open pathways for the further cultivation of relational flow moments, enabling a *feeling,* rather than a *thinking* into flow.

As the feeling dimension of relational flow encourages inquiry into the inner somatic sensations of movement activities, and flow inquires into the existential elements of action,

reaction, and inter-action, this section inquires into the kinaesethetic affects of relational flow moments experienced in improvisational tap dance inter-actions. The descriptions of the sensorial affects of these experiences provided by the participants are grouped into three sections: feelings of connecting and transcending the self; feelings of connecting to and disconnecting from the Other; and feelings of connecting to the spiritual world, that is experiencing something that is felt to be beyond the physical world. Notably, it was difficult for some of the participants to describe the sensations of relational flow they experienced in inter-active improvisational performances. They spoke clearly of the emotional effects/affects of these experiences, particularly in relation to their experiential sense of self and of how these affectivities are sensed and experienced by others in the inter-action, including audience members. These sensorial qualities of performance not only seemed to resonate in the inter-active Other through the dancer's performance, but also became the performance itself. Additionally, the participants described what Lloyd, referring to Henry's phenomenology of life (1990/2008, 2000/2015), speaks of when she says "to move in concert, in subtle, spontaneous rhythmical ways, is to access sensations of vital power, of life … to experience the singular mode of givenness, of life itself" (Lloyd, 2021, p. 966). This omnipresent force of life, something seemingly other than this world and yet in and of this world, was felt and lived through the inter-active improvisational tap dance performances described by the participants. Inter-active, improvisational tap dancing seems to elicit sensations and resonances of connecting outside and beyond this realm – of touching something seemingly greater than our worldly existence – a seeming heaven on earth that is always already there to access, sense and experience, an omnipresent affective realm (Lloyd, 2021, p. 965; Henry, 1990/2008, 2000/2015). As discussed below, the feeling of relationally flowing through inter-active, improvisational tap

dancing is of connecting to, disconnecting from and transcending beyond the realms of the self, the Other, and the spiritual world and of experiencing the ever-accessible affectivity of life's power.

Self: Connecting to and Transcending

Relational flow moments cultivated through inter-active, improvisational performances shared between musicians and tap dancers elicit feelings and sensations of connecting to and expanding beyond the dancer-self in the participants. Heather briefly described connecting in the inter-active moment through breath, while she and others spoke more in depth on the meaning of connecting to one's emotions in improvisational performance. The participants described feeling that they were able to move beyond their bodily selves, experience transcendental states of being akin to trance or meditation, and literally be pushed beyond their bodily-being in improvisational tap dance inter-actions with musicians. Sensations of connecting to themselves on a deeper level and of expanding out from themselves, into the inter-action and towards the Other were key themes that emerged in the participants' descriptions of feeling relational flow. Accordingly, relational flow moments bring sensations of simultaneously deepened attunement to one's own emotional, sensorial being, and of also transcending one's worldly embodiment, beyond one's perceived emotional-physical capacities.

Connecting to One's Breath

Despite its relevance to the feeling dimension as proposed by Lloyd and Smith in the Function-to-Flow model, breath and the sensations of breath were not often discussed in conversations with the participants. This may be because I failed to press further in interviews, or because, as proposed by Heather, when in a state of complete immersion with the movement inter-activity, such as relational flow, it is difficult to *know* or *access* one's sensorial affects,

including how one breathes. Heather proposed that this is because one is not consciously reflecting on one's sensations and feelings in the inter-active moments of flow experiences. She said:

> I don't know, I really don't know how I breathe when I'm in that state. I don't have a clue … I don't hold my breath, I know that. I imagine I don't hold my breath, because if I held my breath then I would feel something conscious. One of the things that we said in that workshop – how do you get yourself back into a state where you're not in a panic [when you're improvising]? You breathe. A lot of dancers stop breathing and stay in panic mode and they're never going to really feel comfortable until they start breathing ... the only reason to stop breathing is fear.

Although she was unable to describe her use of breath in her improvisational practice, Heather was able to state the essential role breathing plays in facilitating the relational flow experience of improvising tap dancers. Accordingly, held breath is associated with panic or fear, whereas releasing breath and ongoing breathing was Heather's suggested means for getting oneself back into the inter-active moment. She said that if you do not breathe, "your muscles don't get enough air [and] they seize up... people get tense... [and close] themselves down to the world. When you breathe and open up, then you start to take stuff in". When one hold's one's breath, one seizes or freezes, creating muscle tension that then inhibits one's motions and emotions. Holding one's breath prevents anything from coming in or going out of the body – it blocks sensory input as the body goes into panic mode. The body needs oxygen to survive, which it cannot get without breath. Unable to access essential oxygen, the body can only survive a few short moments and slowly begins to shut down to conserve what oxygen is left in the blood stream. How can a dancer hear or see the musical-movements of their inter-active other, if their

sensorial body is shutting down? A dancer who holds their breath in improvisational inter-action would only feel fear and panic as they enter survival mode. When the dancer finally inhales and exhales, they release the tension constricting their movement, enable the input and output of sensorial affect, and snap out of their panic stricken mode. A dancer who breathes is open to the inter-active moment and connected through their breath to themselves as a living, breathing, musically-moving body. Breath and breathing in the improvisational inter-action enables the dancer to be in the inter-active moment with the Other, open to sending and receiving communication and can be in listening-being (Lipari, 2010, 2014) in relational flow.

Connecting to One's Emotions

Discussions with the participants revealed the meaning of quite literally *tapping* into their emotional and sensorial feelings in inter-active, improvisational performances. By emotion, I am referring to "a complex experience of consciousness, bodily sensation, and behaviour that reflects the personal significance of a thing, an event, or a state of affairs" (Solomon, 2023). Participants described acknowledging and dancing with and through how they were feeling emotionally in the given moment – their mood, temperament, or disposition – in addition to their physical, bodily sensations. For example, Heather shared the below story about a time when she tapped into her emotional feelings in improvisational inter-action by embracing, accepting, and being with her emotional self in performance. This story demonstrates the role our emotional feelings can play in relational flow inter-actions once we accept them and decide to move with, rather than against, them. As an improviser, tapping into the values of honesty and trust are imperative for Heather; throughout our conversations and in classes, she consistently referred to these two values. Honesty entailed being truthful with oneself ("How am I feeling today?") and with the inter-active Other ("This is how I am feeling today") and trust meant being confident in

one's musical-movement repertoire and in the inter-active Other to be present in the inter-action. While discussing these values, Heather shared a story of a time when she was completely honest with herself and her band members about her emotional state and when she trusted them to carry her through the performance:

> There is a certain kind of person that becomes an improviser and it's somebody that really needs trust and truth – trust and truth – I know that I've always had this Achilles heel of needing truth … and so one of the places that I find that truth is on stage as an improviser because, if you're really honest with the person that you're performing with, it happens. But the minute somebody's pushing too hard or really really playing from their ego or not really being honest about how they're feeling … Here's a great example: my son broke his arm. He's a pitcher. When he was 12 [he broke his arm] in a very dangerous place and potentially could have been the end of his dream of being a pitcher and it's all he's ever wanted in his life. I'm a mother and I was on tour in Germany at the time and I was playing with [some musicians] and I had to go to rehearsal seconds after I found out what happened to my son and I was a mess. I walked into the theatre and I thought I could go in and do what I'm supposed to do but that's not going to be honest at all. So, I walked into the theatre and I said, "I'm a total mess I have no idea what's going to happen tonight, please play a song that means a lot to you and I'll see you on stage, because I can't do this right now" and they were like "okay!" and it was one of the best performances I've done in a really long time because there was so much truth on stage, because they did what I asked – they picked a song that meant a lot to them, they ended up picking a song about their son, you know. And that's the magic. You don't have … there's no control in that, there's just honesty; I wasn't capable of showing up and being,

> so I was honest, I said, "I'm not perfect right now, could you please have my back?" and because they were great improvisers, they went there. To me, that's truth – yet we are taught to go in and say, "I'm fine, I'm good, here do this and this" and that's when the truth is not there, and that's when the improv doesn't happen, you know?

By listening to herself, accepting and respecting her emotional-physical state, honestly expressing these feelings to her inter-active partners, and trusting their capacity to support her fragile state in the inter-action, Heather enabled the cultivation of relational flow moments in her performance. She welcomed, embraced, and accepted her emotions and, rather than pushing them away, worked with them to be her authentic, honest self in her performance. She *listened* to herself, to the emotional sensations she was experiencing, and allowed these emotions to guide her in her inter-action. Heather's emphasis on being truthful to her emotional self in her motional improvisations adds to Susanne Ravn's writing on the relationship between improvisation and connection to one's bodily sensations. Ravn said: "The very process of performing specific movements, steps, and patterns invites dancers to be aware of how their body feels today and how this 'body of today' is best handled to perform a dance piece, for example, in accordance with the ideals of the context" (Ravn, 2020, p. 78). As we see through Heather, this body of today might encompass not only physical sensations, such as the aches and pains in one's joints or the warmth and stretch in one's muscles, but also emotional sensations such as one's mood, temperament, or disposition. Therefore, emotions might also factor in to one's improvisational contributions and thus one's capacity for inter-action.

Dianne similarly emphasized the importance of feeling her full emotions and allowing these emotions to guide her inter-active performances:

It depends on how you're feeling. For me, it's really about how I'm feeling and if I'm open and I'm not weighted down heavily. No, I can't say that, let me rephrase that because sometimes when you're weighted down heavily, you have a lot more to say and you can go way out. But it's a different conversation, but it's there. There was a period where I was doing waltzes a lot and sometimes, I could really go outside the lines – for me it's like colouring outside the lines – and I could go outside the lines a lot when I was feeling something heavy. So, it wasn't explosive, so maybe I don't think of that as much of an improvisation, but we think of improvisation as such a big word, you think of it as a big moment … That word improvisation didn't exist. It was a word that came up later, improvisation, that's just dancing! That's when you're 'going in' … 'dig in' … 'go for it!' … 'you better dance, girl!' That's when you're quote-un-quote "improvising", but we never called it improvising. When you 'went off' … oh she's gon' go off! She's going 'off book!' When you go off, now you're 'out of bounds.'… but … I did it much more subtly. And if you look at some of the improvisational stuff that happened when I was doing waltzes, I was going inside myself with more of an internal thing, so people may not recognize that or even regard that or think the word improvisation; it looks like, what is she doing? … I'm making an assumption about how people may have seen that which was much quieter as opposed to something explosive, so when you think improvisation you think wow! and this is no wow factor, but for me it was the depth of my improvisation and it happened there [*pointing inward to her chest*] as opposed to here [*gesturing outward*] … That's how I feel it and that's how I best express it as deep as I can go not as full as I can be.

