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Finding Layers in the Gaga Movement Language

**A Study of Lived Experience of the Gaga Movement Language in the Dancing
Community Gaga/people at the Suzanne Dellal Centre, Tel Aviv**



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Acknowledgements

To write about the lived experience of the movement language Gaga and to capture the sense of wholeness has been my quest in this thesis. How can one describe a total sensation, texture, effort and floating in words, words that can be used in an academic context? The movements and sensations in a Gaga class are fluid – in the moment: “one day after six or seven months I was floating, I was not in class, I was floating, it was amazing, I understood all the layers (...) and the next day it was gone” (B personal communication, March 18, 2015). This is both the challenge and the beauty of writing about movements. There are many layers in the Gaga movement language, and those layers would not have been possible to find without the help of all of my informants in the Dancing Community Gaga/people at the Suzanne Dellal Centre. For that I am ever so grateful. I want to give a special thanks to the Gaga administration and Deborah Friedes Galili, who was willing to let me read her unpublished article of valuable research on Gaga. I had a great deal of research material after my fieldwork at the Suzanne Dellal Centre, but it was hard to find out how these valuable elements should be put together. Without the help and support of my student counsellor Anne Fiskvik, I could not have done this. I want to thank my dance colleague Lisa Colette Bysheim who let me read her dissertation about Gaga, and all of my fellow students at NO-MA-DS who have been supporting and curious about this research. Thanks to my friends and family for all the love and support, and a special thanks to and my boyfriend who has patiently kept my spirits up through the hardest parts. The journey of capturing the Gaga movement language in words has been both difficult and thrilling. This thesis is for those who find that struggle interesting, and for all of those who worship movements and dance.

Figure 1: This picture is from a Gaga class. Photographer: Dagon.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This research is based upon the lived experience of Gaga in the dancing community Gaga/people at the Suzanne Dellal Centre in Tel Aviv. I am inspired by Paula Saukko's methodological approach and her notion of combining lived experience with classical approaches in cultural studies. I will enrich the focus of the lived experience by letting other approaches bleed into it. This I will do by analysing, comparing and discussing theories from phenomenology, cognitive science, somatic methods and dance theories.

In the fall of 2002, I saw the Batsheva Dance Company for the first time. This was in London on a school trip. I was totally amazed when I saw Batsheva perform 'Sabotage Baby'. After reading the name of the choreographer Ohad Naharin, his name instantly imprinted itself onto my mind. Some years later, after I finished my BA degree in dance at the University of Stavanger and moved to Bergen, I attended my first Gaga class at Bergen Dansesenter (BDS). I found it strange, but intriguing; it was something new, yet familiar.

When I decided to write about Gaga for my master's thesis, it was out of a wish to combine a practical embodied experience with an academic approach. I wanted to study an improvisation based dance style, and having newly taken a Gaga class with a Swedish Gaga teacher at BDS, I thought this could be an interesting phenomenon to study for my thesis. After doing some research, I found that the biggest community for Gaga training had its base at the Suzanne Dellal Centre in Tel Aviv. On their website, I read that they had fourteen Gaga classes per week. This made me open to the possibility of doing fieldwork in a concentrated period of time to get an in-depth study of Gaga. So I did. I had quite ambivalent feelings about going to Tel Aviv, because of the charged and complicated political situation, and the relationship between Israel and Palestine. Even though a political approach was not what I had in mind for this thesis, I had this in the back of my head when I did my fieldwork. I am well aware that my background, coming from Norway with little practical knowledge about the Middle East, but still having read very much about the conflict through the newspapers and media, would probably colour my experience. Even though I try to have an open mind, a *carte blanche* so to speak, I cannot take myself out of the experience. There is no such thing as an objective researcher.¹

¹ See chapter 2.4.

Before I started my research, it was important for me to get permission from the Gaga administration at the Suzanne Dellal Centre. I received a positive response, and the first thing I did when I came to Tel Aviv, was to arrange a meeting with two of the Gaga administrators, this was also a request from the Gaga institution. They were both curious about my research, and told me that they really felt the need for more serious (academic) research around the phenomenon of Gaga. As many fieldworkers have experienced before me, I had an ‘aha moment’ when I found out that Gaga/people (Gaga classes for everyone) was the big thing in Tel Aviv and Israel, not Gaga/dancers as I had thought. This was a major turning point for me. After taking some classes at the Suzanne Dellal Centre, I decided that it was the lived experience of Gaga in this dancing community I wanted to follow. The Gaga movement language is quite a new phenomenon, and it is still evolving. I find it interesting because it is not something you can explain in a simple way. After doing my fieldwork, I came home with a lot of impressions, but it was hard to explain it in words:

I've been home for three weeks now and I can feel that Tel Aviv is somewhat more distant. When I get the question 'What is Gaga?' I still don't have a quick answer.

Today I tried to explain it to a colleague:

Colleague: "What is Gaga?"

I: "It is a movement language."

Colleague: "How come?"

I: "It's about movement qualities, you improvise to certain words, you don't get in to a particular shape."

Colleague: "Is it like Butoh?"

I: "Eh, well, no...mmm. It doesn't have the same philosophy behind it. I don't know how to explain it. That's a part of my thesis."

Colleague: "Hah, you should come up with an answer before too long."

My colleague found it weird that I could not explain what I was studying. This ‘struggle’ is a big part of my research. I find it interesting that Gaga does not fit into a set category. The artist Meredith Monk states that she does not care for labels and categories:

Now it is kind of a strange thing that these techniques have become codified. Actually, sometimes I wonder about that because I think that when things get codified or named,

then something dies. I feel like art is really about working with the unnameable. So as soon as you name it, something of the mystery gets lost (Monk, 2009, p. 37).

Maybe Monk is right, as an artist you do not want to limit your research so that it can fit into a category. As a researcher, I also have this in mind, and my goal in this thesis is not to narrow down the Gaga movement language and make the 'magic' disappear. As a researcher I am interested in finding and describing the different layers that are hidden in this wonderful movement language, to make it richer, not to narrow it down.

Chapter 2 Methods and Theory

To find the multiple layers in Gaga, I want to combine methodologies. The main focus is on the lived experience of the Gaga movement language. It's a qualitative, hermeneutic and post-structural way of doing research. Even though the interest in Gaga has grown substantially over the last few years, there is not much serious literature on the topic. Still, there is some important graduate work and also a doctoral dissertation called "Body of Knowledge: Embodied Philosophy in Gaga, Ohad Naharin's Movement Research", written by Evian Katan in 2013. When I first came to Tel Aviv, I met with Deborah Friedes Galili. She works at the Gaga administration and has a BA in dance history from Brown University and a MFA from Ohio State University. Galili has written the book "Contemporary Dance in Israel" (2012), and she also gave me permission to read her article (soon to be published) "Moving Beyond Technique: Gaga, Ohad Naharin's Movement Language and Dance Training in the Twenty-First Century" (2015). Both of Galili's works have been very valuable research material for this thesis. Beside this, there are a lot of newspapers, magazines and blogs that have written about Gaga. Some of these are more superficial than others. Galili states that "some journalistic accounts have perpetuated myths and misunderstandings, ranging from the overly causal claim that Naharin developed Gaga in response to a back injury, to the unexamined, automatic labeling of Gaga as a technique" (2015). In order to use the earlier research material on Gaga, I have had to be critical. One way of being critical can be to combine methodologies. The notion of combining methodologies is shared by a number of researchers such as P. Saukko and O. Ronström. To see how I can combine methodologies, I will use a theory developed by the dance anthropologist S. Youngerman.

2.1. Combining Methodologies

Youngerman suggests that dance anthropology should have a holistic view. She states that "anthropological approach can serve as an umbrella for the study of all types of dances and for the whole range of research topics" (Youngerman, 1975, p. 116). But how can I incorporate this holistic view in my thesis about the Gaga movement language? Youngerman states that her approach is an anthropological one, and that dance should be studied as a cultural phenomenon. In order to do so, she incorporates the fields of natural science and the humanities that are relevant to the anthropological research. Dance studies are a "multi-faced phenomenon" (Youngerman, 2008, p. 116). To be able to analyse this, Youngerman suggests dividing the study into four parts:

First of all, it [dance] exists in time and space as *a dance* – a physical phenomenon and cultural product. Second, it is made visible *as dancing* the manner in which it is performed. Third, a dance is an event – a behavioural process which takes place in particular cultural context. Finally, the dance exists as a body of concepts and feelings – the cognitive and affective dimensions that are associated with dance on each of the other “levels” (Youngerman, 2008, p. 116).

In this thesis I am inspired by Youngman’s study, which divides dance research into four parts. To divide my thesis into four neat parts, however, is not so easily done – I am still inspired by the notion of including all four aspects, but they will not come in Youngman’s chronological order. In searching for the different layers of Gaga movement language I will first look at the development of Gaga with the notion of historicity, and then I will (briefly) give a demographic description of Tel Aviv and the development of the Suzanne Dellal Centre. This is the part that Youngerman refers to as the cultural context, it gives information about *who, when, where, and why*. The next chapter is about the phenomenon Gaga – the *what and how*. This is what Youngerman calls “the formal aspect of the dance structure” (2008, p. 116). In the next part, I will again return to the cultural context and describe the dancing community Gaga/people and Suzanne Dellal Centre. The last part concerns different concepts that are relevant to Gaga movement language. The findings from the previous chapters will be compared and analysed in the light of those concepts.

The hardest part of writing this thesis is to separate all of these aspects from each other. When you see a painting for the first time, you might notice the colours and the larger structures and shapes. When you look closer, you might notice the details in the brush strokes. You might see that the picture is not just one colour – it actually has a lot of colours, red, green and yellow. The goal is to both look at the big picture and the details in it. Then, when you move away to see the whole picture again, it might have changed your perspective on it.

Youngerman’s way of dividing these aspects is a way of combining methodologies. The Gaga movement language is way of thinking and moving. It is difficult to analyse some aspect of it without losing the sense of the whole. It is based on a holistic philosophy and in this thesis the hermeneutic methodological approach is relevant:

2.2. The Hermeneutic Methodological Approach

Hermeneutics is based upon holistic thinking and the recognition that a part of a text must be understood as a part of the whole text. The philosophers Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer are central to the development of hermeneutics (Kjørup, 1996, p. 270). Heidegger argues that the world is tacitly intelligible to us: we do not understand the world by gathering a collection of neutral facts. Heidegger reformulates the problem of truth by stating that we may not reach a set of universal propositions through laws, or judgments that corresponds to the world as it is. This Heideggerian reformulation of the problem of truth gives rise to a new conception of the hermeneutic circle. Heidegger's hermeneutic circle draws on notions of the interplay between our self- understanding and our understanding of the world ("Stanford Encyclopedia", 2015).² This self-understanding is most relevant for this thesis. In the fieldwork I did on Gaga, it is the reflections of my informants and myself that shape the core of this study. Through their interviews, I reflect upon their reflections. When I do this, I draw on notions of the interplay between my self- understanding and an understanding of the world. Gadamer works within the Heideggerian paradigm. He adds language to the discourse and argues that language is central to human existence. It is through language we come to know the world. Gadamer states that language is our second nature, and that language must be understood in a historical and cultural context ("Stanford Encyclopedia", 2015).³ Gadamer's notion of the relevance of contextualising research is relevant. In this thesis contextualising is not carried out to find a universal truth, but it is a way of looking at the different layers of Gaga.

Saukko notes that the "interplay between lived experience, text of discourses and the social context" (Saukko, 2003, p. 11) is trademark of the cultural studies approach to empirical research. She suggests "dialogic validity" (2003, pp. 19-22) as a way to do this. "Dialogic validity" is the hermeneutic approach. Saukko suggests "dialogic validity" as a way of being more truthful to the lived world of the people being studied. She has looked at Y. Lincoln and E. Guba's (1985) suggestions of how to do qualitative research, and divided them into three different parts:

1. Truthfulness. Research should do justice to the perspective of the people being

² (No Author) "Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Hermeneutics" (September 29, 2015), retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/>

³ (No Author) "Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Hermeneutics" (September 29, 2015), retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/>

studied, so that they can, in the main agree with it (...) 2. Self-reflexivity. Researcher should be reflexive about the personal, social, and paradigmatic discourses that guide the way of they perceive reality and other people (...) 3. Polyvocality. Researcher should be conscientious that they are not studying *a* lived reality but *many* (Saukko, 2004, p. 20; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

In this research, all three aspects of “dialogic validity” are used. When it comes to “self-reflexivity” this approach will be explained in *chapter 2.4*. “Truthfulness” and “polyvocality” will be discussed *chapter 2.7.2*.

2.3. Embodied Knowledge

”We must rediscover the origin of the object and the very core of our experience, we must describe the appearance of being, and we must come to understand how, paradoxically, there is for-us and in-itself” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, p. 74). In this statement Merleau-Ponty is supporting self-reflective writing and the relevance of the lived embodied experience. For Merleau-Ponty there is no separation between the mind and the body. H. Thomas writes that Merleau-Ponty’s focus is on behaviour. “The subjective states of other are available to us through their behaviour, just as our behaviour is also available to them” (Thomas, 2003, p. 62). It is through behaviour that we understand others and ourselves. This is an important statement about how we communicate with others. When researching Gaga, the aspect of how we communicate through movement is most interesting. A Gaga class is like a micro society, and we let our behaviour be available to the rest of the group. This will be further explained in *chapter 4*. The question is: how can embodied knowledge be explained and discussed in a manner that gives the research validity? Warburton states he has a “problem” with embodied knowledge because the subjective states of other people are not defined clearly in philosophy and in science:

The problem with embodiment as a joint philosophical-scientific concept (...) is that there are very different notions of exactly what is, what it means for different disciplines and ways of knowing, and what kind of body (if any) is required for and “embodied cognition” (Warburton, 2011, p. 66; Ziemke, 2001).

There are some ways of dealing with this, and S. Gallagher focuses on this in his book “How the body shapes the mind” (2005). Gallagher combines theories from phenomenology,

psychology, and cognitive neuroscience. His goal is to “pull phenomenology into a broader context of the cognitive sciences” (Gallagher, 2005, p. 10), and use this as an interdisciplinary approach.