For Dianne, relational flow moments or moments of what she has previously referred to as “true improvisation” were particularly accessible during a time when she felt most connected to her “heavy” emotions. In these improvisational performances, she felt she could “go way out” or, as she proposes, “colour outside the lines”. I interpret this to mean that when an improvising dancer connects with their authentic, emotional self, and when these emotions feel exceptionally strong, they may feel as if they move beyond their perceived limitations as an improvising dancer, feeling relational flow moments of connection. In this experiences, she digs deeper inside herself to fully feel the affectivity of her emotional being, and it is through this internal connection that she may move outside of herself to connect to her audience. While joyful or happier emotions might seem to “explode” out of the improviser, Dianne’s heavier emotions – perhaps sadness or longing – similarly drove her to experience sensations of ‘going off’ in improvisation, which I have previously related to relational flow. Dianne reflected further on these improvisational performances, noting how digging deep inside herself and allowing herself to move with and through these sad emotions provided her with an expressive outlet to work out her personal stress and struggles:

> During those years taking care of my mother and my grandmother, I’d get on the plane, I’d get to the gig, my mind is still there. I’m carrying a lot of stuff, I’m not going to go out and choose a tune that’s going to be [*Dianne stretches her arms out wide, expressing big, high energy*] … I don’t feel that way… so I’m picking tunes that really … are where I’m at. Tunes that can help me express what I’m feeling, and I did three songs in my act for many years; it was always, I’d come out and do something upbeat for me that was saying hello to people, I was here [*arms open looking at audience presenting*] [*scatting up beat*]. ‘Hi! Okay!’ And now we’re going to get serious for a minute, and I’d go inside

> and do the waltz, and then I'd come out of it and do a Latin piece, like [the tune] Black Orpheus or some Latin flavoured tune to end on that had a nice vamp to vamp yourself off the stage. That was the way I always put my set like that, and I felt… I've never said this out loud; looking back at the way I used to do that, I felt like I'd feel too guilty if I went out and did the waltz, that was the one that was for me. This one is for you. This is for me, this is for us to get on out of here, I can vamp out, those are always for me. They were all improvised but improvised on stuff – ideas – and a lot of those became repetitious. So there were certain steps that I opened with all the time with Black Orpheus … but if you look carefully it'll be slightly different, and sometimes it's no different, sometimes I can't get away from the main line, and sometimes I can get way away from it and come back. [It] depends on that, always depended on how I felt …

At a time in her life when she was stressed, emotionally and physically drained from caring for her ailing mother and grandmother, Dianne embraced these feelings and found opportunities to dance with them, rather than against or in spite of them. Choosing songs with energies that related to the energy she was experiencing, she created space in her performances to *feel* this energy and its emotions and be honest with not only herself, but the audience as well. As she allowed herself to feel these emotions and to shape her performance through mindful attunement to her emotional state, Dianne deepened her relationship with her emotional self, and in effect, with her audience. Evidently, musical-movement performances are not only moments where we express and convey emotions as performers, which may elicit feelings and sensations in audience members, but they may also be guided by and even based in our emotional feelings as individuals, which may in turn elicit feelings and sensations in us as performers. She says:

> I'll tell you, I always felt guilty about that dance because it was clearly for me. I'm sharing with you, I hope you like it, stay with me, I'm giving you the best of myself, now I'm being really honest, I can do this but now let's get real. And I'd go inside and listen to it, set myself up, I'm dancing like this, ear to the floor, but I can't tell you how many times on that dance that I would finish and I'd look up and the whole place is standing up and I'd just go 'ooohkay they heard me; they got it, they got what I'm feeling or what I'm saying'. And then afterwards for a long time I used to feel really badly that people from the audience would come up to me and say 'oh Dianne I just cried and cried' and I said 'gawd these people paid 35 dollars for tickets to cry! oh Dianne, you gotta stop making these people cry!' But I couldn't. I had to be where I was, but then I understood that if they cried, then they understood what I was saying, and they felt what I was feeling. Or they were just concerned about me what the hell is going on with this woman! Whatever they thought, but I connected…So that is more satisfying for me because all I ever wanted to do was connect … and that was the biggest compliment. So, for the longest time I survived in this business, not the best dancer … but I am the one they all wanted to be with after that show or say something and I don't think a lot of people understood that for a long time. They'd be like, 'damn I just went out there and did this whole 15 min set with one and ain't nobody said shit to me, and her, she goes out and…' I think it was a long time before people really understood, I wasn't doing it on purpose, I wasn't trying to sabotage anything! It took me a minute to really understand the strength of that level of communication and truth and honesty.

Connection with Others, for Dianne, was facilitated through a deepened connection to herself as this internal connection seemed to externally reach out to her audiences through her

improvisational performances. Thus, when one moves in, within, and through one's sensorially experienced emotional states, moods, and moodiness, connecting to and within oneself to the capacity to feel and, in effect, to be alive, and when these emotions are lived or played out in performance, they affect the audience. When we, as performers, genuinely feel through our performances, we elicit similar emotional sensations from our audiences. We *move* our audiences to *feel* the affectivity of our emotional being in themselves. When we reach inside ourselves, listening to our present-moment state of being or the physical-emotional sensations we feel affect us inside, we may also reach out to the Other – be them our inter-active performance partners, or our audience members. Effectively, we feel our way into relational flow moments by allowing ourselves to feel our emotions fully and completely, which enables us to connect to our internal emotional selves, and are then more deeply, relationally connected to external others in the inter-action.

I asked Dianne to provide a specific example of a time when she listened to and moved with and through the emotional sensations she felt. She described a performance she gave after having just received news of performer Sammy Davis Jr.'s death:

> I was in Portland, Oregon, and Honi Coles was the artistic director of that performance. I came to the theatre to rehearse and got the news Sammy had died, maybe that morning before. This was fresh news, Sammy had died. They were asking me what I was going to do and I was thinking about it and the piano player started to play Mr. Bojangles on the piano, and I kinda turned around and I looked at him and I said, "yah let's do that, that's fitting and appropriate". I didn't rehearse it, we just talked about the beginning – the introduction – and the ending. I opened with an upbeat swing, then I did the Bojangles piece … and after Bojangles I took a bow and put my head down at the end and when I

> looked up, everyone in the theatre was on their feet and I just stood there and I just looked at them and I knew that it was just one of those moments. Maybe it was the first, I don't know, it was an intense one … The depth of what I was feeling, it wasn't sad, it was just a feeling, an expression. An expression of a lot of things of gratitude, of sadness, of course that's a part of it. I knew his wife and his son so there was a familiarity that went above and beyond choosing a song or picking a star because I actually knew them, I had met him on the set of the movie *Tap*. His son … the wife… I knew them, it was very personal to me and very heartfelt. And I remember when I did that, I didn't feel like the audience was standing because it was Sammy, I knew they connected because I was able to express what they felt.

In the performance described above, Dianne danced from a place of genuine grief and sadness. She suggests that through this, she was able to move the audience to feel these feelings with her. Driven and directed by her emotional sensations, she was able to literally and figuratively *move* her audience to feel what she was feeling, to experience these emotions, and their full affectivity, as she was. She explained, however, that as she attempted to do the same thing the following evening, her performance fell flat. The feelings and emotions she experienced upon hearing of Davis's passing, which so strongly emanated from her performance the night before, were less affective as she actively tried to recreate the performance:

> Both show performances were two nights, that was the first night the second night everyone's set was the same. [The relational flow experience] could not happen the second night. Yes, people stood up [for a standing ovation], but it was a different kind of ovation, everything about it was different. I was different in the way I felt; it was nice, it was okay, it was probably worthy of an ovation, but not like that first night. That first

> night was real and honest and pure and it can't be repeated. When you try to do it again then you're mocking it, it's an imitation. It didn't have the same power and honesty and belief as the night before because it was pure and honest and I really got the difference of what that feels like.

Heather and Dianne's descriptions of feeling emotional connection in and through inter-active improvisational performances, of tapping into their emotional beings through honesty and trust and of the resulting "truth" in their performances as experienced by co-performers and audience members alike, reveals the necessary departure of consciousness from intentionality towards affectivity and impressionality and towards feeling fully-alive. As demonstrated through salsa dancer Anya Katsevman's reliance upon her "gut level instinct" for power and agency in her partnered salsa dance performances, engaging our emotional being in inter-active performances reveals the visceral, sensorial drive inside us, the life that gives to relational flow moments, whereby one "taps into the primordial power that is there before any intentional experience manifests" (Lloyd, 2021, p. 968). Sheets-Johnstone similarly asserts that motion and emotion, or kinetic and affective bodies, "are of a dynamic piece" (1999, p. 260). Our emotions can drive our motions, and when we move in and through them, we can drive others to experience – to feel – these emotions as well. We can relationally connect with them by being authentically present with ourselves, by feeling the impressions of our emotional states of being rather than intending or striving to feel anything different.

Transcending: Motile Consciousness and Being Pushed Out of Bounds

Moments of feeling connected to oneself emotionally through inter-activity can also be experienced as moments of transcending one's bodily being, even as this experience is facilitated through their being a moving body. According to the participants, while being honest and

truthful with one's emotional feelings elicits moments of relational flow connection with themselves, the audience and other performers, these inter-active improvisational performances can also create moments wherein one experiences oneself as disconnected from one's own body. In these moments, one feels as though they transcend their bodily being – particularly in relation to injuries or ailments that might normally impede one's movement abilities. Relational flow experiences in inter-active, improvisational tap dancing that deepen emotional connections between the self and performing/spectating others may also resonate in the physical self as moments of transcending our state of bodily being and our perceived bodily capacities.

In her experience of relational flow, Brenda described feeling a "sense of timelessness, a certain feeling of suspension" from her living bodily reality. She said:

> It was interesting, I got a herniated disk in my neck and I really thought, "well okay this will be [the end of my career]." … I had gone and contracted a date in Nuremberg and I was sure I had told her, "I am not performing! I can teach but I'm not performing!" So, I get there, and she said, "well okay, your rehearsal with the piano for the solo show is this afternoon" Now, I had not even danced in like 10 months, so I said, "I can't!" She said, "you have to! All the flyers are out; people have bought tickets!" So, the musician came, and it was like he was sent from the angels. He was so good that I ended up dancing for almost two hours with the guy and I was back on my feet and then I was performing again. He brought me back! He was so brilliant, his pocket was so good, he got all my ideas, all my material. It was amazing! He was absolutely amazing, and I never worked with him again.

When I asked her to describe what she felt during this moment of performing with this musician, as she lost herself in the inter-active experience, Brenda reiterated that she just “kept dancing”, implying, at least, that she was not feeling inhibited by the pain from her injury. Despite knowing she “probably shouldn’t be doing this”, dancing with the musician felt “so good”, so she kept going, pushing her physical self further beyond feeling her injury. Something she had previously considered would impede her ability to perform became inconsequential in this inter-action. The musician’s musical skills and, one might assume based on our previous discussions of what functional capacities are required for relational flow experiences, his ability to listen and engage with her in improvisational performance, sustained and supported the inter-action, which in turn supported Brenda’s ability to physically perform. This supportive relationship provided a basis upon which the inter-action could grow and flourish into relational flow – like the container described in the previous chapter. Brenda felt emboldened to try new things, despite her injury and lack of performance for an extended time prior to this experience; Brenda said she kept thinking, “let’s try this one! Okay! Let’s try that! And he’s like, ‘oh, you like this!’”. She forgot about her injury and therefore forgot about her physical self in the relational flow moment.

Heather described a similar experience wherein she felt she expanded beyond her bodily capacities and lost her sense of self. I asked Heather to speak to her experience performing with Canadian percussionist Jesse Stewart, and to note any moments of flow-like sensations:

> Thing is I had a really bad hip injury when I did that show with Jesse and I don’t remember it bothering me when I did that show on stage, so even when I have an issue you can go to that state … So, when I start to improvise or even in class, because class is stop start stop start and I am constantly thinking when I teach, not giving thinking

> exercises, but thinking about exercises that will free people, so I am in a state of constant thought when I am teaching. So, I could feel my hip, until I started dancing, and once I started dancing, the pain went away. But the minute I stopped dancing and tried to sit down or stand up, the pain was back because as soon as I go into the thinking state then I'm in my body and can feel everything. But when I'm in the non-thinking state … it's beyond being in a moving state because when I walk around the lake my hip will hurt, and that's a movement, but I'm not in a meditative state. Whereas, when I dance, I'm in a different state then when I go for a walk or work out in the gym.

While dancing, Heather loses conscious awareness of herself, including how her body feels in the moment as she dances. There are two aspects of her comment that I would like to discuss. The first is her comment that she feels no pain while dancing given that she is not in a "thinking state" and is therefore not aware of any bodily pain she otherwise knows to be there. She differentiates experiences of dancing from those of performing other types of movement to point to the distinct affect of dancing on her state of being. It is important to note that when Heather refers to "thinking" and a "thinking state" in the above quotation, this perspective on thought and thinking is rooted in two assumptions that, through Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenology of dance, namely that thinking occurs in movement, I refuted in Chapter 4. Sheets-Johnstone (1999/2011b) describes these two assumptions:

> … consider two assumptions about thinking … [firstly] it is commonly assumed that thinking is tied to language and that it takes place only via language.... [and] that thinking and language are tied in an exclusive way to rationality... [this leads to] a further assumption … that thinking takes place only by means of something, in particular, a

> symbolic system of some sort – e.g. mathematical, linguistic, logical – a system having the capacity to mediate or carry through referentially. (pp. 426-427)

And secondly:

> … a parallel assumption rooted in a Cartesian separation of mind and body. To assume that thinking is something only a mind does, and doing or moving are something only a body does is, in effect, to deny the possibility of thinking-in-movement. If thinking is furthermore assumed to be always separate from its expression … then thinking must necessarily be transcribed … When the mind formulates a thought, for example, the tongue and lips move to express it; when the mind thinks of going to the store, the body complies by walking or driving it there. The notion that thoughts must be corporeally transliterated, that they exist separately from and prior to their expression, has been justly criticized by philosophers. (p. 428)

These assumptions, that thinking, language, rationality and symbolism are inextricably linked, and that thinking is something only a mind does, underpin Heather's assessment of her "thinking state" of being while walking or teaching versus her "meditative state" while dancing. Through Sheets-Johnstone, however, we have learned that "movement is neither a medium through which a dancer's thoughts emerge nor a kinetic system of counters for mediating his or her thoughts; movement constitutes the thoughts themselves," (1999/2011b, p. 427) and therefore while Heather may feel as though she is not thinking in her improvisational dancing, a reconceptualization of what thinking and thought are might suggest otherwise. In this thinking-in-[dancing]movement state, Heather suggests she does not experience physical pain she otherwise knows to be there, essentially pointing to a loss of conscious awareness of her bodily self. Though she may momentarily "forget" about her injury and the pain it causes her, this

injury does not simply disappear. Instead, in this state of being in dancing movement, her conscious sense of self becomes less distinguishable from the activity at hand (dancing) and, in effect, her bodily self (and her injury) becomes less prominent in her sensorial field of consciousness. As her senses shift from being absorbed in her lived reality, that is in feeling the pain in her hip and thus cognitive awareness of her injury, toward absorption in the musical-movement improvisational inter-activity, what I have previously referred to as listening being in musical-movement inter-action with the Other, she experiences herself less as a self in the inter-activity but *as one* with the inter-activity.

Heather said that in these dancing-meditative moments, she is not "there in the same way that we [were] right [then in our interview]". Of course, Heather was there in the moment of dancing, as the self doing the dancing, but given her absorption in the activity, she did not experience herself as a self separate from the dancing. Additional details she provided reiterate Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenological assessment of thinking-in-movement, as discussed in chapter 4. Heather said:

> I can't really tell you what goes on in that moment because it's not conscious. I can't tell you what it felt like because I wasn't there in the same way that we are right now thinking. … The idea of flow … it's not something that you can report back on, because you're not watching it, you're in it, you *are* it. You are not experiencing it, you are it. You are that state. It's like meditation; you can't really report back on meditation because meditation is about *not* thinking. You can't really turn it into a thinking process when the whole goal is to not think … There is a way to listen that is not with your brain, the front part of your brain, but that's with your emotion. I'm emotionally present more when I'm improvising, more than my brain is thinking or analyzing or judging. I mean that's the

> whole thing about improvising, it is learning how not to judge in the moment, because it stops the process, so you know it's impossible for me to even have any clue as to how I'm feeling in that moment, because that would be stopping the process.
> (italics added to reflect spoken emphasis)

In flow experiences like those described by Heather and Brenda, it is difficult to report back on what is felt in the moment to moment flows of the inter-action, given that in those moments, we do not experience ourselves as separate from the inter-action and instead we are the inter-action. Through our musical-movement, we both create the inter-activity and become the inter-activity; it is because we are musically moving together that we become the musical-movement. We cannot separate our consciousness, our sense of self, from these moments because, if we are experiencing them, then we are not separate from them. What results is a motile consciousness, a consciousness rooted in the motility of the moment, or what Sheets-Johnstone (2015b) refers to as "consciousness exist[ing] its body in movement as a … *form-in-the-making*" (pp. 28-30). That is, consciousness in musical-movement improvisation is consciousness as a body in motion, a body that is its movement and is only its movement. Despite the fact that both Heather and Brenda described experiencing moments of disconnect from their bodily-lived realities in relational flow, these experiences are inextricably linked to their being sensing bodies in dancing motion: they accessed these 'states' of being separate from their bodily pains through the musical-movements of inter-active improvisational tap dancing. This aligns with Sheets-Johnstone's (2015b) assertion that in dance performances, "the dancer is not conscious of the form-in-the-making, the dance, as an object, nor is she explicitly aware of herself as she creates the form" (pp. 28-30). Heather asserts that in her experiences inter-acting with others in improvisational tap dancing, she is not cognitively present in the same way that

she may be in conversation with someone, as she walks around the lake near her house, or as she teaches a class. Brenda suggests that in improvisational tap dance inter-actions with the right musician, she is able to transcend her bodily limitations. In these moments, both Brenda and Heather exist their bodies in dancing movement as *forms-in-the-making,* experiencing motile consciousness, or consciousness originating in bodily motion, rather than a cognitive consciousness. Further affirming this assessment of Heather and Brenda's experiences in improvisational tap dance inter-actions, Sheets-Johnstone says, "My experience of an ongoing present exists only in virtue of these immediate moments, that is, in the actual here-now creating of this gesture or movement... My perpetually moving present is in this sense indistinguishable from the actual movement I am here and now creating" (1999/2011b, p. 425).

The second aspect of Heather's description of her experiences dancing versus those of moving relates to her assertion that she is in a specific state of being that is "meditative" when she is dancing, and that this state of being is not accessible to her when she is moving in other forms, such as walking or teaching. For Heather, experiences of being completely immersed in the musical-movement of tap dancing inter-actions feel more like what she believes are states of meditation or trance than flow. Given that she was unable to reflect on her own experiences in these states, she described what she sees when observing her dance students in these moments:

> The class goes into a trance. Once, the entire class did and they lose the sense of time, they don't get tired, they stay grooving the entire time, even if they're not dancing because they stay in the music. … They don't check out with their brain, they don't walk away and get some water or sit down and rest, they don't feel the need for that. They just stay pulsing with the music…. You can feel it's like a meditation, the music becomes so much a meditation because it starts to feel like you're going into a trance, and that's why

> the dancers could dance themselves into a frenzy … because they're not thinking about how tired they are, that's just not even part of the experience. They will dance until they literally drop, not knowing that they're tired because they're in a trance.

Trance and meditation are states of being often compared with flow experiences, though their defined characteristics differ slightly. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* (Colman, 2015), trance, like flow, is an altered state of consciousness characterised by a narrowing of awareness to one's immediate surroundings (*immersion with the activity at hand*), a suspension of the sense of personal identity (*loss of sense of self*), and a diminution in the range of motor activity and speech. In the *Oxford Dictionary of Cultural Anthropology* (Vivanco, 2018), trance states also induce dissociation, alterations in sensations of time and space, and even hallucinations, and are often associated with ritual, illness, and healing. Trance can be induced in a healer, patient or ritual specialist through dance, breathing, or psychoactive drugs or alcohol and might also involve spirit possession in which the individual experiences sensations of temporary displacement or seeming inhabitation by another spirit, such as an ancestor, historical figure, or demon. Unlike flow states, trance states are often associated with forms of intoxication, mental disorder, and hypnosis in definitions in the field of psychology. According to definitions, trance states differ from flow states in that they do not involve the meeting of challenge and skill, which is a vital aspect of Csikszentmihalyi's flow experiences (e.g., 1975a, 1990).

Meditation is a practice originally conceptualized through traditional Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Abhidharma-pitaka* and the *Vishuddimagga* (Buddhaghosa, 1975/1991/2010). The practice of meditation is often equated with the experience of mindfulness, but meditation is itself actually the act through which one experiences mindfulness states. The original Buddhist

term for mindfulness is *Sati*, a Sanskrit word describing a lucid awareness of what is occurring within the phenomenological field (Bodhi, 2011). Therefore, according to Alberto Chiesa:

> In sum, according to classical literature, mindfulness concerns a lucid awareness of what is occurring within the phenomenological field and meditation plays a key role in the development of mindfulness. In particular, for the correct development of mindfulness, both concentrative and open monitoring skills should be developed with the main aim of keeping the mind anchored to present moment experience and perceiving an experience in its stark form free from one's own projections and misunderstandings. Finally, an attitude of acceptance is thought to facilitate and to be the result of the development of both mindfulness and concentration. (Chiesa, 2013, p. 258)

This required present-moment awareness in mindfulness and meditation practices differs from Csikszentmihalyi's definition of flow (e.g., 1975, 1990); accordingly, though while in flow one must maintain focus on one's immediate surroundings and the moment at hand, those experiencing flow often must "step outside" of the present moment, momentarily, in continued pursuit of the activity's goal. For example, in a chess match, a player might need to think ahead, into the future, as they plan their next move, though they may experience themselves in flow states of consciousness. Orin C. Davis and Vera Ludwig (2018) state that because of this anticipation or need to "step" into the future, those experiencing flow are not necessarily *fully in* the present moment, and while their experiences may be *meditative,* they are not quite meditations. Davis and Ludwig (2018) also note that the role of concentration in flow is more centered on merging one's awareness with one's actions, so that one might apply the skills necessary to meet the challenge at hand – and less about concentrating on one's present moment surroundings.

According to Chiesa (2013), those in flow are not as open and non-judgemental as those who are in a state of mindfulness. As Chiesa (2013) describes, “acceptance is an attitude that is brought to both mindfulness and concentration practices [like meditation]”, (p. 257) but is not an inherent aspect of either. In traditional Buddhist mindfulness, an attitude of acceptance and curiosity is used to refocus attention on the chosen object (Grabovac et al. 2011), preventing negative thoughts such as self-judgement from arising. This attitude of acceptance allows “rapid, discrete sensations to be more easily noticed and followed during mindfulness practice … [and is] a quality of awareness that can both help the development and is the result of concentration and mindfulness” (Chiesa, 2013, p. 257). In flow experiences, and particularly those experienced relationally with others, one might pursue a degree of the acceptance attitude, but, according to Csikszentmihalyi (e.g., 1990), one must maintain an attitude of judgement to participate in monitoring, or the repeated analysis and adjustment of one’s actions based on that analysis, to maintain course towards the objective or goal. This judgement or analysis might arise as ‘discrete thoughts’ of thinking-in-movement, as proposed by Sheets-Johnstone (2015b) and discussed in Chapter 4.

Given that the purpose of this research is not to determine exactly what kind of experiences the participants have in inter-active tap dance improvisations, I will not dwell further on Heather’s preference for terms like meditation/meditative and trance over my chosen terminology, relational flow. When prompted to describe a time when she felt relationally connected with her co-performers or of when she witnessed such moments of connection wherein the performers seemed lost in the experience, Heather provided descriptions that illuminate various possible experiences and feelings of these experiences accessible through improvisational tap dance inter-actions. Perhaps, as provided through Heather’s descriptions,

relational flow-like moments are experienced sensorially like those we might otherwise ‘label’ as meditations or as trance states. Sensorially, and therefore phenomenologically, maybe these experiences are the same, though to different degrees? Then, perhaps it is only in psychological studies or other forms of analytic or pathological research where we must distinguish between these states.

The descriptions of the trance-like, meditative states Heather witnesses in her students provide more detail about what these states are like to experience, even if Heather is only witnessing these experiences and is not feeling them herself. She describes sensations of time distortion and transcendence of bodily-being as the participants exercised an ability to dance until they dropped, seemingly unaware of the limitations of their being a body. The dancers’ need for water or rest dissolved into the inter-activity, and movement became the only sustenance required to continue. These descriptions align with her and Brenda’s experiences of relational flow wherein they seemed to transcend their bodily states of being; they forgot about injuries or ailments as they thought-in-movement and their sense of being as one with the activity at hand reflected a motile consciousness or a consciousness existing its body in movement.