The human body, and the way it structures human experience, also shapes the human experience of self, and perhaps the very possibility of developing a sense of self. If the self is anything more than this, it is nonetheless and first of all this, an embodied self (Gallagher, 2005, p. 1).

The way we structure experience shapes our sense of self. In this case the study of how my informants and I structure experience in Gaga can say something about how we shape our embodied self. *In chapter 5* I will use Gallagher’s concept of *body image* and *body schema* (2005) to see how this can enlighten on some aspects on the phenomenon Gaga.

Many researchers discuss the question of how qualitative research can be more truthful and valid. H. Thomas states that one way to do this, can be to have a “self-reflective stance as researcher” (2003):

2.4. The Stance of the Individual Researcher/ a Dancers Habitus

Thomas writes that in new ethnology, to collect data the researcher must use a variety of methods:

The aims if ethnography, the (far/near) relation between representation and reality and the observer and the observed, are subject to debate and largely depend on the theoretical, political and/or methodological stance of the individual researcher (Thomas, 2003, p. 51).

With this, Thomas states that in ethnological research “the stance of the individual researcher” (2003) is of great importance. Saukko suggests the same thing as Thomas: the researcher should not try to hide behind the text and the subject. Instead she suggests having a dialogue with the subjects that are under research, and the researcher meeting them with “a hermeneutic methodological quest to gain a thorough understanding of a person’s life-story” (Saukko, 2003, p. 8). But how can one conduct a study like this without being *too* subjective?

Thomas explains that P. Bourdieu's theory on "bodily hexis and habitus" (Thomas, 2003, p. 20) can be relevant in this case. Habitus is the same as 'a feel for the game' or 'practical sense'. Your body language and attitude adapt to fit in with the environment that you are in. Habitus is not something that you are consciously aware of, unless you are forced to think about it, it is something that has become a habit. Habitus can be used as a way observing oneself, and knowing your own way of being. This is something that I will investigate in this thesis. My stance as an individual researcher is that I constantly reflect upon my own research. When I reflect upon my informants' lived experience with Gaga, I do not try to 'hide' in the text. As L. Finlay writes "researcher and participants thus engage in a dance, moving in and out of experiencing and reflection while simultaneously moving through the shared inter subjective space that I the research encounter" (Finlay, 2006, p. 2). The important part of this aspect is to have the right balance between reflections on my own lived experience and theories that will keep it relevant to the research. In order to do this, I had to ask myself during the writing process: in what way is this relevant to the problem statement? It is easy to go on exploring in the wrong directions. An example of this is when my role as a researcher overlap with my role as a dancer/choreographer.

2.5. The Conflict of Multiple Realities and Contextualisation

The hermeneutic and post structural way of doing research is based upon the ideology that there is not one single reality; there are multiple realities and multiple perspectives (Kjørup, 1996). The lived experience of the embodied self can be researched in multiple ways to make the research richer. C. Geertz notes that the ethnographers' task is to interpret and make sense of different lived experiences. He calls this process of finding layers of meaning and structure for "thick description" (Thomas, 2003, p. 68; Geertz 1975). O. Ronström also writes about this in his article "It takes two –Or More- to Tango" (1999). He discovered a way of seeing multiple layers in his own research:

As a main unit of observation an analysis, the event became a prism, in which my searchlight could split in several directions: the micro level of steps and tunes; the intermediate level of human relations, interaction patterns; and the macro level of tradition, history, culture and society (Ronström, 1999, p. 135).

Ronström describes research as a prism, a notion echoed by L. Richardson, only he calls it a "crystallisation" (2000). P. Saukko suggests that this idea of research as a prism is not easily

combined with the notion of contextual validity, because this is based upon a form of realism. The idea of methodologies as a prism is a hermeneutic and post-structural way of doing research, and it is based upon the ideology that there is not one single reality; there are multiple realities and multiple perspectives. Saukko writes, furthermore, that in order to comment and discuss something, “scholars need to resort to some notion of social and historical context and structures of inequality and need some criteria on how to analyse them” (2003, p. 22). As Saukko suggests, the lived experience needs to be analysed and contextualized.

Saukko further argues that lived experience and critical discourses call for a methodological dilemma. Saukko explains that she was torn between this belief and another comity that suggested paying more attention to economic developments and explorative material that often fall through in new ethnographic research;

In this situation, felt somewhat tugged and pulled between two currents in empirical research in cultural studies that were in either the microcosms of individual experience or the macrocosms of global, economic power structures (Saukko, 2003, p. 6; Saukko, 1998).

This shows that individual experiences need to be connected to a bigger context. The importance of combining methodologies is a notion that is shared by a number of researchers both in dance anthropology, new ethnology and cultural studies. The anthropologist D. Williams (2004) does not deny that dance can be studied as a subjective phenomenon. Williams chose to focus on theories and explanation of dance, not the dances themselves. She urges the need to be critical in research, because that leads to a more constructive path. She stresses the need to link dance research to the academic discipline of social anthropology. Williams does not trust in the experience and the embodied knowledge that you find in qualitative research and new ethnology. She states that only by studying the explanation of dance you will find good and valid data that can be supported by theory. Williams suggests that to be critical is a more constructive way of doing research (Williams, 2004). I disagree with Williams in her statement on the value of doing qualitative research. In this thesis I *will* use qualitative methods to study the layers in Gaga. I do believe that in order to understand Gaga both as a phenomenon and cultural phenomenon, qualitative methods is necessary. However, Williams’ notion of being critical when doing such research, I do agree with. In

order to be critical in this thesis I will use a various range of analysis methods, theories and discourse to compare and reflect this research in context to.

2.6. The Use of Tools in my Fieldwork

Before I did my fieldwork at the dancing community Gaga/people at Suzanne Dellal Centre, it was important to ask the administration permission to carry out this research (as mentioned in the introduction). It also gave me an opportunity to get in contact with an informant before I did any fieldwork. D. Sklar (2012) writes that dance ethnography is unique among other kinds of ethnography because it is necessarily grounded in the body and the body's experience rather than in text, artefacts or abstractions. She suggests various methods for gathering data including Labanotation, qualitative description, videotaping – and no matter what theoretical framework is used for analysing that data, all paths lead from and back to people moving (Sklar, 2012, p. 6). In the fieldwork I have used multiple methods, as Sklar suggests, for making the research “thick” (Geertz, 1975). This includes participant observation, semi-structured interviews, the friendly conversation, audio recording and field notes. All of these methods are mentioned by C. Wadel (1991). Sklar suggests Labanotation as a method, but since it is not allowed to observe or make video recordings of a Gaga class, not even for academic research such as this (I asked about this when I first contacted the Gaga administration), Labanotation is impossible. I also asked permission to make audio recording of some of the classes, but I did not get an answer before the last week of the fieldwork. Still there was time to make audio recordings of two different classes. The terms I had to agree on were to ask the Gaga teacher for permission and send a copy of the audio recordings to the Gaga administration. I did transcribe some parts of the audio recordings, but not all of it, as I did with the interviews. Quotes and information from the transcribed audio recording have been used in this thesis. One of the audio recordings has also been used as a tool to do embodied writing on the re-experience of this class in particular.

2.6.1. Informants

In the fieldwork I had 20 informants. They had different roles and some of them became ‘key informants’ (Walden, 1991). With some of my informants I had regular *friendly conversations*, and some became my friends, others I just shared one or two friendly talks with, and two of them became my key informants. The communication with my informants started with J.P. Spradely's *friendly conversation* (1979). In *the friendly conversation* you ask questions without an explicit purpose. This was an easy way of making contact. Walden states

that a good way to obtain different types of data for the research is to alternate between key informants and regular informants. He also notes that it is important to write about this during the fieldwork (Walden, 1991, p. 54). I did this during my fieldwork.

My informants came from various places in the world: Australia, US, Sweden, Norway, Japan and Israel. I will keep their names anonymous in this research. Their ages varied from 20 to 60 years. I did four semi-structured interviews. These interviews have been of great relevance in this research:

- *Informant A (key informant)* works as both as a Gaga administrator and Gaga teacher. She attended the Gaga Teacher Training Program (GTTP) in 2011-2012. She is from New Jersey, US, and has background in dance.
- *Informant B (key informant)* is a Gaga teacher. She also completed the GTTP. She is from Norway, and lives in Tel Aviv.⁴ She has a background in dance.
- *Informant C (informant)* has been a Gaga participant for nine years. He is from Israel and is a musician.
- *Informant (informant)* is a dancer in Batsheva ensemble. She is from Israel and has some experience in teaching Gaga.

2.6.2. The Qualitative Interview

Semi-structured interviews are based upon a give and take form with open-ended questions. S. Kvale (1996) describes the interview as a conversation; still it's not the same as Spradely's *friendly conversation* (1979). In the semi-structured interview, the interviewee does most of the talking. The lack of any explicit intention in *the friendly conversation* is substituted by a more or less clear intention from the fieldworker's side. Still, the semi-structured interview is based upon a natural and egalitarian relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Hockey and Forsey, 2012). The purpose of doing an interview is "to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale, 1996, pp. 5-6). Kvale states that when you interview someone, you should have a naive and open-minded attitude. You should show curiosity and openness. When I did my fieldwork, the aspect of curiosity was not something that I had to feign, I was already curious. Getting people to talk about Gaga was not very difficult either. All of my informants

⁴ Informant B does not live in Tel Aviv at the time of writing.

wanted to say something on the subject, and making people talk about something they love to do it is not very difficult. This is the blessing of doing research such as this.

Three of the four semi-structured interviews with informant A, C and D took place a local bakery near Suzanne Dellal Centre. I made audio recordings of these interviews. The last interview with B was conducted right outside Suzanne Dellal on a bench. Here I made both audio and video recordings. When I transcribed these interviews, I only used the audio recording. I wanted to use the same method for transcription in all of them, and since I only had one of them on video, I did not use it. E. D. Ives states that transcription will never be exactly the same when two people transcribe it: “it is a representation, it is unavoidably an interpretation” (1995, p. 78). Furthermore, he writes that even when the same person does the transcription twice, the two versions will not be the same. I thought about this when I did the transcription. The semi-structured interviews and the transcriptions gave me access to a rich material that is used throughout this thesis. However, it is important to keep in mind that my way of doing the transcription will have an impact on the material. To make sure that the research had “dialogic validity” (Thomas, 2003) the aspect of “truthfulness” was incorporated with the semi-structured interviews. I did have some correspondence with my key informants A and B after the interviews (but not with informant C and D). I also had some correspondence with the American couple; they commented upon some of my research material, and gave me their fieldwork notes in return.

2.6.3. Participant Observation and Field Notes

In my fieldwork, I spent almost every day at Suzanne Dellal Centre. Here I carried out participant observation in the Gaga/people classes (as well as talking with my informants). All in all I took 30 classes. There were morning classes and evening classes. I did both. In Gaga you cannot carry out observation, make video recordings or take pictures⁵, you have to participate yourself. Participant observation is a way of doing research based on your own experience. When you are carrying out participant observation, you have to be aware of your own role in the observation and you have to be able to use yourself as an informant. As mentioned, Walden writes about the different roles you have in fieldwork, and that it is important to think about this before carrying out participant observation. Since Gaga classes are open to everyone, this was not a problem in this case. In order to do participant

⁵ I did take some pictures of the studio after class and of the Suzanne Dellal Centre building.

observation I did not have to think about which role to play, I could simply take part as a normal Gaga participant.

Wadel (1991) writes that “naive” observation is important in the first stages of fieldwork; the researcher must have an open mind. When you “get a feel for the game”, you can start by attaching this to certain concepts. After a while you will start to see a pattern. Wadel furthermore writes that we need observation techniques and categories to which to connect our observations. Qualitative research is based upon the observation of social relations between people, not the people themselves. Data is different from observation, because you have to translate it into data. It is in this translation we can find our informants’ cultural categories (Wadel, 1991, pp. 77- 82). Even though some elements in Gaga were frequently being repeated by my informants, and appeared regularly in my participant observation, it was not until later, when I got back home and started analysing all the material, that I could see patterns and categories, the multiple layers of Gaga movement language. This again led to an idea about a possible structure for the thesis.

Chapter 3 Historical and Demographic Context

In this chapter the development of Gaga will be looked at. There will also be a (short) demographical view of Tel Aviv, and a brief history of the development of the Suzanne Dellal Centre. The point of this is to look at the development of Gaga and give it a demographic framework that can be used further in the next chapters.

3.1. The Development of Gaga

Gaga is a quite new phenomenon (around 15-20 years). Even though Gaga has grown into a phenomenon of its own, it is still unquestionable linked to its founder Ohad Naharin, or, as informant B puts it, “Father Gaga” (B, personal communication, March 18, 2015). At first the movement language did not have a name; it was just referred to as the class of Ohad Naharin. What this movement language represented could not easily be translated into words. In search of the right name for this baby, someone suggested the name Gaga. Naharin liked the sound and lightness of it, like the way a baby talk. This was in 2003, and from then on it was called Gaga (Galili, 2015).⁶

Ohad Naharin never received any formal dance training when he was young. He was born in 1952 in Kibbutz Mizra southeast of Haifa in Israel. His home was an artistic one, filled with music, dance and creativity. Ohad Naharin describes it like this in an interview: “I was taken to see dance and encouraged to write, paint and sing. That was all a part of growing up.” Levine, D. (“Bodies Akimbi”, 2015).⁷ This might have influenced Naharin to later pursue a career in dance. Another interesting fact is that Sofia Naharin, Ohad’s mother, studied a somatic based method with Moshe Feldenkrais (Galili, 2015). Naharin’s father, Eliav Naharin, was an actor, and was later involved in psychodrama. Naharin explains that he learned much about imagination through his father: “My father put us to bed making up stories; he never read us a book. So the idea of invention and the power of imagination was very strong” Levine, D. (“Bodies Akimbi”, 2015).⁸ The influence of growing up in an artistic,

⁶ Galili, F. D (2015) *Moving Beyond Technique:Gaga, Ohad Naharin’s Movement Language and Dance Training in the Twenty-First Century*. Unpublished manuscript.

⁷ Levine, D. “Bodies Akimbi Batsheva Dancers ‘Go’ Gaga” (2015, June 18), retrieved from http://www.jewishjournal.com/arts/article/bodies_akimbo_batsheva_dancers_go_gaga_20090225/

⁸ Levine, D. “Bodies Akimbi Batsheva Dancers ‘Go’ Gaga” (2015, June 18), retrieved from http://www.jewishjournal.com/arts/article/bodies_akimbo_batsheva_dancers_go_gaga_20090225/

creative home can have a lot to do with Ohad Naharin's development of Gaga. This will be further discussed in *chapter 6*.

Naharin's talent for movement was discovered when he was in the army, where he was asked to join the entertainment troupe. In 1974 Martha Graham, the artistic adviser for the Batsheva Dance Company and a pioneer in Modern American dance, invited Naharin to come to New York to dance in her choreography 'Dream'. This led to a career in ballet and modern dance that included working at Graham's school and Julliard, the School of American Ballet. Naharin studied Limon technique and attended classes with Stanley Williams and Richard Rapp, Maggie Black and David Howard. He also danced in Maurice Béjart's ballet in Brussels. Naharin returned to New York in 1980, where he presented his own work in Hirabayashi's studio. At this time he also danced with Gina Buntz. In 1990, he took over as artistic director for the Batsheva Dance Company, and led Batsheva through a metamorphosis. Until this point, the Company's main training had consisted of Graham technique and ballet. This was about to change. From the time Naharin took over Batsheva, he gradually developed a new movement language, *Gaga* (Galili, 2015).

One could say that the development of Naharin's movement language had already begun when he first started working on his own choreography in New York in the 1980s. In interviews Naharin explains that he felt the need to develop classes that would prepare his dancers for the choreography rehearsal:

The need to communicate to dancers as a choreographer, to help dancers to better their interpretation of my work, the realization that my work is only as good as the interpretation of my dancers, was very much a source. It fuelled my research (Galili, 2015).

The most widely told origin story about the founding of Gaga, is the story about how Naharin had a serious back injury that nearly paralysed his left leg. As a part of his recovery, Naharin worked with a physiotherapist and studied Tai Chi and Pilates. This inspired Naharin to further explore how to incorporate this kind of knowledge into his classes.

In the late 1990, some staff members at the Batsheva Dance Company asked if Naharin could teach a class with them. So they did. For three years Naharin taught these classes to members

and friends at Batsheva. Naharin remembers that this was one of the highlights of the development of Gaga. In these classes he had to use non-dance terminology. This made him come up with important explorations of elements that are still being used in Gaga: floating, availability, traveling stuff, texture, explosive power, dynamics and efficiency of movement. At the same time, Naharin also gave Gaga classes regularly to the Batsheva Company. He wanted to wait for the dancers' inquiry to be able to make this the main training for the dancers and (almost) eliminate ballet from the daily training sessions. In the season of 2002-2003 the dancers had only one ballet class per week and Gaga-training daily. Eventually the ballet classes became more rare. Both Gaga/people and Gaga/dancers expanded from 2000 and became more and more popular in Israel and around the world. Gaga/dancers spread more quietly worldwide, because of the Batsheva Dance Company. Gaga intensive was held for the first time in 2008. This included Gaga/dancers and their repertory. Since then, it has become a big phenomenon. Gaga intensive is held in various places in the world: Japan, North America, Australia and Europe. In 2011-2012, the Gaga Teacher Training Program was established. Until then, it was just dancers or former dancers of the Batsheva Company that could teach Gaga. With GTTP, the global presence of Gaga/dancers and Gaga/people increased (Galili, 2015).

3.2. Tel Aviv-Yafo and the Suzanne Dellal Centre

Tel Aviv-Yafo is the second largest city (in population) in Israel with 414.600 inhabitants. It is located along a 14 kilometre-long strip of the Mediterranean coast. Most of the embassies in Israel are located in Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv Yafo's history begins in Jaffa (Arabic)/Yafo (Hebrew) - the ancient 3.000-year-old city that lies to the southwest. The Old City of Jaffa was built during the Ottoman Empire. In 1909, sixty-six Jewish families who resided in Jaffa established the first neighbourhood of what later became the city of Tel Aviv. The neighbourhood, called "Akhuzar Bayit" (homestead) was originally located within Jaffa. It was renamed Tel Aviv in 1910, and the neighbourhood began to expand. Other new neighbourhoods were added until it eventually became the centre of the Yishuv – the Jewish settlement in Palestine at the time.⁹

⁹ (No Author) "Tel Aviv-Yafo" (October 12, 2015), retrieved from http://www.goisrael.com/Tourism_Eng/Tourist%20Information/Discover%20Israel/Cities/Pages/Tel%20Aviv-Yafo.aspx



**Figure 2: This picture is a view of Tel Aviv from Old Jaffa. It gives an impression of how the city looks.
Photograph: Hogstad.**

The history of the Israeli dance scene started in 1948, after of the founding of the state. In 1935 the Nazi regime started to rose and the Jewish dancer Gertrud Kraus fled from Vienna to Israel. She was schooled in the methods of Ausdruckstanz, and had had success in throughout Europe. She founded the dance group Folk Opera that was active from 1941-1947 in Tel Aviv. In 1948, Kraus visited the United States and was impressed by the progress made by American modern dancers. In 1951, the American Fund for Israeli Institutions sent the Jewish-American choreographer Jerome Robbins to survey the young country's dance scene and identify a promising dance group for a future tour of the U.S. (Galili, 2012, p. 15). Martha Graham first performed in Israel in 1956. In 1964 the Batsheva Dance Company was founded with support of Baroness Bethsabée de Rothschild, with Martha Graham as artistic adviser. Israel's contemporary dance scene, which has grown out of this modern dance community, first started to flourish during the 1990s and 2000s (Galili, 2012, p. 9). The Suzanne Dellal Centre plays an important part in this development.

The Suzanne Dellal Centre is a cultural centre in the neighbourhood Neve Tzedek in Tel Aviv. Neve Tzedek is the oldest Jewish Neighbourhood in Tel Aviv. Today it is an important part of the Israel's performing art scene. "With its spacious stone plazas dotted by towering palms, leafy citrus trees and bubbling fountains, the Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre is a crown jewel in Tel Aviv's landscape" (Galili, 2012, p. 13). The Batsheva Dance Company, Inbal Pinto and the Avshalom Pollak Dance Company are some of the companies

that are currently in residence here. The culture centre is named after the London-based Dellal family and their daughter Suzanne, who had passed away at a young age. In 2008, over 900 premieres, mostly dance, took place here. In the 1970's, Neve Tzedek was a run-down area. In 1980, with the funding of the Yerushalmi family, the Neve Tzedek Theatre group moved in to the old Yehieli School. The Suzanne Dellal Centre was first founded in late 1980s when the Tel Aviv Municipality and Israel's Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports decide to build a large dance centre. To finance such a large project, they needed financial backing. They found this in the Dellal family, and the name to the (dance) Centre was chosen in remembrance of their daughter Suzanne. Galili explains that the Suzanne Dellal Centre became an important part of the dance scene in Israel. In the 1980s, Israel's Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports also saw the need for a greater institutional infrastructure to encourage its development. "Shades of Dance and Curtain Up offered metaphorical platforms for independent choreographers while the Suzanne Dellal Centre provided actual stages for concert and dance artists of all persuasions" (Galili, 2012, p. 23). As mentioned, the Suzanne Dellal Centre is today an important centre for dance and dance companies in Israel. This is also the main base for the dancing community Gaga/people. In *chapter 5* I will describe this dancing community and look at the cultural context of Gaga/people.



Figure 3: The front of the Suzanne Dellal Centre. Photograph: Hogstad.

Chapter 4 The Phenomenon Gaga

“First of all, it [dance] exists in time and space as *a dance* – a physical phenomenon and cultural product. Second, it is made visible *as dancing* the manner in which it is performed” (Youngerman, 2008, p. 116). In order to research these two aspects of Gaga, the questions *what* and *how* will be looked at: *How* is a Gaga class is structured? *What* is the relationship between the teacher and the participants like? *How* is the Gaga vocabulary used and *what* do these phrases mean? *What* kind of effect does Gaga have on its practitioners?

4.1. A Gaga Class

As previously stated, there are two kinds of Gaga classes. One for everyone: Gaga/people and one for dancers: Gaga/dancers. In this thesis, my focus is on the Gaga/people class, but the content is basically the same in both classes.¹⁰ A Gaga/people class last for 60 minutes. During the class you move constantly, there is no pause. The classes are open to adults, and there are no divisions in terms of experience or level. A person who has practiced Gaga for years attends the same class as a first timer. In Gaga the teacher is also moving constantly, like the rest of the participants. A Gaga class does not have a set structure. Not two Gaga classes are exactly alike; however, the language that the teacher uses to describe movement comes from the same toolbox. In a Gaga class you work with different movement qualities. The Gaga teacher guides the participants through the class with movement and language as guide. You are not assuming a particular shape; you improvise around the words and movements that the teacher suggests. The use of language is a key element in a class, but listening to the words is not enough, you also have to be alert, and pay attention to the movements that the teacher is making, and listen to the verbal instructions. You have to keep an eye the people around you, both to have a feeling of what the group is doing, and for practical reasons. You are sharing space with a lot of moving bodies. Gaga is not a stationary movement language, it is very spatial. You move constantly, and the teachers guide you through the use all the different levels, horizontally, laterally and sagittal. There are no mirrors in the room, and nobody is allowed to watch the class.

¹⁰ In a Gaga/dancer class there is some use of ballet terminology, but this is not the main part of the class and not but used like a ballet class. A Gaga/dancer class last for 75 minutes.

Music is used in class, but what kind and how it is used varies a lot. The teachers all have different playlists, everything from, pop and rock, to samba, jazz, classical and so on. The role of music in a class also varies, it can be used to set the mood, and it can be used to enhance the quality of the movement. Some teachers use it to energise up the room – they would then play something rhythmical and turn up the volume. Some teachers do not seem to follow the music at all – it is in the background. Sometimes the music will match the movement quality, and sometimes go against it, or just be different.

Both informant A and B explain that they never plan a class in advance, the structure is improvised but there are still general principles that they aim for: “effort has to be there, speed, letting go, countdowns, sensitivity and layers” (B, personal communication, March 18, 2015). To know more about these general principles, we have to know more about the different aspects of Gaga. Informant A and B explains that the way of structuring a Gaga class is very personal. When talking about teaching Gaga, B explains that is it very connected to how she feels in her body. The best way of preparing a class is to take a class. If she does not know what is going on in her one body, it is impossible to give it to others. In order to be more authentic in her preparations, B has this saying: ”give yourself a class and share it with the others” (B, personal communication, March 18, 2015). A prefers to have 5-10 minutes on her own to listen to her body before teaching a class. Both of them mention that it is a bit scary to teach this way, but the nervousness usually disappears after a few minutes. For A, it was a big transition coming from classical based dance background, where the structure is very set and strict. She states that for her, teaching Gaga is both challenging and liberating at the same time.



Figure 4: In this picture we see Ohad Naharin (in the middle). The participants are moving in different ways, Gaga is not about shape. Photographer: Dagon.

4.2. Teacher and Participants

The relationship between the teacher and the participants is an important part of a class. A explains that she could also be inspired by something that is happening in the room. If someone does something interesting, she might use it and explore it further: “I might hear somebody connecting to a soft voice, and I invite everyone to do it and somebody yawning when we stretches and then I take it into a yawn” (A, personal communication, March 16, 2015). This means that in Gaga, the teacher influences the participants and vice versa. B says you can do a “copy paste” and imitate someone in Gaga if you are not sure what the words mean. This could be a helpful tool for participants who are unfamiliar with Gaga. The more experienced Gaga participants know the language and have an embodied experience of it. Informant C explains that he knows the sensations of for example *floating*, then the word itself become one with the movement qualities.

Ideally people are looking at the teacher and getting information visually to so even before I give the word sometimes people actually be with me in a sense (...)

Sometimes the words make me clarify physically what's happening. It can help me clarify take me in a different direction but it's really a dialogue, and it's not so separate in a way (A, personal communication, March 16, 2015).

A explains her communication with the group as a dialogue between movements and verbal expressions of the movements. She states that sometimes the group follows her movement without her giving verbal instructions then it's a communication only with movements, but it is mostly a mix of the two. B. Farnell (1999) describes this action as ‘simultaneities’:
“‘simultaneities’ bring mind and brain back into the world of embodied activity” (Farnell, 1999, p. 147). ‘Simultaneities’ is the kind of semiotic practices that are integrated when people talk in words and talk with their body through visual/kinaesthetic modalities. Farnell states that when you just copy a language or a dance without understanding the meaning, you will never fully be able to understand and at the same time experience it as it is for a knowledgeable insider. In dance, when students learn a technique, the teachers are often using imagery and metaphorical language “that results in changes in the student’s kinaesthetic concepts and neuro-muscular patterning and so in their physical performance” (Farnell, 1999, p. 151). So in Gaga the ‘simultaneities’ are an important part. Furthermore, both B and A explain that they have to wait and see when to use words and when it is enough to show it in movements. “If I say research thick texture, is there thick texture in the room, is it happening

for everyone?” (B, personal communication, March 18, 2015) If it does not happen, she has several different approaches that she uses: One of them is to go inside her body and say “why am I thick now?” and then she will scan through her body and try to explain what is happening. Another way could be to do the complete opposite and show what it is not, and then try to find it again. B states that the body is different every day. The active relationship between the teacher and the participants is therefore an important part of Gaga.

4.3. Gaga Lexicon and the Use of Images

As stated earlier, the connection between language and body language is tangled and interlaced. The language that is used in a Gaga class, can be divided into two main categories: *Gaga lexicon* and *images*.