Dianne also felt a sort of transcendence of self in her experiences of relational flow, though rather than bodily transcendence, she described being able to express emotions beyond her perceived ordinary capacity. Dianne spoke of experiencing relational flow and this feeling of emotional and expressive transcendence while dancing with jazz musician Dr. Barry Harris, who, through his acute attention to her needs as a dancer and his profound skill, seemed to ‘take’ her to “a place” she had never “expected to go”. Contextualizing this experience, Dianne explained that she perceived herself to be a reserved person in her emotional expression: “I’m

the kind of person that if I hit the mega bucks and somebody handed me the ticket, some people would go off and I wouldn't do that I don't think that's in my body. I'd say 'oh my god…' you know what I mean? When I see people get picked for [television game] shows, like the Price is Right, those people freak out. … I don't have that level of physical expression". She provided this description of herself to explain how some musicians, "good musicians" in her words, have this ability to read her as a dancer and to guide her in the direction they feel she needs to go with her improvisation. She stated that through this inter-action, she is able to reach greater heights of emotional expression than to which she ever perceived herself capable. This reaching or expanding beyond herself is summarized when she describes flow moments experienced through improvisation as when a dancer is "going in … dig in … go for it" … "when you 'went off' … she's going off book! When you go off, now you're out of bounds!" (as quoted in the section on emotions above). The feelings and sensations of these moments, for Dianne, are both of going inwards, deep inside herself, while also being pushed outside of herself, beyond who she perceives herself to be. In these relational flow moments, though she feels as though she is transcending her own expressive capacity, Dianne is literally 'tapping' into a self she did not know was there – a self with the expansive emotional capacity to feel and express beyond her normal, everyday self. This self is one she connects with through the musical-movement experience of inter-acting with certain skilled musicians:

> With … seasoned musicians who understand that process with tap dancers, they know how to take you to the moon, take you over to the moon by listening and they can build it, you didn't even expect when you weren't intending necessarily to build it, but they hear the possibility there and they take that and build on it. And you two are really working together, that is for me the most explosive moment when we're working and I

> equate that to a sexual experience … There have been moments when I have exploded beyond my expectations or even knowledge of myself. The only time I have been able to do that is with musicians kicking the shit out of me, and they can do that and take me to a place that I never expected to go. That happens with the musicians that I am working with, or in some cases, I have found now over the years a piece of music here or there which builds you into a crescendo and you have to move along with that. That journey for me is inspired, comes through my back and comes, pushing me musically …

Dianne described her sensorial experience of relationally flowing in inter-active improvisation with musicians as one of being *pushed,* both musically and physically, as she describes feeling as if the musicians are pushing her, through her back, to a new place, a space that she "never expected to go". This experience is enabled through mutual listening, or listening being together in the improvisational inter-action. Dianne equates this to sexual experiences in which partners listen to one another's wants and needs and, together, achieve climax – "take you over the moon … the most explosive moment". I am intrigued at the juxtapositions in Dianne's description of this experience: these moments are both incredible – out of this world – and taxing, difficult, or challenging – as musicians "kick the shit out of" her. Dianne's description reveals the vital power of these moments – their explosiveness – and how this power relates to her sense of exploding beyond herself, surpassing her perceived state of being, through the musical-movement inter-action. Through improvisational inter-actions with musicians, tap dancers may experience sensations of being pushed beyond their perceived selves.

Dianne shared how developing an understanding of the feeling of relational flow may help a dancer push themselves further towards those feelings so they might experience such sensations of improvisation. As she equated these sensations with feelings of ecstasy and

sensuality, she discussed how difficult it was to explain the moments and their affectivity to her young dance students:

> … it [is] almost like a climax. With Savion [Glover], when he was a kid, I'm trying to get him to understand that he got to go off, now you got to reach this place, you reach this place Savion where it's just like … and I'm looking at him and he's like twelve, I can't quite go there as an analogy and I use a lot of analogies in my thinking. I found with Savion when he was younger, or even Derek [Grant], I couldn't use a sexual analogy, I couldn't say to them it's like having a climax you just go off! You just go off, in your body, in your mind, but I couldn't say that so I found other ways of trying to get that across to them. It's like where you go with your mind and you just get and you go off grid.

I asked Dianne if she could further illuminate what it feels like to expand beyond yourself in relational flow moments of inter-active improvisation with Others. She equated the experience to riding a pulse and building towards an ecstatic climax:

> It's that pulse that builds. It'll never build if I don't sit in and ride it. I've got to ride it, that's why I equate that with so many different experiences. I've got to ride that for a minute before it will explode. I ride it long enough to find it, get into it, it gets more intense, don't break me in the middle of that, that is enough to take me to the moon, I'll lose it.

Judith Becker describes various studies within which the musical listening experience is related or equated to experiences of high emotional and sensational arousal, such as sexual or erotic experiences (Becker, 2004). In her book, *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion and Trancing,* Becker demonstrates that "erotic feelings are commonly aroused by musical listening and

frequently reported by listeners in Western studies of music and emotions" (2004, p. 60). While her work mostly focuses on the experience of extreme arousal in the musical listener and in particular, one experiencing religious trance, Becker does provide one example of musicians experiencing sexual arousal while playing music through an excerpt from a nineteenth-century Javanese poem, *Serat Centhini*:

> They played the piece for a long time.
>
> Then it sped up and moved into the second section.
>
> The longer I lasted, the more intimate with one another the individual rendition became.
>
> They seized the thrill of satisfaction.
>
> The musicians were all sexually aroused, eager, and randy,
>
> Feeling [*rasa-rasa*] as if they couldn't stand it any longer. (Soeradipoera et al., as cited in Becker, 2004, pp. 60-61, parenthesis added by Becker)

By examining studies by Anne J. Blood and Robert J. Zatorre (2001) and Jaak Panksepp (1995), Becker argues that this "semiotic, metaphoric relationship between trancing and the sexual act may be supported by a physiological relationship between the neural pathways of aroused musical listening and those of aroused sexuality" (2004, p. 63). For example, the high arousal of emotions through musical listening experiences can precipitate the "chill phenomenon", or "a tingling at the back of the neck, down the spine, or the raising of 'goosebumps'" (2004, p. 63). Becker adopts Panksepp's label of the chill phenomenon as a "skin orgasm," assuming that there are "underlying neurochemical similarities between the two phenomena" (2004, p. 63). Having previously demonstrated that deep listening to music changes structures in the brain that lead to "increased heart rate, perspiration, and faster breathing" (2004, p. 56), Becker emphasizes the link between the physiological/physical changes and the emotional

sensations experienced by music listeners, and particularly by those experiencing trance states in this listening. Research demonstrating a link between music listening experiences and the physiological/physical changes to the body in sexual arousal aligns with Dianne's equation of sexual climax with relational flow moments experienced through improvisational tap dancing inter-actions with seasoned musicians. She states that she feels as though she is capable of expressing beyond her perceived capacities and is pushed by the musicians, riding the inter-action towards climax or until she "goes off".

As discussed in this section through interviews with the participants, musically-moving in concert with others through improvisational tap dancing inter-actions evokes sensations of both connecting to and transcending oneself. Descriptions of sensorial experience implicate the breath, in that when one is *not* breathing, they are disconnected from the inter-active experience, feeling panic and fear in the relational flow moment. Through breath, the dancer may connect themselves to the experience at hand and achieve, perhaps, more positive feelings and sensations. Sensations of connecting inwards to oneself are linked to fully feeling one's emotional mood and state of being. This includes allowing oneself to be emotionally present in the inter-active moment with the other. When the dancer connects to their emotions rather than seeks to separate from them, they may more authentically inter-act and therefore relate in the experience. Additionally, participants experienced sensations of transcension in that they perceived themselves to surpass both bodily and emotionally expressive capacities: descriptions of relational flow included losing conscious awareness of physical pain or physical necessities, and feeling as though one is pushed outside of oneself to express, and ultimately, feel, bigger and greater than one perceives possible. Feelings of relational flow moments were equated with erotic climax, which demonstrates how relational flow moments experienced through

improvisational tap dance inter-actions may elicit some of the most extreme feelings and sensations possible. As Becker states, "there is a joy in the pure bodily experience of strong arousal, a life-affirming quality of feeling truly alive that [musical experiences such as listening and trancing] can enhance" (2004, p. 67). Evidently, these feelings of being truly alive are also enhanced through musical-movement experiences such as improvisational tap dance inter-actions.

Other: Connecting and Disconnecting to One anOther

> *As soon as man uses movement to establish a living relation with his fellows, movement is no longer an instrument, no longer a means; it is a manifestation. A revelation of intimate being and of the psychic link which unites us to the world and our fellow men.*
>
> (Neurologist Kurt Goldstein, as quoted by Sheets-Johnstone, 1999/2011b, p. 427)

Sensations of connection through relational flow moments are also experienced by performers in relation to the Other in improvisational inter-actions. This Other includes the audience members who are observing or experiencing the performance and the musicians or dancers who are also performing.

Audience

The performer-audience relationship is an essential aspect of what it means to feel relational flow moments in inter-active improvisational tap dance performances. The participants spoke of feeling themselves connect with audience members and of how these moments of connection in turn further affected their performances. Additionally, they shared their own perceptions as audience members to illuminate the audience's sensorial experiences.

Dianne spoke of feeling as though she connects to her audience members when she experiences relational flow in improvisational performance through sensations of expanding

outside of herself. She said she feels as though her emotion and "honesty" "ooze" out of her, facilitating her sharing of herself with the Other in the inter-active performance and cultivating relational flow moments with the audience:

> I think it just oozes out in terms of how I feel, it oozes out, it oozes out. And sometimes you're even surprised at what you've said. And it also has to do with honesty, and I think that one of the reasons that I have survived in this business is because I am honest as a dancer. I may not be the best dancer, but I'm honest, and people believe me and they hear me and I connect to them. I'm not the best dancer, I clearly have never been and never wanted to be, that's not even a goal. I've always wanted to be able to share – there's that word again – and I want you to understand me, it's important to me that you really get me. That's the best of what I can give to you is a little bit of me, regardless of what it is.

Through her musical-moving improvised tap dance performances, Dianne feels as though she is giving herself to her inter-active Other. The self she gives includes her emotions, her thoughts and her ideas. She emphasizes that her goal is to be *heard* and *understood* through this sharing of herself with the audience. She uses the evocative image of *oozing* to describe what it feels like as she expands from herself to her audience through her performance. Like honey oozing out of the bottle – slow, viscous, and sweet – this description evokes images and sensations of a gradual expanding beyond herself to connect to the audience. Such an oozing, like honey, leaves a residue or sensorial impressions – and this resonance sticks with the audience or whomever the honey has touched, long after initial contact, or at least until it is intentionally wiped away. This is in contrast with a performer who may seem to "jump out" at the audience, or one who bursts on stage with an explosive energy. Such connections between performers and audiences, are differently, though equally, impressionable.

Like Dianne, Brenda also described the connection with the audience as being important to the inter-active experience of the performance. She spoke of the approach taken by her mentor, Honi Coles, to structuring performances that privileged the audience's experience and that left, as Dianne explained, a lasting sensorial impression:

> … The way [Honi] set up his material so that the audience could appreciate it, he didn't slam all over them. Although at one point, he might well have! He didn't get to be that fast and that good not slamming over everybody for a while, but he had a way of really presenting: So here's a palette and I'm putting this stuff on this palette so the audience could really appreciate what he was doing.