There are around thirty-two words that are invented terms in Gaga. It is called the *Gaga lexicon*. In the *Gaga lexicon* you find words like, *lena*, *biba*, *pika*, *dolfi*, *ashi* and *tashi*. In the classes I took at Suzanne Dellal, the words *lena*, *dolfi* and *pika* appeared most frequently. *Lena* is named after the daughter of rehearsal director Aya Israeli: *dolfi* comes from Naharin’s gardener in Kilil. “The *lena* is the engine located between the navel and the groin. The *pika* is the area between the groin and the rectum. *Dolfi* refers to availability, a state in which the entire body is ready to move in any direction and in any mode” (Galili, 2015). In my participant observation words from the *Gaga lexicon* would always be followed by an explanation of the quality that the word inhabits. In this way I would for example learn about *lena* and connect this with the engine of my body. One of my informants, C, has been doing Gaga for nine years. For him the *Gaga lexicon* is incorporated into his body, and the words and the qualities is the same. B stated that some days she can wake up and *lena* is there and she can snap into everything. If she can feel it in her body, it is easier to explain it to others in class: “What is *lena*? What are moons? they can tell by looking at you, and understand it without words” (A, personal communication, March 16, 2015). B explains that sometimes she want to use the *Gaga lexicon* *lena*, and other times she wants to call it *prana* or *centre*. She says that it is an ongoing discussion amongst the teacher about whether to use these terms or not. As mentioned earlier in the text, Gaga is open to everyone, both those with experience and those without. If, however, the teachers are using the *Gaga lexicon* without explaining the terms using other words, it can be difficult for the beginners. Then it becomes a codified language that is not available for people who are not familiar with it. In my experience with

Gaga at the Suzanne Dellal Centre, the teachers did not use the *Gaga lexicon* that much, just those words that I mentioned, *lena*, *dolfi* and *pika*.

The use of images is also a major part of the language in Gaga. This is a (small) list of examples from the classes I took at Suzanne Dellal Centre:

Ropes of the arms

Helium balloons lifting the knees

Moving though honey

Marionette threads holding you

Having small weights on our body parts

Softness in the movement

Pulling the bone out of the flesh

Spine like seaweed

Traveling balls

Floating

Shake

Quake

Soft flesh

The point of this list is to get a picture of what kind of images that are used. As stated, this is a small list of examples. Youngerman (1975) states that for research to be meaningful, it needs to have an objective vocabulary. In this case, she suggests using the theories of Rudolf Laban to analyse movements. Labanotation is used to analyse and notate movements. Since you do not have a set of shapes and steps in Gaga, this is not a useful tool. However the effort-shape system analysis the qualitative aspects of the movements, this analysis system is possible to apply to Gaga movement language. The focus in effort-shape is on *how* the body moves:

Effort-shape is concerned with analytical description of the mover's control over energy flow (from bound to free), weight use (strong or light), spatial focus (direct or indirect), and time consumption (sudden or sustained), (Youngerman, 1975, p. 122).

To analyse this further, I will give a description of the qualities that images (from the list above) inhabits and connect this to the effort-shape system:

1.) *Rope of the arms/Spine like seaweed/Traveling balls*

Effort-shape:

The flow is free

Weight use is light

The spatial focus is indirect

Time consumption can vary from sudden to sustain

The expression *ropes of the arms* means to have a sense of whole when moving the arms, that you feel a connection ‘a rope’ that goes between your arms. *Spine like seaweed* has much of the same quality as *ropes of the arms*, but here you work with using the whole spine. The image of seaweed is something soft and wavy. *Traveling balls* is also an image that connects body parts together. The *traveling balls* does not jump from for example head to toe, the point of this image is the journey, in this example the balls could travel from the head through the upper body, down the spine, pelvis, foot, and then down into the toes. These three images have a similar purpose – it’s about connecting different body parts without losing details and the wholeness of it at the same time. The flow is free and the use of weight is light, the movement focus is more inwards so the spatial focus is indirect. You can have a calm and sustained time consumption, but you can also shift to sudden moves (that depends on what instructions you get in addition to this image from the Gaga teacher).

2.) *Floating/Helium balloons lifting the knees/Marionette threads holding you*

Effort-shape:

The flow is free

Weight use is light

Spatial focus varies from indirect to direct (*not in floating)

Time consumption is varies from sustained to sudden (*not in floating)

Helium balloons lifting the knees, floating, marionette threads holding you is images that describe the quality of free flow and to move with lightness in the movements. It is like a gentle force from the outside is moving your body parts, in this case *helium balloons, threads* and in the image *floating*, water is the element that springs to mind being this gentle force. The quality of *floating* is central to Gaga. This term is used in every Gaga class, and it is often

used in the beginning of a class. Gaga teachers often use *floating* as a way of getting back to a calm place if, for example, there has been a lot of effort and speed. *Floating* is a good way to connect to the wholeness of the body. The spatial focus is indirect in *floating*, while in *helium balloons* and in *marionette threads* this varies from indirect to direct. The time consumption is sustained in *floating*, in *helium balloons* and in *marionette threads* it could be both sustained and sudden.

3.) *Moving though honey/Pulling the bones out of the flesh*

Effort-shape:

The flow is bound

Weight use is strong

Spatial focus is direct

Time consumption is sustained

Moving though honey and *Pulling the bones out of the flesh* are images that work in the opposite way of the one described in part 2. Here one really uses a lot of bound force and one moves directly and ‘push the space’. *Pulling the bones out of the flesh* has a more inward-looking feeling since it is using the anatomy of the body to describe something (not anatomically correct, but still connected to this.) *Moving though honey* makes you think of honey and what qualities honey has: sticky, and not easy do move through. Working with these two images makes you use a lot of effort, when you do this you also move in a spatially direct way. Working with these images you do not make sudden changes in speed, the time consumption is sustained.

4.) *Small weights on our body parts*

Effort-shape:

The flow is bound

Weight use is strong

Spatial focus is direct

Time consumption is sustained

Having small weights on our body parts is an image that makes your body feel heavy. This image can be used in different ways, and here you feel the opposition of where the *weights* are and where they are not. You work with the contract of being heavy where the *weights* are and

light in the other body parts that do not have *weights*. However where the *weights* are, you have a bound flow, a strong use of weight, the spatial focus is direct and the time consumption is sustained.

5.) *Softness in the movement/Soft flesh*

Effort-shape:

The flow is free

Weight use is light

Spatial focus is indirect

Time consumption is sustained

Softness in the movement and *soft flesh* describes some of the same quality that is described in part 1. The different is that these images do not involve another force moving you, like in part 1. It is a gentle movement quality where you do not use much force, the weight is light and the flow is free. You have sustained time consumption and the spatial focus is indirect. You move in a sustained tempo.

6.) *Shake/Quake*

Effort-shape:

The flow is free

Weight use varies from light to strong

Spatial focus varies from light to strong*

Time consumption is sustained sudden

Shake and *quake* are images that are used a lot in Gaga classes. *Shake* is movement quality that has a stir in it, this movement can start in one body part, but it affects the whole body. In Gaga *shake* is described as something that you do on purpose, while *quake* is something that happens to you, like an earthquake. *Spatial focus in *shake* is direct. In *quake* it is indirect.

When analysing these movement images from Gaga it becomes clear that even though some of these images inhabits the same type of efforts explained in Laban's system, they all are slightly different. This variation of different kind of images does make the exploration of the movements more nuanced. Like in part 3: *Moving though honey*, it is more like pushing

though honey in the room, it has a more outside-oriented feeling, while in *Pulling the bones out of the flesh* your obstacle is inside your body, and you have to pull from the inside.

Analysing these aspects in the effort-shape system is helpful, because when thinking about the *flow, weight, space* and *time*, you realise the small nuances. Then more of the movements become richer and the layers show through. When explaining the movement in the effort-shape system, it becomes apparent that you can categorize the movements, but you also need to give a more detailed description to capture the whole quality.

4.4. The Fluid and Universal Aspects of Gaga

Galili explains that it is important to use images that people can relate to in different ways. One example of this is “having a good taste in your mouth” (Galili, 2015). This image can give association to a lot of different flavours – the main thing is that it is a good taste, not locking it to a particular thing. Gaga language here functions as a universal term; it creates a common ground for everyone in the class.

This language that Ohad invented is shared and it has a specific terminology and then also how do we find our own individuality in that...so I think by enlarge I’m really using the lexicon that he has thought and I’m playing with it, it’s not as if he said, you can only use these words in front of this and in front of this and these are the only intra sections that’s very fluid (A, personal communication, March 15, 2015).

A explains that a combination of Gaga lexicon and images is an important part of the use of language in Gaga, but the practice of it is more fluid. A states that sometimes when she teaches, an image just comes to her. She would normally use words from the Gaga vocabulary and use her own images to explain it in another way “like the cherry on top...Ad that other little thing that could be the key for somebody” (A, personal communication, March 16, 2015). A try to find words to describe the movement quality that she is after, so that the participants can understand the quality bodily. She can use her own individual words and images to help make the Gaga participants find them. This is one of the factors that make every Gaga class unique.

In Gaga the use of images and Gaga lexicon is not the only verbal information you get. There are also other phrases that are an important part of Gaga. In the 30 Gaga classes I took during

the participant observation, I found a number of words and sentences that are frequently being used (beside those I mentioned in the Gaga lexicon and images):

Be silly

Give in to sensation

Don't be shy of the effort

Smile to each other

Falling into movement

Enjoy the burring sensation

Many new beginnings

Letting go

Total sensations

Pleasure

In a Gaga class you will often hear the phrase *finding pleasure in movement* mentioned. You will also hear words that are associated with it, like: *smile to each other* and *be silly*. This is all connected to a positive way of thinking. Ohad Naharin explains it like this: “Being attentive to pleasure keeps one aware of taking care of oneself. The pleasure connects the flow of energy and information to your body, it heals you by giving you joy instead of punishment in movement” Perkovic, J. (“Ohad Naharin – going Gaga “ 2015).¹¹ So the key element here is to feel joy and to connect to pleasure while doing all of the multiple tasks in Gaga. In a Gaga class you explore movement while constantly moving. In this way it becomes a workout as well. The notion of finding pleasure while doing something physically challenging is spelled out in phrases such as *don't be shy of the effort* and *enjoy the burring sensation*. If you can manage the physical effort by connecting it to the physiological aspect of finding pleasure and enjoying yourself, you can endure more in a class.

While exploring your movements in a class, the focus is on the sensation of the movements – *give in to sensation, total sensation*. Sense or sensation is not the same as feelings. Here is an example of what it can be like to sense something: I sense that I am closed in my chest, and I sense that my stomach is cold. It could be that the feeling I have is sadness. “Sensations are

¹¹ Perkovic, J. ”Ohad Naharin – going Gaga is the difference between dancer and gymnast” (October 12, 2015), retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/australia-culture-blog/2014/mar/08/ohad-naharin-going-gaga-is-the-difference-between-dancer-and-gymnast>

build up and organised into feelings (...) but a feeling and sensation are different” Dr. F. Wildman (“The Royal Road ” 2015).¹² Wildman goes on to explain that emotions are feelings that are being acted out. In a Gaga class you do not go straight to the emotions, you are encouraged to sense what is going on inside your body. You can have many different sensations at the same time.

In Gaga you are being challenged to analyse your movements and to realise what your habits and default states are. This is often explained in class. It is associated with the phrases *many new beginnings* and *letting go*. A explains that for her, the phrase *letting go* is not just about letting go in movement. Both the physical and the psychological aspects of *letting go* are involved when she talks about this:

4.5. The Effect of Gaga

“It’s hard for me to let go: I need to let go from the beginning, it allows me to be more open” (A, personal communication, March 16, 2015). A explains that for her, there is a big overlap between Gaga and life. She says that there is this active core work that she can do herself that relates to being more open and more listening. A explains that she will use her Gaga toolbox when she is stressed – if, for example, she is late for something, she will say to herself “plenty of time” or think about her flesh, asking herself “am I grabbing, can I get there faster if I let go?” She explains that sometimes she uses language, sometimes she just have to listen or feel it: “I listen to my body when I’m moving, even when I’m walking on the street is much different now than it used to be before. I think I was very turned off before” (A, personal communication, March 16, 2015). A mentions that she really struggles to do this when she is working on her computer: “It’s a challenging to break that habit of cutting myself from the body because I’m just sitting here typing I’m not paying attention. I’m not consciously directing the focus to my body” (A, personal communication, March 16, 2015). The problem that A is talking about here, is something that I will look further into in *chapter 6* with the use of *body image* and *body schema* (Gallagher, 2005).

B explains in her interview that she had an injury in her shoulder while working as a dancer. She applied for a scholarship to go to Tel Aviv and do Gaga and heal her body. She already knew about Gaga through the Gaga intensive course. When I asked her what effect Gaga had

¹² Wildman, F. ”The Royal Road to Higher Consciousness” (October 12, 2015), retrieved from <http://www.feldenkraisinstitute.org>

on her injured shoulder, she explained that it did have a great impact. She states that Gaga kept her spirit up and that she became able to move the stiff and injured area in a way that healed her completely. She remembers that it was liberating not to have mirrors in the studio, and that no one could watch the class. B told me that if she would keep on doing ballet, she would constantly think about the shoulder not being the same as it used to be. Something changed in her way of thinking, she felt liberated.

The connection between the ways of thinking in Gaga and life in general is a notion that all my interviewee shares. Informant C stated: “Gaga is like the essence of life “it’s interesting to find new sensations; I find it very, it has a lot of qualities connected to the essence of life, fragile, powerful juicy, sensual, delicacy, explosive power “(C, personal communication, March 14, 2015). It is interesting to see that C calls Gaga “the essence of life”; this means that he refers to the different aspects of Gaga as something universal. C explains that even though he has been researching these terms and qualities for years, he can still find new meanings in them:

I mean I float for years now, I’ve been floating, quaking or shaking but still sometimes I find new things, new ways of the body, like today about curving the hand when releasing, it was like ‘hey’ it was something very small but it was ‘hey’. I never thought about it. So it doesn’t happen in every class, now because I’ve been doing it for years, but still when you still have this after these years it’s really cool (C personal communication, March 14, 2015).

C explains that he still can find new aspects of Gaga. Since the teachers are allowed to improvise in their use of images and explanations of movement, there are endless ways of combining the different aspects. This is why it is hard to pick out some of the aspects of Gaga without making it sound like these are more important than the others. Still, in the interviews with my informants, some of the terms were more frequently brought up than others: *Floating* and *quaking* and *shaking* were mentioned more than other terms. When I asked D about how she felt when she started to practice Gaga, she gave me this answer:

Amazing (...) I remember when we stood there in the very beginning like slowly lifting your arms feels like your floating (...) I could really feel I was floating and the different things. It was interesting and complicated, complex more than complicated. I

felt it was rich. There are a lot of things to research (D, personal communication, March 26, 2015).

When D talks about her first experience with Gaga, she mentions floating. She also states that she felt that it was rich and complex. B refers to a story concerning a girl in GTTP and her experience with floating; “one day after six or seven month I was floating, I was not in class I was floating, it was amazing, I understood all the layers (...) and the next day it was gone” B personal communication, March 18, 2015). B explains that it is the way it works. Working with movement quality and sensations is fluid, it is not like riding a bike. When you have learned how to ride your bike, you do not have to learn it again. With Gaga, you have to work on the same aspects again and again. The purpose is not to get from one place to another and arrive at a destination. The purpose is to be in the moment, to move and to sense.

In my field notes, I wrote that Ohad Fisher kept telling us how the *quake* is something that happens to us, while other elements we are in control over. We can actively choose to do something on top of that *quake*. I noted that this is a really philosophical question. A also sees that link between the philosophy behind *quake* and *shake* in Gaga as movement quality, and life in general: “there are things we can control and not control and that happen to us” (C personal communication, March 14, 2015). In Gaga you explore your movement possibilities within a set frame, and explore the things you can control, something that would otherwise be impossible. Still, in Gaga there is this aspect of becoming more complex and layered in your movements and here the aspects of *letting go* and *be aware of your habits and defaults* are central. In your exploration, you might notice what movements you make more frequently than others. In this case, you can choose to try out other ways of moving within the different tasks.

In this chapter I have used my informants and my own embodied experience to look at the phenomenon of Gaga. In the next chapter, I will take a slightly different approach when I look at Gaga in a cultural context; however, the embodied experience still forms the core of the research.

Chapter 5 The Cultural Context

“...A dance is an event – a behavioural process which takes place in particular cultural context (Youngerman, 2008, p. 116). With Youngman’s notion as a starting point, I will in this chapter look at Gaga in cultural context. I will describe, discuss and analyse the dancing community Gaga/people and use the questions, *when*, *where*, *who* and *why*. The questions of *when* and *where* is connected with a demographic description of Tel Aviv and the Suzanne Dellal Centre and the development of Gaga. Within this framework I will use this to look at the other two questions, concerning *who* and *why*.

In “Modernity at large - Cultural dimensions of globalization” (1996) A. Appadurai looks at the cultural dimensions of globalization. He states that he has trouble with the word culture. Culture or cultural is, according to Appadurai, loaded with different meanings, it could be “some kind of object, or substance, whether physical or metaphysical” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 12). In this part of my research I will try to place Gaga in a cultural context – but what does this mean? Randy Martin notes that a common definition of the concept of culture is “an array of activities shared by a group that set the group apart from society as a whole” (Martin, 1998, p. 116). If I use Martin’s description of culture, I will have to analyse *how* and in *what* way the dancing community Gaga/people at the Suzanne Dellal Centre functions within its cultural context.

5.1. The Dancing Community Gaga/people

As stated out in *chapter 3*, the Suzanne Dellal Centre was first founded in late 1980s when the Tel Aviv Municipality and Israel’s Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports decide to build a large dance centre, and they also saw the need for a greater institutional infrastructure to encourage its development. Shades of Dance and Curtain Up were platforms for independent choreographers, and the Suzanne Dellal Centre provided actual stages for this (Galili, 2008, p. 23). Today the Suzanne Dellal Centre is a central arena for dance and dance companies. This is also the base for the Gaga administration and the dancing community Gaga/people.

With fourteen open Gaga/people classes per week at the Suzanne Dellal Centre, the Gaga movement has grown into a rather large dancing community. Eight people work in the Gaga

management team,¹³ and there are around 70-80 Gaga teachers all together. Roughly half of the Gaga teachers live in Tel Aviv. In the dancing community Gaga/people you find a variety of people with regards to age, gender and nationality. Some of them have a background in dance or are currently working as dancers, and some have a completely different occupation. I met people who was taking their first Gaga class, and one man who had been doing Gaga for nine years, give or take. In general there were around 30-40 people in the classes I attended during my fieldwork.

5.2. Father Gaga

“Abba Gaga, todah habah.” Informant B puts her palms together and leans her forehead towards them. We are sitting on a bench right beside the Suzanne Dellal Centre in Tel Aviv. It is March 18, 2015, and the smell of the orange blossoms is all around. The semi-structured interview with informant B from Norway became a dialogue where her lived experience contributed new insights to the research. As Kvale states, the purpose of doing an interview is “to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale, 1996, pp. 5-6). In order to do this, it was important that our communication flowed both ways and was not a one-way street. When interviewing B from Norway, I quickly ended up in a layered conversation about her journey with Gaga. It is a story that is very personal and tangled. When I ask her about Ohad Naharin, she states very clearly that he is the centre and the leader of the Gaga movement language. B describes Naharin as a father, and the core of Gaga. She states that it is important to stay in touch with what is going on, because Gaga is still evolving. Informant A and B were both a part of the Gaga teacher-training program GTTP that took place from 2011-2012. It was a one-year program, and B describes it as intense for everyone involved. Until now, this is the only teacher-training program that has been held. B mentions that after the GTTP Naharin opened up for taking Gaga into the world. In Tel Aviv, the teacher can receive feedback once a month or so. For those Gaga teachers who have their home in other places it is mandatory to receive feedback in Tel Aviv once a year to keep in touch with what is going on. B explains that since Gaga is still evolving, Naharin can come up with a new word or a term. She explains that it is important to be informed of this, and that she feels lucky to be close to the source. B describes Naharin as the stem and roots. She states that people that are teaching

¹³ (No author) “Management team” (October 3, 2015), retrieved from <http://gagapeople.com/english/category/team/management/>

Gaga, are doing really well. B explains that the dancing community Gaga/People in Tel Aviv is her second family. “In Gaga teachers family the bonds between us are strong. E is like a sister to me” (B personal communication, March 18, 2015). B has taught Gaga in kibbutzes all over Israel, in Scandinavia and in the US. When I ask her to compare Gaga/people classes at Suzanne Dellal with these classes in other places, she states that you do not even have to go outside of Israel to tell the difference. She explains that people do not get into the material so quickly, they do more of a “copy-paste”; however, she adds that this is allowed in Gaga. B states that when she practices Gaga outside of the Suzanne Dellal Centre, it is different. She explains that they are not a community in the same way, they are open and see you, but it is not the same (B personal communication, March 18, 2015). B explains that people outside the dancing community at Suzanne Dellal “don’t get into the stuff so quickly”. At Suzanne Dellal you have Gaga participants who have been doing Gaga for years. They know the movement language, and they know each other (not all of them, but most of them).

Reflecting upon B’s experience of Gaga outside of Suzanne Dellal, I had an ‘aha’ movement when I took a Gaga class in a different dance studio in Tel Aviv called Naim. At studio Naim, we went through the different qualities and textures; all the usual ingredients of a Gaga class. The participants in this class were closer in age (about 20-35 years). People moved with higher amounts of energy and speed than at Suzanne Dellal. At one point in this class I was kicked. It took me by surprise, as it had not happened before. When I reflected upon this experience, I realised that even though some of the classes were packed at Suzanne Dellal, and people were moving their whole body, making big gestures, this never happened here. Could it be a coincidence? It could be that in this Gaga class there was not the same spatial awareness as there was at Suzanne Dellal. At Suzanne Dellal, the regular group of Gaga participants might have had something to do with this. My theory here is that the awareness the regular group of participants at Suzanne Dellal have, can be trained through Gaga, but how does this happen? In *chapter 6* I will analyse Gaga with the use of *body image* and *body schema* to see what awareness can be, and how this is used in Gaga.

After her interview with me, B explained that she felt that she had really changed since she moved to Tel Aviv. She said she could recognize my way of being, my ‘Norwegian habitus’ so to speak. By looking and talking to me, she reflected upon her own habitus, and she noticed the change. She said that she felt much more upfront than me. B reflected further on how it was to move to a new country. She told me that it was hard “learning a new language

and all of that, the culture is totally different here, you have to adapt, people struggle for surviving, if you don't have the attitude that everything is possible, it is impossible to live here" (B personal communication, March 18, 2015). B describes Tel Aviv as an expensive bubble, and that the prices are almost as high as in Scandinavia, but the income is one third. B explains that at the end of the month, most people are in the red, or at best manage to break even. The economic issue that B touches upon here, is a complicated matter. B also told me how scared she was last summer (in 2014) when the war in Gaza was going on. The missile alarm went off three or four times a day. She told me that this happened when she was teaching a Gaga class, and that it was strange and frightening experience. Informant C also told me that he is both scared and sad of the political situation in Israel. The Israeli legislative election was held March 17, 2015, during my stay in Tel Aviv. Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud Party formed a coalition with Jewish Home, United Torah Judaism, Kulanu, and Shas, and they won against the opposition, The Labor Party and Hatnuah, with the bare minimum of 61 seats.¹⁴ Those of my informants that I spoke with after the election felt deeply sad. They had hoped for change. The tense and charged situation between Israel and Palestine has not seen any progress since then, and now in the fall of 2015, it does not seem like a peaceful solution is within reach. The conflict seems to have taken a turn for the worse and violent attacks from both sides of the border is now featured on the news daily. To get an in-depth understanding of how this situation affects people in Tel Aviv and Israel, I would have to dedicate the rest of this thesis to this research (at least). However, this subject will not be explored further in this text. Still, to not mention this aspect at all would also have seemed wrong when looking at Gaga in a cultural context. Gaga was, after all, born in Israel. Changes in society like the economic situation and huge political conflicts like the one in Israel can change people's behavior. To say something about how Gaga is connected to all of this, is a difficult task. In this case, I would also have to use quantitative methods and statistics to be able to draw some conclusions. I would also have to thoroughly research the historical aspects behind it. Since this is not the case here, I will instead look further into the Batsheva, Gaga and Naharin connection.

The Batsheva Company has its base at the Suzanne Dellal Centre alongside the Gaga/people classes. As stated in *chapter 3.1*, Naharin is the artistic leader and choreographer of Batsheva:

¹⁴ Times of Israel Staff (October 13, 2015) "Final vote tally seals Likud win, leaves Yachad out", retrieved from <http://www.timesofisrael.com/final-vote-tally-seals-likud-win-leaves-yachad-out/>

5.3. The Batsheva/Gaga/Naharin Connection

In the dance world, there is a clear connection between Gaga, Batsheva and Naharin. But when it comes to Gaga/people classes outside of Israel, not everyone has heard about Ohad Naharin. However, in Gaga/people classes at the Suzanne Dellal Centre it is simply impossible not to know about the Gaga/Batsheva/Naharin connection since they take classes in the same building.

After two decades of creative partnership, Batsheva Dance Company and Naharin are inextricably linked in the public's mind. It is difficult to mention one without invoking the name of the other, and for younger generations of dancers and dance-lovers, it is partially impossible to imagine Batsheva without the imprint of Naharin's choreography of his movement language, Gaga (Galili, 2012, p. 195).

As Galili here states, dancers who practice Gaga have (most likely) heard about the Batsheva Company and know that Ohad Naharin is the choreographer and director of the company. Both A and B found their way into Gaga through seeing Batsheva perform. B explains in her interview that she was captivated by Batsheva's performance when she first saw them in Copenhagen. B explains that she could see that there was something in the way these dancers moved, something she had not seen before. B took her first Gaga class shortly after seeing the performance, and stated that "it didn't cash on" (B personal communication, March 18, 2015). B told me that at this point in her life she was most concerned with technique, high legs and pirouettes. It was not until later that B returned to Gaga, this time the Gaga intensive class with both repertoire (Batsheva/Naharin) and Gaga classes. B describes this as a "wow"-experience. It was a perfect match. B states that she found something that she did not know she was looking for. A describes her dance training as very traditional. Her training included mostly ballet, and later she also took classes based on Paul Taylor's and Martha Graham's work, early American Modern dance. She had a strong reaction after seeing Batsheva perform:

I was captivated by; I mean I've never seen anybody move like that ever (...) I was given a lot by the training that I've got but in a sense I needed to free myself from it because it was so structured, so shaped based, and you know really not about sensation not how it feel, much more about how does it look, and I didn't understand that that the Gaga was really dealing with that but maybe unconsciously I could recognise

something that I could see in Batsheva that was speaking to this kind of attraction to me (A, personal communication, March 16, 2015).

Since A has a traditional dance background she could recognise the ‘Gaga’-factor in Batsheva’s performance. She describes her dance background as shaped-based, structured and more about how it looks than how it feels. She could see that there was something else in Batsheva’s performance that spoke to her. The same happened to A, as mentioned earlier. The dancers in the Batsheva Company are highly trained technical dancers. One of my informants, D, is in the Batsheva Ensemble. She told me that she mostly danced ballet before starting in the Batsheva Ensemble. Ohad Naharin has a dance background that is similar to A’s as well, consisting of ballet and early modern dance from the United States.