Accordingly, Honi seemed to create a palette in his tap dance performances, like that upon which one might lay out all the colours of paint one intends to create with. Clearly and efficiently laying out his *colours* for his audience, so that they can easily follow along, Honi's approach valued the audience's perspective. Unlike a painting, dance performances are fleeting, ephemeral artefacts which exist in the moment of their performance and then, upon completion, only in the memory of the audience. Perhaps, by intentionally structuring his performance in such a way that he seemed to create a palette upon which the performance could rest, Honi was creating a more tangible, more *palatable* dance performance. An approach such as this recognizes the audience's experience in the inter-action as an inter-active partner and suggests audiences are integral parts of the performer's relational flow experience. Brenda stated how the value Honi placed in the audience and his intentional focus on cultivating a connection with them continues to influence her approach as a tap dance composer and performer:

> So, I really take that into consideration. I take the audience into consideration in terms of what I want to show them, what I want them to understand, how I want to take them on a

> journey. I mean I might do very simple things at the beginning to get into that tone, things like just do a shuffle or on the other hand I might do *brrrrrrrrup*! And then stop. It changes … sometimes I just walk around, but I like to give the audience a breath, give them some breath to join me so that we become one. That is definitely an interaction. I really feel the audience. My mother was a fabulous performer and Honi, those are the two most brilliant performers I've ever seen. I reacted initially against them [*referring to her disdain for the audience during her years as an avant-garde performer*]; I was going to prove something and then finally I got it and then I began to really appreciate performing.

Giving the audience some breath – a pause, a moment to settle into the performance – reminds us of the important role breath plays in various aspects of improvisation, including also for the improviser. As described by Heather, when a dancer holds their breath, their muscles tense, restricting their capacity to move and, in effect, to *think* in and through their movements. This tension creates a barrier to flow. Breath opens pathways in the body for feeling, hearing, and being with the Other as one inhales and exhales. Therefore, audience members, too, need opportunities to breathe and it may be incumbent on the performer to provide those opportunities. For Brenda, this might involve contrasting moments of busier sound and movement creation with moments of quiet or space; as she says, she might "do a shuffle" and then "stop" or "just walk around". This intentional approach to her performance reflects her prioritization of the audience's experience and her desire to feel a connection with the audience, though this was not always her performance intention.

When she feels moments of disconnect with her audience, Brenda described how she employs her attentional energy to draw them in like a magnet, rather than strain herself by reaching out to them:

> [I meet them] with my own attention. Attention is a powerful, powerful thing. The more attention you have to your body, your sound, your environment, that is magnetism, that's what I was talking about with the kids [in class]. That's charisma. Attention, you light up, with your attention, so attention is [a] powerful, powerful connector. And I'm the soloist they paid to see me, you know, so I'm paying attention to what I am doing and sharing it with them … it is rare that I ever have a problem, sometimes I can feel them going [*Brenda lifts her hands and shrugs her shoulders, gesturing to convey confusion*] "what is that? What is it that she's doing?" … I see them looking at each other … [I say] "okay here's a mystery, it'll be revealed, give me a minute".

Through an energy of attention to herself as well as to her audience, what we may consider as an energy of presence in the moment and sense of care for the audience, Brenda maintains connection with her audience in performance. Such an approach recognizes the audience as a co-inter-actor, privileging their experience of the performance as much as her own experience. Save for a passing remark on her visual perception of the audience's connection, Brenda's description does not reveal much about the sensorial registers of connection between performer and audience, just that she believes there is value in cultivating this connection as a performer. In effect, her descriptions speak to the role of the audience in the inter-active experience and to enabling the cultivation and continuation of relational flow moments in performance.

Sarah also spoke to the role of the audience and particularly noted the feelings and sensations she experiences that indicate to her that the audience is disconnected. This came through in her description of a performance in which she and the musician could feel the audience disconnecting:

> I just had a show last weekend [and danced to Somewhere] *Over the Rainbow* … with a cellist this time in L.A. and we had rehearsed it like … an arrangement we will go to four [-four time] go back to six-eight … but when it came to the show we had overdrawn it out and it was the last song of the first set, we had a look at each other and we were like "and we're done"! We had planned for a little more to go on but we looked at each other and you just felt it, and then afterwards we were like "yeah we were just totally feeling it [was over]" … It was to the point where my dad was like "Over the Rainbow was a little long", You can feel when an audience is getting like … a little antsy, a little wiggle in their seat.

Accordingly, in her inter-active performance, Sarah and the cellist were able to sense that their performance had gone on slightly too long through recognition that the audience was "getting antsy" with "a little wiggle in their seat". If she is able to feel this reaction from her audience, she must maintain some sensorial awareness of the audience throughout her performance, though she is also sensorially attuned to her musical-movement in relational connection with the performing musician. I asked her to describe this awareness of the audience and how it affects her performance:

> [Awareness] is definitely there, I would say [it's] in and out. There are times I have to be like "oh don't forget to smile or look up" and I might be in my concentration mode and sometimes we look down at the floor when we are like, really in a mode or I'll be looking out but not at someone's eyes or I'll just be looking out but in a concentration mode. We do that a lot as tap dancers, look down.

In the above quotation, Sarah describes moments of awareness wherein she may think of movements before she acts them, that is before they are "transcribed" (Sheets-Johnstone,

1999/2011b, p. 428). Notably, these thoughts, "while emerging within the experience of an ongoing present, do not interrupt the flow of movement which is the dance" (1999/2011b, p. 423). That is, in experiencing these thoughts of movement, Sarah continues to move – the thoughts do not stop her moving, nor do they impede her from continuing in the inter-action. Sheets-Johnstone says "the image or inclination is a kinetic form within a form, a motional thought that momentarily intrudes itself into, or superimposes itself upon, the ongoing process of thinking in movement" (1999/2011b, p. 423). This aligns with the above discussion on judgement or analysis in flow moments, in that these thoughts may occur in thinking-in-movement, but are not separate from the moments of movement themselves.

In speaking of these thoughts that emerge while in improvisational inter-action, Sarah specifically points to the value of the visual sense in her performance. She notes that in moments when a performer wants to strengthen their connection with the audience, they might "look up" at them, that is, connect with them through the visual sense. At other times, the performer might look out beyond the audience rather than really at them or might even avert their eyes down and away from the audience. This focus of the line of sight down and away from the spectating audience might symbolize introspection, a deepening of the connection with the self rather than with the Other. The improvising tap dancer may use their visual sense to both connect to or disconnect from the audience.

Connecting out to an audience is not only facilitated through visual expression, but also through an affective energy that certain performers exude, "when they feel it", according to Sarah. This type of energy leaves residual impressions on the audience: Sarah said you know a performer is "feeling their performance" because you, as an audience, "can feel it". She says:

> That's how much you need to be connected. I understand that people can be nervous, but when you feel it, you're like: oh yah! That's when an audience yells because they feel that you're feeling it. Confidence comes with that, which comes with practice.

Moments of relational flow connection between performers and audience members are apparent through audience reactions. As Sarah stated, when dancers appear to be 'feeling it' on stage, audience members demonstrate their shared experience of these feelings with "yells" or cheers of excitement. Valis Hill (2003) similarly noted these reactions, and particularly about how the audience can influence the improvisational inter-action between performers:

> I think the audience's in-the-moment response to the challenge dance is what makes it the most dynamic of performance expressions, and also what aligns it most closely with improvisation. The audience, with its cheers or jeers, reinforces the feeling that whatever they are experiencing in the interchange onstage, illusory or not, whatever is going on onstage and their reception of it, is vitally alive; and this bares the dangerously exciting unpredictability of the improvisatory moment. (p. 100)

Malone also wrote of the audience's experience in discussing the connection between the aural and visual senses in African American art forms. She said, "Black people attend musical events with the expectation that the performers will appeal to their visual and aural senses. One attends a social event to hear the gutsy scream of [singer] James Brown and to witness his smooth dance moves; to see the precision stepping of Black sororities and fraternities and to hear their polyrhythms, chants, and songs of allusion" (196, p. 29). Taken together with Valis Hill's comment on the role of the audience in encouraging the performer, these quotations reinforce the participants' experiences of the role of the audience in contributing to feelings of relational flow. The audience is an equal inter-actor, and through improvisational inter-actions, tap dancers feel

moments of connection with their audiences. When performers are attuned to the needs of their audience members and "listening" to their reactions, visible, audible and energetic, the audience, too, may feel, and therefore share, in these relational flow moments.

A hooded figure appears centre stage as the lights dim to near darkness, only his faint shadow remains visible to the audience. Dun. … dun dun. … dun. … dun dun. An audible pulse softly emerges and begins to build, until the sound of a heart beat played through heel tap on wood floor fills the sold out space at Toronto's Lula Lounge. The figure bobs to the left with the drop of each heel, his neck snapping as his head meets his shoulder with each thump. This carries on for what feels like hours until the figure gradually begins to lift his feet in a time step. Unlike the bouncing lightness of the up-on-the-toes time step of Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson, this time step is low, grounded, and heavy. His feet slowly drag and drop as if moving through molasses, sinking into the floor. Suddenly, he jumps into a series of shuffle pick-up flap heels that turn his body round and round in a dizzying frenzy. Almost as quickly as he started, he stops dead centre. A light illuminates his face, like a police officer's flash light, revealing terrified eyes under the shadow of his hoodie. His arms slowly raise above his head, in surrender.

The above vignette, inspired through my experience witnessing one of Travis's performances, demonstrates how relational flow moments shared between performers and audience members are not always experiences of joy. In the moments of this particular experience, I recall feeling as though the air had been sucked out of the room. I could feel heat in my cheeks as anger boiled up from my gut, and my nails dig into my palms as my hands clenched. The show was a celebration of the connection between tap dance and big band swing music. Though the general feeling that evening was fun, an air of tension and anxiety hung thick,

as another Black boy had just been murdered by police in the United States. Travis's solo reminded all in attendance of the complex racial history embedded within tap and jazz and demonstrated how tap dancing is not just a simple form of entertainment for audience consumption; tap dancing performances can be deeply and emotionally affective. Travis's performance demanded that we as audience members experience his pain, his anger, and his frustration. His physical capacity to convey these emotions through his musical-movement improvisations compelled us to not only bear witness, but to share in his feelings as well. Though a White, middle-class woman, I felt connected to Travis, a Black man, for a brief moment, as he seemed to expand out from the stage and moved me to feel with him.

Other Performers

The sensorial experience of connecting with Others through improvised, inter-active musical-movement creation also extends to connecting with the other performers in the cultivation of what we have previously referred to as a "pathetic community" (Henry, 1990/2008). Travis spoke of the feeling of energetic connection he experienced in improvisational inter-action with musicians and other dancers. His descriptions of the sensations of cultivating something seemingly greater than the dancers and musicians themselves, a force with the power to *move* the participants to respond, are particularly revealing of Henry's phenomenology of life (1990/2008, 2000/2015). Travis said:

> I devised an exercise where all the mobile musicians moved through the crowd and so they started the song – the energetic build was magical and it let me know that I have no idea what's going on around us – there was more than this standard physical model of reality that science is pushing or believes in – because what I witnessed was pure magic, because what happened, the dancers formed multiple circles around the musicians that

> were on the dance floor suddenly and the musicians were being fed by that. It was like uhm, hmm, I don't want to say like a snake charmer, the musicians were being fed by the energy of the dancers and then the dancers were being fed by the energy of the musicians, and then these circles formed a gigantic circle and then [the singer] hit the head of the song again and at that point the room exploded and legs in the air and arms are being thrown and turned and the musicians felt it too, everyone, everyone felt it, one of the dancers left the space outside of the circle and just started crying because she was overwhelmed and she said afterwards when the song was done that she had never felt that before, she didn't know that was possible and she, I'm crying it's ridiculous … I've witnessed things that are only possible when we connect with each other and it becomes the safety behind doing what we're told, pressing play, keeping to ourselves on our phones. I understand because there's a lot of dangers and I'm an anxious person, I understand, but in the moments when I've been allowed magically, chemically to be open enough to be connected to people, the gift of that has been spiritually eye-opening, expansive, it's the only thing that matters to me, and so. I have to continue.