5.4. Technique and Style: the Labels that doesn’t quite Fit

In Galili’s analysis of Gaga movement language she writes that “Gaga is alive and adaptable, and its verbal lexicon continues to absorb new vocabulary—both invented and otherwise—and to shed terms as their research is refined” (Galili, 2015). Galili argues that Gaga is not a technique. In dance techniques drilling is necessary to create the body of a dancer. Galili comments that Gaga is not aiming to shape the body of a dancer in this way. Hamera defines technique as “a lexicon, a grammar of/or affiliation – even a rhetoric –in motion it facilitates interpersonal and social relations as it shapes bodies” (Hamera, 2007, p. 5). In *chapter 5* it was established that Gaga has a lexicon and a verbal language with some particular phrases that are repeated. When it comes to the “interpersonal and social relations”, Gaga does include communication with bodies in the room, but Gaga is not about shaping the body into a particular form. Naharin explained in an interview that “I don’t like to call it a technique. Because also it’s still evolving, it’s still so open; it’s still so open to change its mind” (Galili, 2015). Here Naharin states that he does not define Gaga as a technique because it is not a set dance vocabulary.

Sometimes I see critiques that look at Ohad’s repertory on stage and say this is Gaga or they say their moving in the style of Gaga or the rhythm of Gaga, and this is very interesting because I’m not sure what the rhythm of Gaga is. It doesn’t make sense course they see choreography and they confuse it with this training (A personal communication, March 16, 2015).

A mention that several dance critics refers to Gaga as a *style*. She does not agree with this. Galili suggests that when it comes to the term *style* Gaga is more a byproduct of the methodology. The *style* is then more about the ideas and the principles of Gaga (Galili, 2015). Youngerman states that even though *style* can be a subtle and slippery phenomenon to study, she suggests that Labananalysis as a way to illuminate aspects of it (Youngerman, 1975). In Gaga you cannot make video recordings or conduct observations, and because of this, it is impossible to do a full Labananalysis. In *chapter 4* an effort-shape was used to analyse some of the images in Gaga. However effort-shape is about the movement qualities alone, not notation of “a dance” (Youngerman, 1975). Is it then possible to say something about Gaga in the terms of *style*? In Gaga you do have ideas and principles; you also have certain movement aspects that are being used more frequently than others. In *chapter 4* the term *floating* came up as an important aspect of Gaga. When people *float*, they have the movement qualities of free flow, the weight is light, the spatial focus is indirect, and time consumption is sustained. Since you use *floating* in every Gaga class, this way of moving might be something that people think about in the terms of Gaga aesthetics or *style*. However, this movement quality alone does not represent all of the ideas and principles of Gaga. The terminology that Hamera and Youngerman use to describe technique and *style* does not quite fit with the Gaga movement language. The ideas and principles of Gaga will not function if you only look at one ‘piece’ of the puzzle or just look at one layer, this in itself does not describe the whole phenomenon. To look at other concepts and levels of Gaga I will use the framework of somatic methods, *body image* and *body shema* (Gallagher, 2005).

Chapter 6 Concepts and Other Levels of Gaga

In this chapter, Gaga's connection to somatic therapy and the use of *body image* and *body schema* will be used as a theoretical framework. "The dance exists as a body of concepts and feelings – the cognitive and affective dimensions that are associated with dance on each of the other "levels" (Youngerman, 1975, p. 116). This chapter will reflect upon the findings from the other chapters as well as draw notion to the analysis and reflections that have been mentioned.

6.1. Comparing Gaga to Somatic Therapy

At Suzanne Dellal several of the informants were familiar with somatic therapy and somatic methods (as mentioned earlier.) One woman talked about Anna Halprin and her work with using imagery with cancer patients, she also mentioned that she used Thai Chi as a part of her own method with the same kind of patients. Another woman had experience with Alexander Technique and a man had experience with the Ilan Lev Method. An American couple were doing research on how to combine elements from somatic based therapy with elements from dance and improvisation. They were interested in seeing how Gaga could help them in this research (I was lucky enough to be given access to their notes from the Gaga classes they took during their stay in Tel Aviv). Both of them were most helpful, and we had many conversations before and after classes. One of things they observed was the conflict between the correct anatomical understanding of the different types of joints, and their more imagistic exploration/expansion, e.g. place a ball in your elbow joint. Galili also mentions that Gaga in some way relates to images in the same way as Ideokinesis and somatic-based methods do, but the intention is different: "Gaga itself is not predicated on a though anatomical understanding of the body" (Galili, 2015). To be able to analyse and compare somatic therapy to Gaga, it is important to get a clearer definition. In his wonderful book "Bone, Breath and Gesture" (1995) D.H. Johnson has collected qualitative interviews with people who have significant experience within this field. The word *somatics* was introduced by T. Hana in the journal *Somatics* in 1977. He used *somatics* to distinguish it from the commonly used adjective somatic as in psychosomatic. *Somatics* is a broad field, and within this field you find various methods of therapy. Historical traces can reveal that practices of embodiment like this have existed since the 1800s. One example of this is the German writer Leo Knofler, who wrote the book "The Art of Breathing" (1887). These practices have a longer clinical history

than for example psychoanalysis and other, newer kinds of psychoanalysis or physical medicine (Johnson, 1995). As mentioned in *chapter 3.1*, Ohads mother, Sofia Naharin, was a student of Moshe Feldenkrais. With this in mind the connection between Gaga and the somatic practice of Feldenkrais will be explored further.

6.1.1. Moshe Feldenkrais

Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984) was born in what is today the Ukrainian Republic (formerly a part of Russia), and had a background in engineering – mechanics and electricity. He started practicing Judo in the 1930s and moved to Tel Aviv in 1954, where he founded the somatic therapy methods called Awareness Thought Movement (ATM) and Functional Integration (FI). His method is known as Feldenkrais' method or just Feldenkrais.¹⁵ Students of Feldenkrais state that the benefits of practicing these methods are many; they could breathe more freely, that became lighter, fuller and more relaxed. "I have been privileged to examine, by touching and moving, more human heads than I dare to say. They have come from all walks of life and from many races, cultures, religions, and all ages" (Feldenkrais, 1995, p. 138; Johnson, 1995). Feldenkrais was interested in the question of 'how' rather than 'why' and 'what', in his method. "In science, we really only know how" (Feldenkrais, 1995, p. 137; Johnson, 1995). This shows that Feldenkrais compared his work to science, or that he was conducting a kind of bodily research in a scientific manner. In the Feldenkrais method an important part of the practice is to discover how to perform a movement in a more direct and efficient way, and at the same time analyse what happens in your body, what happens to your breathing, what is going on in your neck? Mia Segal, one of Feldenkrais students, explains, "There are many different ways one can go about it. The difference lies in how it is done" (Hanna, 1995, p. 118). The focus is on the whole of the body, while at the same time scanning one is scanning different body parts and movements – the intention is to move more directly and efficiently.

When comparing Gaga to the notion of moving in the most direct and efficient way, as in Feldenkrais, one sees that there is a difference in purpose. In Gaga you analyse how you move in relation to the different movement tasks and suggestions that are given. You are then encouraged by the teacher to analyse this while you move. When you do this, you start to pay

¹⁵ (No author) "Curriculum and learning strategy" (2015, October 9), retrieved from <http://www.feldenkraisinstitute.org/training.html#training>

attention to what your habits and default movements are. This far Feldenkrais and Gaga are not dissimilar, but how one proceeds from there is not the same. In Gaga, if you for example notice that your movements are usually symmetric, you will be encouraged to try and explore something else, for example an asymmetric position. When you are aware of your habits and default movement patterns, it opens up the possibility of expanding your range of movements. In this way, you will learn to move with more richness. Eventually, if you do pay attention to this, you will be able to incorporate more layers into your movements. In this way, you will have more nuance and complexity in your movement patterns. In Feldenkrais, you also notice your habits and default movements, but the purpose is not to go to the other extreme in the movements, as you can in Gaga. In Gaga, the spatial aspect is important, you move around a lot in all directions. In Feldenkrais you work mostly stationary. In Gaga, there is no pause, you move constantly; in Feldenkrais you stop, talk and reflect between the movement tasks.

6.1.2. The Use of Touch

In Feldenkrais touching is an important part of the method. Feldenkrais himself states that touching is more directly connected with the unconscious – it is more effective and less distorted than verbal language. Words can hide the intention more than express it, touching is more direct. Even though touch is important, Feldenkrais notes “a certain kind of knowledge can pass from one person to another without a touch” (1995, p. 143; Johnson, 1995). Segal states that many people focus on what Feldenkrais did with his hands. In one video recording, the director had zoomed in on his hands, but for her, this was totally wrong. She states that this takes the method out of its context. Touching is not just about the hands, but also about how the whole body moves and communicates.

In Gaga/people classes you normally do not use touch¹⁶. In Gaga, the whole group moves together, but as individuals. Still, when Feldenkrais talks about his method as a dance, it refers to a holistic way of thinking, which is also an important part of Gaga. Though the focus in Gaga can be on moving for example with the initiative in one’s fingers, we are always reminded to think about how this affects the whole body. What happens in my belly or in my knee when I initiate the movement from my fingers? As Segal states, in Feldenkrais you cannot just zoom in on the hands, you have to look at the whole body to understand what is

¹⁶ Use of touch did occur in one Gaga/people class I did at Susanne Dellal Centre. It is used in Gaga/dancers class sometimes, but then it often comes at the end of a class, where you would do some movements in pairs 5 minutes or so.

going on. When Feldenkrais talks about dancing in his method, he refers to the learning process that happens between him and his students. It is a conversation between bodies, not just a shape that he wants his students to be moulded into. When Segal was studying the Feldenkrais method, she would observe Mosche Feldenkrais and then try it out. Feldenkrais would never stop and explain during a session. Later she would try to be a student herself and have a session with Feldenkrais, and vice versa. This is learning by doing or master teaching.

In a session, Feldenkrais' question could be "how do I move to do this?" Segal explains. Then he would show how he went through the process in his body. When Segal asked Feldenkrais how he would prepare a class, she asked him if he was improvising, and the answer was yes. "I'm always teaching the same kind of movement – only with a different sauce" (Feldenkrais, 1995, p. 118; Johnson, 1995). Feldenkrais was not talking about a shape here – he simply states that there are many ways to explain the same movement. "In saying that I work with people I mean that I am 'dancing' with them" (Feldenkrais, 1995, p. 140; Johnson, 1995). In a Gaga class you have that same 'dance' between the participants and the teacher as Feldenkrais describes. Informant A explains the relationship as interlaced.

I mean there are times when I want to get to this place, it just feels right to me and then I'm consider trying to get there. But there are other times when I, it's in a sense more mixed, or interlaced. I find myself somewhere and then I need to find the word to use that I can give people to help them join me" (A personal communication, March 16, 2015).

What A explains here, is that when she teaches Gaga, sometimes her body will be one step ahead of the verbal description of it. To make sure that everyone is following her in the class, she needs to find the words to help people get into the same state as her. In a particular good Gaga class, the contract between the participants and the teacher works in such a way that everyone influences each other. In classes where it does not work in the same way, someone might be pulling out and not committing to the task that is given. All the participants and the teacher have a great impact on the whole group. A Gaga class might be experienced differently from person to person, but when you dance in a group, sometimes magic is created. This magic has to do with a positive spiral effect. Feldenkrais explains that movements and dance are not necessarily something that has to be explained in words. The

body can communicate directly, and when a whole group of people pull in the same direction, it's a powerful feeling.

In Gaga the communication is connected to the whole group, in Feldenkrais the communication can go through touch, one to one or a in a group session: "When touching I seek nothing from the person I touch; I only feel what I can do at that moment to make the person feel better. It's essential to understand what I mean by "better" and "more human" (Feldenkrais, 1995, p. 140; Johnson, 1995). Feldenkrais explains that this can mean different things to different people. B told me about an experience with a group of young dance students, she taught Gaga to them for three months. At the end of this period, she asked them if they had noticed the change that had happened. She explained that they really dared to go into the flesh and bone, and dived into the research. They enjoyed the pleasure in effort and were not afraid to look silly and ugly. In the end, they had thrown away more and more layers and had become beautiful. B tells me that they were amazed by their own efforts and all that had been peeled away: they became more themselves. Feldenkrais refers to this as being "better" or "more human". Galili writes in her article about Gaga that after the GTTP, Leia Weil (one of the graduate students) observed: "When I'm looking at Clea; I'm seeing even more Clea than I ever got to see before. I've been so moved by seeing the amazing people around me come into themselves in a big, big way" (Galili, 2015). This notion of seeing more of a person, becoming better or more human, is not so easily explained. B explains that the student she worked with "peeled of layers" and "dived into the research". She describes it as a state of being open-minded and not holding back or feeling stupid for moving in a silly or ugly way.

6.1.3. The Healing Aspects

In the book "Breath, bone and gesture" (1995), Johnson writes in the introduction that many of the pioneers of somatic based methods started their practice when faced with injury or sickness. This happened to Moche Feldenkrais and to Ohad Naharin. It was an injury that set the wheels spinning in terms of the development of Gaga. We know that Naharin had some knowledge about the Feldenkrais method though his mother Sophia Naharin, who was a student of Moche Feldenkrais. Naharin recovered from his injury after developing Gaga. B told me that her shoulder was healed while doing Gaga. Naharin explains in an interview that "I really needed to dance both to heal and as a source for body pleasure, to compensate for the pain that my body gave me (...) and to be able to overcome the injury by becoming more

efficient, more coordinated, more clever, so I can bypass the injury and still do more with less” (Galili, 2015). The notion of doing more with less effort, as Naharin mentions here, is the same one B described when talking about her students: that their “layers were peeled off”. Naharin and B here suggest that in our movements, we have incorporated a lot of unnecessary elements; we can train ourselves to peel them off and do more with less effort. M. Bales explains that in somatic practices “the idea is often to pare down, not build up (muscle, habits); to get out of the way (of nature’s better decision), to allow rather than to make something happen; to ‘listen’ to the movement impulse before acting” (2008, p. 15). In this case, Gaga and somatic methods have a lot in common.