Travis's description of experiencing relational flow moments of connection with the musicians and dancers with whom he was performing points to some of the sensations associated with these experiences. His description also reveals that the feeling of connecting through musical-movement with other performers may be something beyond rationalization and beyond our understanding of reality. He described feeling an energy emerge and explode in the room that seemed to feed both dancer and musician participants. This energy was so powerful that it drove participants to emotional-physical responses – to kicking "legs in the air" "arms being thrown", and to tears. These bodily responses to the experience show that participants were feeling

moments of relational flow through the connection they had cultivated in musical-movement co-creation. The energy surging between them was so strong and so powerful that it drove the participants to movement; the participants had to move in ways that expressed the power of the energy in the room. This energy was not unidirectional – dancer and musician responses were driven through the mutual exchange of inspiration. Kerr-Berry points to this "two-way street" exchange of energy with reference to dancers and musicians at the Savoy Ballroom in New York City during the Big Band era of jazz music. While Stearns and Stearns assert that Chick Webb's Orchestra and Al Cooper's Savoy Sultans "were a constant inspiration to dancers, and their propulsive rhythms set the pace at the Savoy" (1994/1968, p. 317), Kerr-Berry emphasizes that dancers and musicians were mutually inspirational, as "musicians inspired dancers *and* dancers inspired musicians through the current of energy that flowed between them" (2022, p. 88). The relational flow experience which emerged through the musical-movement inter-actions between dancers and musicians in Travis's description is consistent with the flow of energy between musicians and dancers experienced by patrons at the Savoy in the 1930s and 1940s.

In describing this experience, Travis referenced feelings of connecting to the Others through a power so "magical" as to be beyond our scientific understanding of reality. His description illuminates how improvisational tap dance inter-actions create opportunities for participants to feel the full power of life in relational connection. In these musical-movement experiences, dancers and musicians alike are literally *moved* by the energy cultivated in and through the experience to physically and emotionally respond. This energy, flowing between them as they musically-move together in the creation of the musical-movement experience, leaves impressions, resonances, or sensorial affects that drive the inter-action forward. These sense impressions are so overwhelming that the participants feel as though they explode with the

energy as it surges out their arms, legs, and tears. Henry (1990/2008) describes this energy or this driving force as life's auto-affection:

> The affect is, first of all, not a specific affect; instead, it is life itself in its phenomenological substance, which is irreducible to the world. It is the auto-affection, the self-impression, the primordial suffering of life driven back to itself, crushed up against itself, and overwhelmed by its own weight... when the suffering of life can no longer be supported and becomes an unbearable suffering, this experience gives birth to life's movement to take flight from itself, and as this is not possible, to change itself. It thus has need and drive.... in this way, the affect is in itself a force; it continually gives rise to force within itself in virtue of what it is. (p. 130)

Life's affective force continually drives its change – its movement. Just like the force which drove the participants to kick, throw, and cry, the force of life drives movement. This force, according to Henry, is what binds us together in community:

> the idea of community presupposes the idea of something in common as well as the idea of community members who have in common what is held in common … perhaps there is only one and the same reality, one and the same essence, of the community and its members …: life... every community is a community of living beings. (1990/2008, p. 119)

The community cultivated through the musical-movement improvisations of the participants in Travis's experience of relational flow is bound through the affective force of life which it simultaneously creates and is created by. The force was so affective and powerful as to seem magical. It is in these moments when we feel what it means to be fully alive, when we truly

experience the driving, affective force of life, of being in communion with others. Through Travis's description of a relational flow moment, we can understand the intense, overwhelming, euphoric feelings that relational flow moments experienced through inter-active improvisational tap dancing with Others can create. We also begin to sense how these moments may elicit sensations of connection between performers, and how these pulsing connections add fuel to the fire – that is, they feed life's energetic surges as they pulse through and between performers.

Through improvisational tap dance inter-actions, connections between performers and audiences create sensations of experiencing relational flows that reveal life's auto-affection as the driving force underlying our living experiences, as the force which connects us together in community.

Spiritual World: Connecting to Something Beyond

The feelings of relational flow moments of connection sensed through inter-active, improvisational tap dance experiences are comparable to sensations of connecting to some*thing* that is perceived to be greater than or beyond the physical, material world, according to many of the participants. Participant descriptions bring forth the history of spiritualism and spirituality intertwined with tap dance and jazz music (e.g., Malone, 1996; Guarino et. al., 2022).

Connecting to a 'Higher Power'

Research participants described feeling sensations of connecting to a higher power such as a god or deity, as indicative of their relational flow experiences. As Dianne described what it feels like for her to "go off" or "colour outside the lines" while improvising, she compared these moments to the experiences of Christian worshippers she had witnessed as a child:

> I used to go to church because I liked to see them dance… On my way home we passed them 'holy roller' churches, the Baptist churches, and the music that was pouring out of there. I started sneaking in the back of those churches because I wanted to see and hear the singing. Whenever I saw a person where they say they go off, get sanctified with the holy ghost, when a person gets the holy ghost and they go off, they start dancing. And they dancing some stuff that you couldn't replicate that choreography if you tried. That stuff was coming from so deep and they just dance, shouting, and doing all this stuff and the footwork to me it was beautiful. I loved that. I went only to see, waiting for somebody to go off. I wanted to see them shuffling.

The dancing and shouting she witnessed seemed to come from somewhere deep inside the worshippers. Dianne described these movements as deriving through the spiritual or religious power she presumed was surging through the worshippers' bodies. She compared these religious experiences and the movements that emerged through them with the ecstatic experience of improvisatory movement and music creation, experiences wherein, as she described, movement seems to take a dancer "out of bounds". In these moments, as a dancer moves from her musical-movement repertoire, movements seem to come up from *deep inside her*, rather than from a place of cognition or awareness. The movements of the worshippers and improvisers both seem to emerge from somewhere internal and also appear to be externally driven, through some transcendental force.

Dance, music, and spirituality are deeply connected throughout tap dance's history, dating back to its origins in West Africa. For example, Robert Farris Thompson described the body as the means through which one accessed the spiritual world in the danced rituals of the Yoruba tribe of West Africa. He said, "Ritual contact with divinity underscores the religious

aspirations of the Yoruba. To become possessed by the spirit of a Yoruba deity, which is a formal goal of the religion, is to 'make the God' to capture numinous flowing force within one's body" (Thompson, 1984, p. 9). Similarly, Malone (1996) provides various examples to illustrate the spiritual dimensions of African American music and dance. She quotes a plantation preacher who said: "The way in which we worshipped is almost indescribable. The singing was accompanied by a certain ecstasy of motion, clapping of hands, tossing of heads, which would continue without cessation about half an hour … The old house partook of the ecstasy; it rang with their jubilant shouts, and shook in all its joints" (p. 28). In such forms of worship, dance and music are inseparable and the body is the means through which spiritual expression is communicated. Malone asserts that twentieth-century gospel music maintained this traditional connection, quoting singer Mahalia Jackson who wrote "I want my hands... my feet … my whole body to say all that is in me...If you feel it, tap your feet a little – dance to the glory of the Lord" (pg. 29). Thus, Dianne's equation of relational flow moments experienced through improvisational tap dance inter-actions with those she witnessed as being experienced through worship, and her description of feeling connected to a higher power or spirituality through improvised inter-actions, aligns with the origins of tap dance in the songs and dance of African ritual.

Connecting to Something Indescribable

Travis's descriptions of his experiences of relational flow similarly reflect sensations of worldly transcendence or of connecting to the spiritual realm. He shared the story of his first experience of relational flow, describing the affectivity of relational flow moments, registers of relational flow consciousness in the body, and sensations of connecting to another realm, to some other-worldy *thing*:

> So one particular Tuesday, [the band leader] says “Travis, start freestyle, hold a groove and we will build the song off of your groove”. So, I’m like yah, I’m doing my thing, tap tap tappa, wing and a wing, the crowd’s like yah man really cool, then I hold something, I hold something down. What’s great about that exercise is I would go home and create grooves for the next Tuesday – so it was really wonderful to have that access to that kind of thing ... so I’m hitting this groove and I’m holding the groove and then the bass player comes in first, says some, holds it down. Then the Rhodes [pianist] says something, [the drummer] comes in, pat, boom, and brings everything together, cemented together. At this point, I start to feel something in my being and it started here, it started from my sternum and it’s a feeling, I was 20 something at the time and I never felt anything like that before and it just grew and grew and I couldn’t take it any more so I stopped dancing and I sat the eff down because I was terrified. I didn’t know, I didn’t know and to this day I keep on chasing that feeling. ... But, in order to know anything, I think, you have to experience it once and then experience it again so that you know what that is. I don’t know what that is. I don’t know what that was, but it happened because of a sense of otherness – this music – and music is such a specific word, but this experience was growing based out of something that started from me and I was feeling that, I think, in my body. Not just hearing it, not just doing it, I was feeling it and it terrified me. … I didn’t know if I was going to explode, I didn’t know, so I ran, which was probably wise but I regret that.

In this description of his first experience feeling relational flow in improvisational tap dance inter-action with others, Travis describes feeling the growth of a force that began within him through his musical-movement articulation of a groove that was then picked up and expanded

upon by the other performers in the experience. This force surged between him and the others through their musical-movements as they, beginning as individuals, came together in creation of the groove. Recalling the sensations experienced in this moment of relational flow, Travis described feeling the experience manifest in his sternum. He said:

> It's emotional, it makes my hair stand up on my arms, on my body, I imagine. I think I call out [this] example because it is the starkest example. But I know that part of what I do in performance is dive into emotion whenever it shows up – DIVE – and I notice I feel like I brush up against the thing and it changes the quality of what I am doing. And I notice that in those moments, people connect to what I am doing, musicians as well connect to what I am doing. It is not necessarily the thing; it is a radiation off of the thing.

Travis's description of this experience illuminates many aspects of the sensorial affects of relational flow experiences: their fleeting nature, their ephemerality, the challenge of languaging such experiences (as per Sheets-Johnstone, 2015b, citing Stern, 1985), and the varied emotional responses one may have to these experiences. It is only by living and reliving them through musical-moving inter-actions with others, by "brushing up against" them, that we come to know them. It was difficult for Travis to articulate his experience feeling relational flow because he felt he could not compare it to anything else he had ever felt before. No other previous experience could compare with the sensations and emotions he felt that day as he created music through tap dance movement with other musicians. He was, however, able to describe the terrifying fear he felt in the moment of the inter-action. Sensations of being overcome with the force or power created through the inter-action were so strong as to ignite fear in him. His description reveals feeling a sense of loss of control: the groove, which he introduced and initially drove, seemed to develop a life of its own as it was carried on and away through the musical-movements of the

other performers. As we have seen, however, the groove always had a life in that it was driven through the life of the community and also was the community itself. In his experience of the groove, Travis felt *out of control* and therefore an overwhelming sense of panic. This feeling of panic literally pushed him out of the experience and drove him out of the inter-action, just as life, in its auto-affection, drives its own change. Despite his initial fear of these feelings, Travis is now driven to reconnect with these sensations in the inter-active, improvisational moment. Travis's description illuminates that relational flow moments may elicit sensations of fear and terror instead of or in addition to spiritual connection, as described by Dianne. Furthermore, it literally illustrates the feeling of the form of relational flow moments as a coming together of multiple individuals into the groove – that is, Travis created the initial rhythmic-melodic pattern that was then picked up, elaborated upon, and carried by the other musicians. Travis's experience reveals the phenomenality of relational flow – that some*thing* is experienced in these moments as separate from the dancers and musicians themselves; life's energetic forces both driving and created through the improvisational experience. The thing – the groove, the pathetic community – becomes outside of the dancer and musician-self, though it is created and sustained through their musical-movements.