By comparing Gaga to the somatic based method of Feldenkrais, I can see that there are a lot of similarities: 1.) The way of thinking about the whole body and still pay attention to details in different movements is the same. 2.) The interaction between the teacher and the participants/students is all about communication, a dance; this is also the same in both practises. 3.) The effect of Gaga and Feldenkrais can be to be *more human, better* and to *peel away layers*.

The differences between those two practises are as follows: 1.) Gaga is very spatial and works with a range of qualities. Feldenkrais works with movements in a mostly stationary way, and the intention is to see how you can move more efficiently and directly. 2.) In Gaga/people you do not use touch as a method, in Feldenkrais this is a central method. 3.) The vocabulary that is used in Gaga, is not concerned with using anatomically correct descriptions and images. In the Feldenkrais method they use anatomically correct descriptions.

6.2. The Use of Body Schema and Body Image in Gaga

In this research, I found that the use of *body image* and *body schema* (Gallagher, 2005) can be interesting when applied to Gaga. *Body image* is used when we consciously think about a movement. *Body schema* is all the knowledge that is embodied, and that you do not consciously have to think about. This is connected to the proprioception called kinesthesia, which means movement sense. These terms can not only be useful for analysing movements in Gaga, the practice of Gaga can in itself be a sort of research into the way we structure experience and shape our sense of self.

Gallagher discusses whether there is a terminological problem associated with the meaning and use of *body schema* and *body image* (2005). In his work on cognitive psychology, Parson and several others in this field mixes the use of these two terms, and suggest that they mean the same. Merleau-Ponty describes the term ‘schema corporal’ as a system that operates according to habit rather than conscious choice, with only a marginal awareness of the body. He associates *body schema* with a *global awareness*. Gallagher points out that in “The Phenomenology of Perception” (1945) this is not explained thoroughly. “Many of the conceptual ambiguities concerning body image and *body schema* revolve, in part, around the question whether and to what extent an image or schema involves consciousness” (Gallagher, 2005, p. 21). Gallagher argues that to better understand embodiment and its role in cognition and experience, *body schema* and *body image* can be explained as different phenomena.

6.2.1. Body schema/Body Image

Body schema is, according to Gallagher, a “system of sensory-motor functions that operate below the level of self-referential intentionality” (Gallagher, 2005, p. 21). It is not automatic, but close to automatic. *Body schema* is a process “without reflective awareness or perceptual monitoring” (Gallagher, 2005, pp. 37-38). In daily life we do not think about how to reach for a glass of water. We do it without ‘thinking’ (consciously) about it.

I move my body directly, I do not find it at one objective point in space in order to lead it to another, I have no need of looking for it because it is always with me. I have no need of directing it toward the goal of the movement, in a sense it touches the goal from the very beginning and it throws itself towards it. In movement, the relation between my decision and my body are magical ones” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, p. 97).

Merleau-Ponty is here referring to the way his *body schema* is embodied, so that he does not have to think consciously about his movements. *Body schema* works in a holistic way, relating to the world around us. It also relates to objects in our environment. Only in specific situations do we think about this consciously, for example when you sit for a long time by your computer – your back might begin to ache. You might be aware of your back during the whole session, but a in a marginal sense. Gallagher argues that in contrast to *body schema* - *body image* implies that one is consciously attending to the body. The *body image* is being used to control movements, for example when you learn dance steps. If you practice the steps

many times, they will be a part of your *body schema* and you can perform them without consciously having to think about them. The way that *body image* works, attention can only be directed at one area at the time. Gallagher explains that this means that when analysing the embodied experience of one's own body, there are certain limitations.

How does the concept of *body image* and *body schema* work in Gaga? When I practice Gaga I have a feeling of working from both the 'inside' and the 'outside' at the same time. Let me explain this a little closer: By 'inside' I mean when I consciously think about my movements and "attend to only one part or area or aspect of the body at a time" (Gallagher, 2005, p. 36) and what Gallagher refers to as *body image*. This happens a lot in Gaga, for example when the teacher is giving a specific instruction, such as 'move your sit bones away from your chest'. Then I would use the *body image* to consciously think about this movement, paying attention to one area of my body. When doing this in class, I would sometimes become introverted and go 'inside' myself. I would concentrate on myself, and sometimes I would want to close my eyes and really focus on the movement in order to block out any impressions from the outside. In Gaga, though, the teachers would always remind us, the participants, to open our eyes. They would not let us go completely 'inside' ourselves. They wanted us to see the other people in the room. Sometimes they would tell us to smile to each other. Sometimes they would give us instruction to use our eyes and look around the room, and not to look down at the floor. For me, this made the experience of the movement completely different – a feeling of being 'outside', paying attention to what is happening in the room, while at the same time paying attention to *body image* and consciously thinking about movements from the 'inside'. When I talk about being 'outside', this expression cannot translate into the meaning *body schema* as Gallagher explains it. Being 'outside' is of course not to go 'outside' my body, which is impossible. The feeling of 'outside' is when I consciously pay attention to other people in the room and see how they move. In Gaga, you move constantly, so that while you are doing this, you are also moving. When I do this, my *body schema* is being used. Still, I can also at the same time go 'inside' myself and work with movements that I consciously think about.

This multitasking was hard in the beginning of the participant observation, when my focus would be more inward looking, but after a while I could manage to do both. Some days this was easier than others. This bridge between being 'inside', or thinking consciously about the movements, and at the same time paying attention to everyone in the room, is a complex and

wonderful feeling. In one class in particular this all worked very well. People would not bump into each other, even though we were moving fast and changing directions. I think people were concentrating and really looking out, and feeling the space between themselves and the others – an awareness of the movements.

6.2.2. Awareness

We normally experience our body as our own, “it is my body”. When dancing with a partner, Gallagher explains that he sometimes cannot tell where his body ends and his partner’s body begins:

My body has to take into postural-schematic account the moving extension of my partner, so that, one might say, the body schema includes information that goes beyond the narrow boundaries defined by body image. This extension of the body schema into its surrounding environment is reflected in its neural representation (Gallagher, 2005, p. 37).

Gallagher here refers to a dance where he is in physical contact with his partner. In Gaga there is no physical contact still there is this important aspect of paying attention to the people in the room.¹⁷ Gallagher talks about an ‘extension of his own body’, in Gaga, even though there is no physical contact, this could happen to the whole room of bodies. As Feldenkrais also writes, “a certain kind of knowledge can pass from one person to another without a healing touch” (Feldenkrais, 1995, p. 143). Feldenkrais talks about bodily communication. In Gaga you train your body to be alert and aware of the surrounding bodies moving about. The discussion of what this awareness includes is another aspect of this debate. Gaga can be looked at as a way of being alert to the surrounding world, training one’s marginal awareness of one’s surroundings, while at the same time paying attention to *body image*. In Gaga you practise being ‘inside’ and exploring movement consciously, while at the same time paying attention to what is going on in the room.

We become more *aware* of our form. We connect to the sense of the endlessness of possibilities. We explore multi-dimensional movement; we enjoy the burning sensation in our muscles, we are ready to snap, we are *aware* of our explosive power

¹⁷ Though in some Gaga/dancers classes you can find some contact work, normally towards the end of the class. This is, however, not the main focus in Gaga/dancers classes either.

and sometimes we use it. We change our movement habits by finding new ones. We go beyond our familiar limits. We can be calm and alert at once.” Ohad Naharin¹⁸

Naharin describes how Gaga can make us be aware of ourselves. This awareness also includes being aware of others. In Gaga there is also the aspect of doing a copy paste. If you cannot find a connection to the words, you can find meaning in the movement when copying someone else’s movement. Sometimes a Gaga teacher would encourage this action: “look at me and synchronize, actually copy, synchronise you quake to mine, you can gain a lot” (O. Fisher, 2015).¹⁹ This synchronising is not used in every Gaga class, but as B also stated, it is totally allowed to copy the movements of others.

In the early 1990s, neuroscientists discovered a type of brain cell that responds in the same way when we perform an action and when we witness someone else perform the same action. These cells are called mirror neurons. The scientific research on mirror neurons is relevant in the study of empathy as well as autism and the development of language. “Researchers want to understand how we perceive other people's emotions and sensations, not only their actions” Winerman, L. (“The mind’s mirror” 2015).²⁰ Gallagher writes that we use our mirror neurons to copy movements from the day we are born. The instinct of copying the movements of others feels like a natural thing. So how does this copying influence the experience of moving in a Gaga class? In a Gaga class, you have to keep your eyes open and pay attention to what is going on in the room. At the same time, the Gaga teacher gives you information in the form of words and movements. As explained before, the Gaga teacher has a certain movement quality or textures that he or she wants to share with the class. In Gaga you can try to find you own way of connecting this to your movements, but you are also in room with other moving bodies. In this way you can actively use your mirror neurons to copy someone else’s movements, by this I mean in shape and quality, or you can try to find your own way of carrying out this movement task. Gaga is not a about going into a particular shape, but if you do not know how to find the quality of the movement, you can “borrow” someone else’s movements, and then it is possible for you find the movement quality. The use of mirror neurons is in this way different from if you are learning a dance step, which has a particular

¹⁸ Naharin, O. “Gaga, the movement language developed by Ohad Naharin” (July 7. 2015), retrieved from <http://gagapeople.com/english/>

¹⁹ O. Fisher, audio recording from a Gaga class, March 29, 2015.

²⁰ L. Winerman ”The mind’s mirror” (October 2, 2015), retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/monitor/oct05/mirror.aspx>

shape. When you learn a dance step, you have to use mirror neurons and *body image*, in Gaga you only have to use this if you decide that you need to. “The subjective states of other are available to us through their behaviour, just as our behaviour is also available to them” (Thomas, 2003, p. 62; Crossley, 1995). In a Gaga class this could also mean that if you see someone performing a movement that you find interesting, you could try to copy it, and then you would use mirror neurons and *body image*. Since humans use mirror neurons from infancy, it is possible that you could copy someone in Gaga without consciously thinking about it, only using your *body schema*, but this cannot happen if you use your *body image* in the process. Then you would be aware of it. In this way, when using *body image* and *body schema* to analyse movements, Gaga itself can be a research tool for finding out how we shape experience.

Chapter 7 Summary/Finding Layers in the Gaga Movement Language

In this MA thesis I have explored the lived experience of the movement language Gaga in the dancing community Gaga/people at the Suzanne Dellal Centre, Tel Aviv. Both the phenomenon and the cultural phenomenon of Gaga has been discussed and analysed in various ways. Using the hermeneutic circle, I will look back at the different chapters:

My findings show that combining methodologies, as Youngerman and Saukko suggest, does give an in-depth insight into Gaga. By using B. Farnell's (1999) concept of 'simultaneities' to analyse how Gaga functions, I found that in Gaga the use of verbal language combined with movement language is used in a dynamic way, where the Gaga teacher collaborates with the participants. The use of Laban's effort-shape analysis in Gaga shows that the movement qualities that are being used, have a lot of nuances. In the dancing community Gaga/people at Suzanne Dellal, many of the participants are familiar with somatic based method, and by analysing and comparing Gaga to Feldenkrais I found that Gaga has a great deal in common with this somatic method. By using *body image* and *body schema* to analyse the phenomenon of Gaga, I found that this could be a tool to see how we shape experience. By looking at Gaga in a cultural context and analysing its demographic and historical aspects I found that Gaga is connected to Ohad Naharin, the Batsheva Company and the Suzanne Dellal Centre.

P. Saukko's notion of combining lived experience with the macrocosms is difficult to put into practice. I found it harder to look at the big picture than to look at the details. Still I can see that using the cultural context is valuable, because it shows how a practice like Gaga is connected to the world. To dig into the microcosms of Gaga was somewhat easier, and writing about a lived experience felt more graspable than writing about the cultural context. The problem of writing about one's own experiences in an academic paper, is that you can easily get lost in your stream of thoughts, and you can end up writing more for yourself than for the sake of the research, which of course not the intention. The theoretical framework became my lifeline in this case. The information from my wonderful informants through interviews, correspondence and conversations, has been invaluable. I do believe that conversations and dialogues are very important tools for academic research. In the hermeneutic approach (and in this research), there are multiple truths.

7.1. Reflections of My Own Personal Experience with Gaga

Since a large part of my research was participant observation and writing about my embodied experience, sometimes my thoughts would wander off into a choreographic idea that would be interesting to explore. When I reflect on this way of doing research, I can see that it has a lot to do with my background and habitus as a dancer. I must admit that I was drawn to write about Gaga because I knew that I would have to take a lot of classes in order to get the research material needed. Since I am both a researcher (student) and a dancer/choreographer, the latter role would sometimes take over in my chain of thoughts. When I look at my field notes in retrospect and analyse them, I can clearly see that my dance background has influenced my experience with Gaga:

We had a task where we were supposed to play with opposition. Feeling a movement coming from a totally different place, example when moving you toes you would emphasise that you move from you head. By doing this I really got an association from working on material in my performance *Paper Wings*. Here we really explored oppositions and feeling to points at the same time (Hogstad, March 3, 2015, Field notes).

These particular movements related to my dance performance *Paper Wings* and some of the research that I used in it. This in itself is not an incorrect observation, but it was not quite relevant for my task a researcher. My point here is that my role as a researcher sometimes overlapped with my role as a dancer/choreographer. I noted that this was something that I had to keep in mind both when writing and when analysing my field notes. To be able to this, I used Spradley's list in order to be strict about my observations. The list includes looking at different aspects: space, participants, activity, objects, action, event, time, purpose and sensation (Spradley, 1980, p. 78; Hammersly and Atkinson, 1996). Spradley's list helped me to be more diverse and also strict in my descriptions.

My fieldwork in Tel Aviv Yafo lasted for a month. I arrived on February 27, and left March 31. This was my first time in Tel Aviv and Israel. Coming to this new city all by myself was a strange experience. I rented an apartment in Florentine, a dusty bohemian neighbourhood. Being an outsider coming in to Tel Aviv was not very easy. Hebrew letters are not intelligible for me, and some of the translations from Hebrew into the English are not accurate. A Street could be named one thing in Google Maps, and go by another name when people talked about

it. The public transportation system was not easy to figure out either. It was a good thing that I lived so close to the Suzanne Dellal Centre. This really became my home during my stay in Tel Aviv. My very first time at the Suzanne Dellal Centre was a Sunday, on March 1, 2015. I immediately felt at home. There was this familiar feeling when I came inside the dance studio a certain 'je ne sais quoi'. Both Suzanne Dellal and the neighbourhood of Neve Tzedek made a pleasant impression. Coming from a wet and cold winter in Bergen, Norway, to spring in Tel Aviv was something of an energy boost. The climate in Tel Aviv is pleasant, especially in the spring when the temperature is around 20 degrees Celsius and the weather is mostly sunny. As mentioned in the introduction, I did think about the political climate as well as the pleasant, sunny weather. All these elements coloured my experience of Tel Aviv; however, when doing the research about the phenomenon of Gaga, taking classes at Suzanne Dellal, and talking with my informants, these factors were in the back of my head, but certainly not the most dominant thoughts.

As stated earlier, not two Gaga classes are ever alike. In the dancing community at Suzanne Dellal many of the participants have practiced Gaga for years. Coming from a dance background, my training has taught me to work hard and follow the rules in a class. So in my personal experience with Gaga, I took the rules very seriously. As I mentioned, even though Gaga is a structured improvisation and the aim is exploration, there are some rules that are important to follow. In the beginning of a class, the teacher would always ask if there were any new participants. If there were, the teacher would give a short introduction to these persons, and tell them about the rules of the class. The rules are quite simple, as mentioned earlier: you have to constantly move. In my field notes, I compared the non-stop-moving policy with being on stage. On stage it is a big "crime" to perform any private motions, like scratching your nose, unless you are supposed to do so. My dancer habitus is clearly not something that I switch off, even though this was a Gaga/people class. Normally, nobody would avoid "breaking the rule" of constant movement, but in one class this was particularly noticeable. In my field notes, I wrote that when we were lying on the floor, I noticed that some of the people around me almost seemed to fall asleep, they were just lying there. The Gaga teacher actually said that she could see that people had been out celebrating Purim. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, this was not the only experience I had where I became aware of my (dancer) habitus.

In my fieldwork I practiced Gaga almost every day for a month. When I came home, I wanted to research what kind of traces this has left in my body. To capture this embodiment in writing, I did an experiment. I listened to the audio recording of one of the Gaga classes (for the first time since it was recorded), while at the same time I wrote about this experience. The audio recording is about 60 minutes long, which was the same amount of time that I used to write the text:

(Re) experiencing a Gaga class through an audio recording:

I'm listening to the audio recording of a Gaga class with Ohad Fisher. Mumbling soft voices makes strange sounds. Like baby or an animal. Directions "juicy", "legs together", "pelvis"...silence... "Activation of feet". "Don't be shy of the effort". The sound of people in a room is never quiet. "Find small collapses in your chest". As I'm writing and listening, I can feel my self-thinking in movement. I'm sitting at a desk, but my body is re-living this class. "Softer in the spine and looser in the chest". I'm in the present and still I can feel and smell the room, and my body is remembering the class. "Move everything away from the sit bones". I'm at my office at Cornerteateret in Bergen it's June. At the same time the audio recording takes me into the Gaga studio at Suzanne Dellal, it's March. "The moons under your feet." It's Sunday morning and Tuesday afternoon. Ohad is giving a lot of instructions. I wonder how it would be to do Gaga class if I was blind. I think it really could work very well. The sounds of the different bodies in space. Just by listening to this recording I can feel the three-dimensional feeling. The sound of moving bodies. Music comes in from record player. Luckily the music is not too loud; it confuses my thoughts of the moving body in space. In the class it was not a problem, now when I'm not able to see; hearing the body in space is making me see it re-live it. The music leads my thoughts in other directions. Its power is overwhelming. The movement language speaks more quiet through the sense of listening. "Smile to you partner". "Give it out." "Give it so someone". Increasing effort, sound of heavy breathing. It's moist. "Small explosions in different directions". "Ten- nine-eight- seven- six- five-four- three- two- one". The clapping of hands on the body sounds like heavy rain. Then a quiet soft voice.²¹

²¹ This text was written when listening to the audio recording of O. Fisher's class in Tel Aviv, Studio A, Suzanne Dellal, Sunday 29.03.15, 9.00-10.10 am

The reason why I use this text is to capture the character and quality of this Gaga class. In Sheets-Johnstone's article *Thinking in Movement* (1999), she states that when a dancer thinks of movement, it is a through a flow of thoughts, spatial, temporal and dynamic. "Precisely because its aim is to render the experience of the dancers justly, it leaves an object kinaesthetic language behind, the latter language tying us to facts about the experience rather than leading us to a conception of its living quality or character" (Sheets-Johnston, 1999, p. 486). This first-person perspective is, according Sheets-Johnston, a way of getting access to the experience of thinking in movements. This is the same as stated in *chapter 2.3* in the quote by Merleau-Ponty: "We must rediscover the origin of the object and the very core of our experience, we must describe the appearance of being, and we must come to understand how, paradoxically, there is for-us and in-itself" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, p. 74).

At Suzanne Dellal the morning classes were held at Studio Suzy, which is in the same building in which the Batsheva Company rehearses. My dance background means that I have spent hundreds of hours inside dance studios. After walking around in a new city, coming to Studio Suzie was like coming home. The smell of dance mats and sweat, changing into comfortable training clothes, taking a sip of water, looking at people stretching and talking quietly, gave me a feeling of something familiar. When you have been a dancer for a long time, this whole routine gets into your blood. It took some time before I approached people in the Gaga/people class. Though people seemed friendly, there was a kind of calm atmosphere that I did not want to interrupt. Before a class people, mostly found a place on the floor. They would stretch a bit or roll up and down the spine and perform soft movements like a rolling of the shoulders. It was not easy to just to start a conversation, and I felt a little shy. After a while, when I had taken more classes, I felt more confident and used the opportunity to talk to the people beside me in the room. When two weeks had passed, I had noticed who took classes more frequently than others. I had also spoken with several of the Gaga participants. It was a nice feeling to get to a point where I could just go to a class and see a familiar face. This also meant that in order to maintain those relations, I would also miss the opportunity to speak to new people. This was a bit of a challenge.

In the morning classes there were a greater age variations than in the evening classes. There was a "troupe" of older women who came to these morning classes daily. They all seemed to be very close, and after a class they would chat cheerfully and stay together in a group. After one of the classes, I took the opportunity to talk to one of them. This was after watching her

(discreetly) in class. She had a very open, bright face, and it moved me in a special way. She told me that she worked in somatic therapy, and was using images with very sick patients. She explained to me how she loved Gaga and that the tools she learned here was useful in her work, especially the use of imagery. She started to speak to me about Anna Halprin. Halprin, was an important figure in the early postmodern dance scene, and she has worked with imagery throughout her career. The women I talked to, referred to Halprin as her mother, and implied that she meant a lot to her. Galili writes that even though many dance teachers has worked with images, Halprin's use of images as a part of each individual participant's experience, was special. She also encouraged students to develop their own images (Galili, 2015, p. 15). The woman I spoke with was truly wonderful. She explained that her daughter used to be a dancer in the Batsheva Company. It was not difficult to imagine her working with imagery. Ohad Naharin himself had recommended that she start practicing Gaga. She talked a lot about the use of images, and when she explained this, she also touched me gently to show me how she would meet her patients. The research into the connection between somatic methods and Gaga was not something that had I planned in advance before doing my fieldwork. Somatic method was a term that had been mentioned frequently by my informant, and in Galili's article as well, as a connection that was worth looking into.

Since this is an academic paper, it is in my interest to make sure that this material can be used for further research (if possible). If I do not draw any conclusions or make any statements on the different aspects of Gaga, it will be difficult to compare this research to other work.

7.2. Layers of Gaga

All the layers of Gaga are connected to the whole; you cannot focus on one aspect alone and let this represent all of the movement language. It is possible to have multiple perspectives on Gaga, and some of them are represented in this thesis.

The combination of Ohad Naharin's childhood, with the influence of a mother who was a student of Feldenkrais', and a father who was a creative storyteller, and his career as a dancer and choreographer, could be a factor that has coloured the shaping of the movement language Gaga. Naharin developed Gaga from the idea that he wanted to prepare his dancers for the choreography in the best way possible. When Naharin had an injury, he had to focus on movement in a different way. His influences from various dance forms, somatic methods and martial arts shaped the beginnings of Gaga. He taught this class to the Batsheva Company

before it was given the name Gaga. At the same time, he was also approached by some of the staff working for Batsheva. They wanted to take his class. Naharin then had to develop a verbal language where he did not use ballet vocabulary. He has said that this was a very interesting part of the development of the movement language Gaga. From this time on, both Gaga/people classes and Gaga/dancers classes were held. Today, Gaga classes have become a huge phenomenon in the dance world, and are also popular among non-dancers.

When analysing what global impact this dance from Israel has had, Galili suggests that the increasing interest in Gaga could be connected to Batsheva's performances around the world "as more people see Batsheva in performance and experience Gaga for themselves the demand for these classes are likely to rise" (Galili, 2012, p. 208). Informant A and B were both drawn to Gaga after seeing Batsheva perform. In this way, one can say that dancers know Gaga through Ohad Naharin and his work with the Batsheva Company. Still, in the Gaga/people classes some of the participants are non-dancers that might practice Gaga for other reasons than the dancers. To draw some conclusions on why non-dancers are drawn to Gaga, I will look at the findings from *chapter 4*, concerning the phenomenon Gaga:

In Gaga movement language you explore different movement qualities and textures. The Gaga teacher uses images and the Gaga lexicon to verbalise the movements. The communication between the participants, however, is based upon both the movements and the verbalisation of the movement qualities. A Gaga class does not have a flat structure, "effort has to be there, speed, letting go, countdowns, sensitivity and layers" (B, personal communication, March 18, 2015). As B explains it, there are certain elements that have to be present in a class, but there is flexibility as to how the teacher puts them together. In Gaga, the focus on sensations, awareness, flow, pleasure in moving and developing more complexity in your movements, are important ingredients. The aspect of being attentive to the whole group while moving (in your own way) is also important. When you do this, you use both your *body image* and *body schema* (Gallagher, 2005) – you think consciously about the movement and work from the inside, while at the same using your *body schema* to connect with the whole room full of moving people. The focus of Gaga is to get more complex by *letting go* and *peeling off layers*. You explore your movements so that your *body schema* becomes more complex and rich.

Several of my informants at Suzanne Dellal were familiar with somatic based methods. As mentioned, Ohad Naharin's mother Sofia Naharin was a student of Moshe Feldenkrais. He founded a somatic based method that is used all over the world. When comparing Gaga to Feldenkrais, I find that the notion of doing more with less, exploring through the use of images, and the use of sensation when exploring movements, are some of the similarities. The difference is that in Feldenkrais, practitioners use anatomically correct descriptions, they take a pause between tasks and analyse, and they do not take movements into the extreme. In Gaga, the verbalisation of qualities is not anatomically correct, you move constantly, and you can take the movements to the extreme. The healing aspect is something that both Gaga and Somatic base methods have in common. Both Ohad Naharin and Mosche Feldenkrais had an injury that was important for the development of their movement's methods. My informant B said that Gaga healed her injured shoulder. She changed her way of thinking about movements, and she liberated herself from her old habits. When moving the stiff area in her shoulder in Gaga, her shoulder got better. She had to let go to for her shoulder to become better.

In Gaga the focus on *enjoying the burning sensation* in order to become a more complex person and endure more, is an important layer. For the participants, this can be interpreted both physically and physiologically. For a dancer, this is valuable. The following conversation that I had with informant D, who is a Batsheva dancer, can shed light on this. I asked her how Gaga could be used in dance training:

D: It's a lot of freedom, connect to your groove, connect to what you like about dancing, passion to dance.

I: The pleasure of it

D: Yes connection to pleasure, that's something, it's very smart. And it's not in the dance world...

I: No

D: You don't hear it

I: Connect to pain [laughing]

D: We, but also then you come on stage finding yourself in the hardest of moment that you [makes a sound as grasping for air] it's almost as I'm enjoying it: it helps you know. It's also interesting for the audience (...) you want to see something real.

So the thought behind tapping into to pleasure while moving, can help dancers endure more and become more extreme, and still enjoy it. This aspect is very valuable if you can manage it. Galili (2015) suggests that Gaga can be used a tool for dancers in the postmodern dance world. Gaga cannot be called a technique; it is not a shaping of the body into a form. In this way Gaga does not exclude other dance techniques, in fact, you can use the movement qualities and sensations from a Gaga class on top of for example ballet technique.

The notion of connecting to pleasure is not an aspect that only applies to dancers. Ohad Naharin states that Gaga can speak to all humans. It has some universal aspects; it is about being individual, but also about being aware of and attentive to others. It's a positive worldview, and as informant C states: Gaga is like the essence of life.

We are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in detaching yourself from it in order to shift to the consciousness of the world. If we want to do so, we would see that the quality is never directly experienced and that all consciousness is consciousness of something” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, p. 7).

Merleau-Ponty writes that we are connected to the world we live in; we cannot detach ourselves from it. When looking at the cultural context of Gaga, we know that Gaga is connected to Ohad Naharin and Tel Aviv. This was something that my key informants A and B both stated clearly. Tel Aviv is the second largest city in Israel, and Israel is furthermore an area with a complex economic and political situation. The on-going conflict between Israel and Palestine has an effect on people living here. When the missile alarm goes off and it is not a rehearsal, you cannot pretend that this is not happening – it has an impact. My informant B and C told me that it is a very scary situation. In the book “Bone, Breath and Gesture”, Johnsons writes that somatics has been used as a method of healing. Practices like Feldenkrais and somatics is often thought of as a kind of marginal phenomenon in society. When Jonson first started to work with ‘somatics’, he worked with a small group of torture victims in the Bay Area. They were 700 people, and this was in 1987. Johnson states that the polar opposite practice to somatics is the use of torture. In 1995, the number of people