Connecting with Mentors Passed

Sarah's description of experiencing relational flow in inter-active, improvised tap dance performance reveals her feelings of connecting to the spiritual realm, feeling fully alive within the inter-active moment, and of connecting with her late mentor, Harold Cromer, through her musical-movement improvisation:

> [My mentor] Harold Cromer had just passed away, he was my biggest mentor, my best friend for the last 10 years of his life … I took a little nap and when I woke up,

Somewhere Over the Rainbow was stuck in my head and I had never really dug that song. I knew Harold had planted it in my brain, I just knew it. I was like “okay Harold, I’ll dance to this in the show tonight”. I wasn’t using the band they hired, I had a friend, a piano player ... who was already in Detroit. We BS’d it at tech rehearsal, just to get the sound, but we never really talked about form. We kind of did but we just kind of went. I remember he had this beautiful piano intro and I was in the wing, and I was waiting to go on. I was anticipating. [The announcer] just announced my name, “I should go on”, but I was like “no, let him have his moment, just wait, just wait. This is a beautiful intro” and I remember telling myself “just wait, play the part, be one with the music right now, be one with your performance, because right now you’re trying to rush it and just stop”. So, I let him play the intro and then I come out and I walk and then it’s like this nice entrance. I have these brand-new high heels that are gorgeous, they’re just sparkle sparkle sparkle, they’re just shining like Cinderella shoes and I just took a walk and I just stood by his piano and I just listened and I kept playing. I just kind of caressed the floor and I just took my time. I had never really done that in a performance before, but I just knew to take my time, just feel the floor, move around, trickle a little bit. We locked eyes and BOOM we start. Then it goes into this thing and then we go into swing feel and then we lock in and I’m going in and he’s going in. Then we bring it down, then we bring it up again, it goes down, it’s like 17 minutes! We were just in it and Harold was on my mind. I was emotional … There’s a spiritual connection there. It was amazing and I think that’s so beautiful to experience while improvising or performing. Whatever, just a bigger thing than I’m going to perform for you and entertain you. I think there is something bigger in tap dancing that allows for that spiritual experience… It’s seldom that you find those

killer kismet moments that are just like, what was that? It's like God just came in and took over.

Improvisational tap dancing inter-actions, as demonstrated through the above experiential description, open spaces wherein dancers and performers may feel as though they connect to something beyond the living world. Sarah describes feeling as though she was connecting with Harold, her late mentor, through her musical-movement improvisation. In this experience, she chose to dance to a different song than usual, and she credits Harold's influence in that song choice. She also says he was on her mind as she was dancing and that this made her feel emotional, suggesting that she could feel his presence with her in her performance and that this would have contributed to the relational flow experience. Sarah also felt connected to her improvising partner, the musician, and describes how this connection drove the experience of relational flow wherein they felt completely immersed with the musical-movement experience. She uses the phrase "locked in" to describe their sense of deep connection. As she describes the experience wherein she felt as though God came in and took over, she illuminates the potential power and sense of loss of control that may be felt in improvisational inter-actions. Through her improvisational tap dancing performance, Sarah experienced connection with her inter-active partner, the musician, as well as with her late mentor, and with a seemingly out of this world Other. This description confirms the possibilities for experiencing sensations of spiritual connection through improvisational tap dance inter-actions.

Sarah's experiential description of feeling relational flow moments in an improvisational tap dancing inter-action closes this final research chapter as I feel it demonstrates many of the function, form, and feelings of relational flow discussed within this dissertation. She alludes to the influence of her relationship with her mentor and of how, in the relational flow moments of

the inter-action, she moved with a sense of ease and relaxation, expressing through her cultivated musical-movement repertoire which had been distilled into her unique, improvisational voice. This voice was inspired through her relationship to her mentor. She references musical form and structure, and confirms that when musicians and dancers have developed musical bodily-knowings they may move in and through these knowings without cognitive-conscious awareness. They can feel as though the musical form carries them away, off on a musical-movement journey together. Sarah describes her role in the inter-action and her improvisational approach in that moment, which was to offer space to the musician rather than take over the inter-action. This likely contributed to the relational flow experience, in that it established a mutual respect between performers – a listening being together in the inter-action. Sarah also describes the groove which she and the musician 'locked' into and brought 'down' and 'up' again, demonstrating how some*thing* is created between musician and dancer – something seemingly tangible and other than the musical-movement inter-actions of the performance, though this thing is also the performance itself. This *thing* that simultaneously cultivates and is cultivated through the inter-action resulted in an experience that, for Sarah, is "seemingly bigger" than simple entertainment. This suggests that relational flow moments indicate connections beyond dancer-self, dancer-audience and even dancer-musician; performers experience sensations of connecting with a power so overwhelming, so seemingly magical, that it is felt as though it cannot be of this material, physical world. This power is compared with the power of God, or of a realm beyond the physical. As we have seen through Henry's phenomenological analysis, this power could very well be the auto-affective power of life itself. Therefore, as demonstrated through Sarah's experiential description of an improvisational tap dance inter-action, relational flow moments are those wherein we feel life's full affectivity, life's complete vitality; we feel fully alive.

Relational flow moments experienced through improvisational tap dance inter-actions reveal themselves to performers as sensations of expansion beyond the bodily self, beyond connection with the Other, and beyond this world to something seemingly greater than earthly existence. Some *thing,* some *force* beyond the physical/material reality of the dancers themselves seems to enter the experience and is felt to be taking over the dancer's bodily being. The dancer feels as though they transcend themselves, as though they connect to that which is outside of themselves, and as though they are reaching beyond this physical world into the spiritual realm. The participants describe feeling something, a force, that drives them towards, into and even out of the inter-action. This force is the force of life in its auto-affection, as we have learned through the material and life phenomenology of Henry (1990/2008, 2000/2015). Though the participants describe feeling as though they expanded beyond their lived world to connect to some *Other*, they do so through stories that involve musical-movement as they exist their bodies in motion. In other words, while they may feel as though they are expanding beyond their bodily selves, these sensations of expansion and connection occur *as* they musically-move, and as they do so in inter-active relation with other musical-moving bodily beings. As bodies in musical-movement inter-action with Others, improvisational tap dancers experience sensations of connecting to something out of this world, something beyond the material, physical realm. Through improvisational tap dancing inter-actions, performers experience the omnipresent heaven – the full force of life's vitality – that is always there for us to access.

Connecting, Disconnecting, Transcending

The feeling dimension of relational flow moments experienced through inter-active, improvisational tap dancing comprises sensations of connecting, disconnecting, and transcending the self, Other, and spiritual world. The participants described feeling moments of deep internal

connection as they literally tapped into their emotions and harnessed the power of their emotional sensations to express outwardly through their musical-movement improvisations to their audiences. They also spoke of feeling as though they could transcend their bodily-lived realities while in relational flow, as they forgot physical ailments or they experienced emotions beyond their perceived emotional capacities. The participants compared the feelings they sensed in and through these moments of motile consciousness with trance states, meditation, and erotic or sensual experiences. Additionally, relational flow moments elicited feelings of connecting and disconnecting with the inter-active Other, which, for the purposes of this chapter, includes the audience and other performers. These moments elicited energetic sensations of *oozing* out to the Other. The participants spoke of the value of feeling these moments of connection with their audience members and how this feeling, as well as feeling disconnected from their audience, drives their performances. This demonstrates the meaning of feeling connected with the audience to the performance experience and thus to the experience of relational flow. Relational flow moments experienced between performers were described as feeling the energetic connections flowing between performers – the feelings of the force of life as life, driving the living of life in communal relation. Feeling connected with the other performers was akin to experiencing Henry’s pathetic community in all its auto-affection. Finally, relational flow moments cultivated between and through musically-moving inter-actors are felt as moments of connecting to the spiritual world in that they provide access to sensations of powerful forces seemingly beyond this realm; God-like powers. Feelings in these moments were described as both terrifying and comforting; some participants experienced overwhelming feelings of power surge through them such that they felt they might explode, while others felt sensations of connecting, through the dance, to their beloved mentors. Evidently, relational flow moments experienced through

improvisational tap dance inter-actions elicit many feelings and sensations in those participating in the inter-action, and these feelings and sensations carry significant meaning for those who experience them.

Chapter 7: The Outro

I began this phenomenological research inquiry with a wonder into what it is like to experience relational flow moments in improvisational tap dance inter-actions. This wonder was driven through my own inability to experience flow moments as I attempted to improvise for the first time at a jam session hosted by the Toronto Rhythm Initiative. Despite many years of study and practice as a tap dancer and as a tap dance teacher, I felt completely unprepared to participate in the jam. Instead of the good feelings I regularly associated with tap dancing experiences, I felt nervous, anxious, disappointed, and frustrated. While dancing and music-creation experiences are often associated with feelings of flow (e.g., Bernardi, et. al., 2018; Custodero, 2005; Douse, 2017; Hefferon & Ollis, 2006), I felt none of the sensations of elation, euphoria, immersion of the self in the experience, etc., that Csikszentmihalyi (1990) had promised. Though I personally did not feel flow in that jam, I witnessed flow moments emerge in the inter-actions between the other participants as they exchanged musical bars, stole and modified steps, encouraged one another with cheers and claps, and seemed to smile from ear to ear each time they finished their solo and passed it along. Their apparent joy and seeming ease and comfort in the improvisational inter-action drove me to wonder how I might also share in these flow moments, and how I might better prepare my own tap dance students for these experiences.

Through this inquiry, I have come to learn much about the function, form, and feeling of relational flow moments experienced by professional tap dance improvisers in similar inter-actions to that of my first jam. Interviews, private lessons, group classes, footage, literature and reflection have provided me with glimpses into what relational flow moments are like, how they form and are sustained in improvisational tap dance inter-activities, and what they mean to the

practices of those whose livelihoods are driven through and by them. Though my research questions are framed as “what is it like” questions, as per van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenology, they allowed me to delve into what sensations participants experienced, what capacities were fundamental to their experiences, and what qualities, shapes or forms emerged through these experiences. Through analysis, these what questions enabled me to describe the “how” of the appearing of the phenomenon of relational flow, which is more in alignment with Henry’s material phenomenology. Additionally, I took some liberties in applying Lloyd and Smith’s Function-to-Flow model in my analysis while also maintaining a focus on the motility of the relational flow experience of improvisational tap dancers. In my broad interpretation and application of the function, form and feeling dimensions of flow, I was able to consider various aspects of improvisational tap dance inter-actions in addition to the kinetic-aesthetic-kinaesthetic dimensions of flow consciousness. This includes how cultivating one’s capacity to improvise with others entails one’s ability to listen in inter-action with others, or that a bodily knowing of musical form structures inter-actions between musical-movement improvisers. Thus, the results of this inquiry might divert from the original premise of motion-sensing phenomenology and the intended application of the Function-to-Flow model, but this is, in part, because I have sought to maintain as close a connection as possible to Dianne, Heather, Brenda, Sarah and Travis’s stories and perspectives, as they were shared with me.

The functional dimension of the relational flow experienced through improvisational tap dance inter-actions comprised the cultivation of acts for moving out or voicing and acts for taking in or listening. Accordingly, these acts are not merely things a tap dancer does but are states of becoming and being a tap dance improviser. A tap dancer firstly develops a musical-movement repertoire of “I can’s” through study and training with experienced tap dance teachers

and mentors, and then sheds or distills through these layers of influence to reveal the qualitative dynamics of sound, rhythm and movement expression that constitute their individual, unique improvisational voice. This process of becoming a tap dancer is fundamental to *doing* tap dancing so that one might, eventually, *be* a tap dancer in inter-action with others. The second functional capacity required for experiencing relational flow moments, as described by the participants, is the development of a sensorial attunement to the energetic fluctuations, emotional resonances and responses of the inter-active participants so that one might be in listening being with the other. Such a state of being requires a sensorial openness, whereby the dancer thinks-in-musical-moving creation through their musical-movement repertoire and is therefore able to be listening in relation with the inter-active other. These fundamental capacities enable and facilitate the cultivation of relational flow moments between participants in improvisational tap dance inter-actions.

Four inter-related aspects of the form dimension of relational flow were discussed: the visible forms we see, the audible forms we hear, the animatable forms we do and the tangible forms we feel. The visible forms of improvisational inter-actions vary depending on the approach to tap dancing, but as discussed, when tap dancing is rooted in its origins as an African American vernacular dance form, elements of Africanist aesthetics such as *Asymmetry, the Get Down, Flat-Footedness,* and *Polycentric Isolation* visibly connect tap dancing to the Africanist cultural continuum. Audible forms we hear when experiencing relational flow moments include the musical form and structure that both shapes and is shaped through the inter-actions of improvisers. Traditionally performed to and with jazz music and musicians, improvisational tap dancing inter-actions are guided through a cultivated bodily knowing of musical form and structure. The animatable aspect of the form dimension includes forms that shape the inter-

action, which are in-formed through the degree to which the performance is improvised and the setting within which the improvisation occurs, and the forms that shape improvisations, such as the improvisers' individual approaches to musical-movement improvisation. There are many varied approaches to improvisation, but those discussed by the participants include structuring spontaneity through improvography or scaffolding, employing theme and variation, focusing on the creation of sound and music through tap dancing movements, and dropping the form altogether by relying on ingrained musical-movement repertoires to guide their inter-actions. The final aspect of the form dimension – the tangible forms we feel in relational flow moments – included feeling the coming together of multiple entities into one *thing* – the groove – which simultaneously is, creates, and sustains the inter-action. This groove, which is both life-giving and life itself, aligns with Henry's phenomenology of life, which describes the auto-affection of the force of life that is absolute subjectivity, as it "experiences itself and is nothing other than that experience … the essence of every possible community" (Henry, 1990/2008, p. 120). Thus, analysis of the formal dimension of relational flow moments reveals Henry's "pathetic community" in improvisational tap dance inter-actions between dancers, musicians and audiences that is both driven through the force of life and is life itself.

The final dimension of relational flow experienced in improvisational tap dance inter-actions, feeling, comprised feelings of connecting to, disconnecting from and transcending beyond the self, Other, and spiritual world. The research participants described the sensorial affects of their breath and emotions in cultivating relational flow moments in improvisational inter-actions, such that breathing and authentically living their emotional feelings facilitated the emergence of and sustained relational flow moments. Additionally, experiential descriptions revealed feelings and sensations of expanding beyond their bodily selves, whereby participants

felt as though they could transcend their bodily-lived realities and experience emotions beyond what they perceived possible for themselves. They compared these experiences with trance or meditation, states of being that are aligned with, though differ slightly from, relational flow. The participants also described feeling sensations of connection and disconnection in relation with the inter-active Other. This other participant in the relational flow experience, the community with which they were inter-acting, comprised the audience and the other performers. Energetic sensations of oozing out to the Other, as well as feelings of connect and disconnect with the audience, were described as driving improvisational tap dance performances. Additionally, the feeling of energetic connections experienced in improvisational inter-action with other performers revealed the feeling of the force of life itself. Such descriptions of relational flow moments once again illuminated life-affirming feelings, feelings of being alive, and of living in relation with Others in Henry's pathetic community. Finally, relational flow moments experienced in improvisational tap dance inter-actions were described as feeling as though the participants were expanding beyond the world in connection to a higher power, such as a God or to some other spiritual dimension. Sensations of connection beyond this world were, again, revelatory of life's auto-affection as described in Henry's phenomenology of life, in that in these life-affirming moments we feel both life and its affects which drive it (us) to live.

As I reflect back on that first experience of improvising with other tap dancers to jazz music, I see where some of the functions, forms and feelings of relational flow moments as described through this inquiry were absent. In this first attempt improvising with others in a tap jam, I felt the physical affects of nervous fear as I anticipated my turn to solo: a heavy weight on my chest and my stomach twisting and turning. I felt the surge of adrenaline's energy as I leapt into my solo: the pounding of my heart, the contracting and stiffening of my muscles in my legs,

ankles, and hands, and the closing of my lungs as I held my breath. Of course, holding one's breath only restricts the circulation of oxygen throughout the body, which increases tension and rigidity, further inhibiting one's range of motion. Anxious, oxygen-starved tension creates a barrier, like a wall, preventing any affective or sensory input from seeping through. This tense wall blocked out the music and amplified the voice screaming at me from the inside, pleading with me to do something … anything ... to get out of there! It was only once the bounce in the knees of the dancer to my left caught my eye, and I opened my ears to hear its alignment with the musical beat, that the wall begun to crumble and I began to *feel* something beyond my nervous energy. Only then was I able to open myself to the music, the other dancers, and to my own cultivated musical-movement repertoire. As the dancer to my left breathed in deeply, I too released the tension in my lungs and breathed in my surroundings, opening space in my muscles, knees, joints, and bones for the music.

Breathing in and opening my senses to feeling the groove of the music, and feeling the support provided by the others in the jam allowed me to be in listening being in relational inter-action with the music and other dancers. This breath opened my sensorial attunement so I could feel the swinging beat of the jazz tune, the melodic line as it rounded the bend of another chorus, and of my solo nearing – so that the musical form and structure could impress upon my moving body and guide me back into the inter-action. Opening to my own cultivated musical-movement repertoire, ingrained in my muscles, ligaments and bones through years of physical practice, diverted attentional awareness from my movements themselves to my senses – opening my eyes, ears, and body to my surroundings and to the experience itself. This sensorial opening, facilitated through trusting in my cultivated musical-movement repertoire, focused my energy on being in the experience, rather than on what I was doing with it. It shifted my thinking from that of the

cognitive sense and allowed me to be thinking-in-musical-movement creation, to improvise as my tap dancing improvisational voice. As I took this breath, I allowed my senses and muscles to open and engage with my surroundings, including the support of the other dancers, and began to feel my way into the flow experience.

Future projects inquiring into the experience of relational flow in improvisational tap dance inter-actions may wish to pursue some of the lines of inquiry stemming from this research that I have left open. These include considerations of dis/connections with available phenomenological and pedagogical scholarship on dance improvisational practices in other forms of dance, the role of emotions in dance improvisation, the spectator-performer relationship, and research on cognition and cognitive processing. While I chose not to draw links between the present study and these various fields of discourse in this dissertation, it would be worthwhile to consider engagement with these works when publishing, and/or in future studies.

Though in that first jam experience I did not feel any of the characteristics of flow as described by Csikszentmihalyi (e.g. 1975, 1990), of relational flow as described by Smith and Lloyd (2020), nor of the connection to and expansion beyond the self, Other and world as described in this inquiry, I have experienced relational flow moments in other living, inter-active experiences. For example, through sharing my love for tap dance, music and history with my students as a dance educator, I have experienced the many ebbs and flows of relational flow moments as I 'get lost' in these moments of inter-action and feel myself immersed in the relational connection cultivated between us. In these moments of vital connection through pedagogical inter-action, I feel the force of life's auto-affection as I am joined with my students in our pathetic community of musical-movement learning. Throughout the last four years of conducting, analysing, writing and rewriting this dissertation, these relational flow moments

have become more apparent and more accessible to me and I am enlivened to share the knowledge and expertise I have been so honoured to receive through this inquiry. I only hope that, by passing along the stories and descriptions of feeling relational flow moments and their functions and forms, my students may also feel their way into relational flow moments through tap dance improvisational inter-actions.

Since that first tap jam with the Toronto Rhythm Initiative, I have sought out opportunities to practice and further hone my improvisational 'chops'. This ongoing practice has deeply informed my approach to and understanding of this research inquiry, and has enabled me to cultivate relational flow moments in spaces outside of my studio as a dance teacher: in practice with fellow dancers of the Ottawa Rhythm Initiative, in revised solitary kitchen jam sessions, and in improvisational performances with friends who happen to be musicians:

I'm already seated back at my table, sipping my beer, when Deb, the lead singer of the folk-guitar duo, the Dirty Sheep, suggests to the audience that I return to the stage for another song. "We haven't practiced this one" she says, "but she's doing such a great job she might as well stay". The 75-person audience erupts in cheers, clapping and whistling, and I'm back on my feet. The metal taps on my white shoes rap loudly on the floor as I run the 10 meters back to the stage. I hesitantly nod at Deb and anxiously force a smile. She mouths, "just go with it". Alain, her partner, begins to strum his guitar, softly and slowly. Listening for the rhythm, I hang my head heavy in front and rock slightly over my feet. An air of melancholy envelopes Deb's voice as she sings the first lines. I hear the words of my teacher, Heather, in my ear: "play your part in service to the music" … I hear Travis saying "we're just playin' tunes!" … and Dianne who says "it isn't about the steps." I lay back in my heels to subtly pulse the beat. I fight a nervous urge to fill the quiet spaces of the song with fast rhythms, and instead allow myself a moment to

soak in the first verse, like Brenda and Sarah described. Strums of the guitar wrap around me: dum da-dum da-dee-da dum da-dum da-dee-da. The smooth rhythm sinks into my heels, gun ga-gun ga gun-gun gun ga-gun ga gun-gun. My leg throws out to the side with a shuffle dig heel scuff – shaga deega gun – as we enter the bridge of the song. Growing alive, the song feels faster and I throw in more rhythmic fills – shaga deega gun ga-gun ga shigggy baba gun ga-gun ga digga daga gun ga-gun. Deb glances over her shoulder towards me with a nod: that's my cue. Take the lead. As the vocals pull back, I jump into a series of heel shuffle pickup changes – gun shaga deedah gun shaga deedah… and leap out on my flat left foot with a deep, strong oomph. Sounds from my feet completely fill the musical space – shaga deegah shiggybaba gun zigga baba gun-ga shiggy deega shiggy deega gun – heel shuffle pickup changes carry me in a circle on the tap board. In the middle of a shuffle pick up heel turn, I feel the music turn around, too, signalling the end of the instrumental break and my solo. Cutting through my spin, I hop up on the balls of my feet to face the front and drive my heels into the ground, an exclamation point to end the phrase. Deb tilts her head towards me with a smile on her face and speaks into the microphone – "see, we don't need to practice!".

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Appendix A: Certificate of Ethics Approval

12/07/2018

Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	S-06-18-650
Titre du projet / Project Title	Feeling for Interactive Rhythm through Improvisational Tap Dance: A Motion-Sensing Phenomenological Inquiry
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Approuvé / Approved
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	12/07/2018
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	11/07/2019

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	**Affiliation**	**Role**
Carolyn HEBERT	Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Rebecca LLOYD	Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education	Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie | www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics

Appendix B: Research Activities

Research Participant	Interviews	Practice
Heather Cornell	• August 2018 – In person, audio recording (Nyack, New York) • August 2018 – In person, video and audio recording (Vancouver, British Columbia)[15] • August 2020 – Telephone conversation, email exchange	• Two weeks of Tap Labs in Nyack, New York (August 2018) • One class at Vancouver Tap Dance festival (August 2018) • Attended classes at RiFF Dallas Tap Dance Festival (January 2019) • Private lesson in Ottawa, ON (September 2019)
Brenda Bufalino	• November 2018 – In person, audio recording (New York, New York) • August 2020 – Email exchange	• Four classes at New York City Big Apple Tap Dance Festival (November 2018) • One class at American Tap Dance Teacher Training Program (July 2019) • Indirectly studied Brenda's technique and approach through successful completion of American Tap Dance Teacher Training Program – Level 1 (July 2019 – July 2020)
Dianne Walker	• January 2019 – In person, audio recording (Dallas, Texas) • August 2020 – Telephone conversation	• Two classes at New York City Big Apple Tap Dance Festival (November, 2018) • Three classes at RiFF Dallas Tap Dance Festival (January 2019) • Two Days of Classes in Toronto, ON hosted by Toffan Rhythm Projects (August 2019)
Sarah Reich	• January, 2019 – In person, audio recording (Dallas, Texas) • August, 2020 – Telephone conversation	• One class at Vancouver Tap Dance Festival (August 2018) • Three classes at RiFF Dallas Tap Dance Festival (January 2019)
Travis Knights	• August 2019 – In person, audio recording – (Toronto, Ontario) • August 2020 – Email exchange	• One class in Montreal, Quebec (June 2019) • One private lesson in Toronto, Ontario (August 2019) • Prior to research, I studied under Travis in Toronto, Ontario; Ottawa, Ontario; and Montreal, Quebec on numerous occasions (approximately 5-10 classes)

[15] Conducted as part of phase 1 of the Inter-Active for Life Research Project (R.J. Lloyd and S. Smith) (Funded in part through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada)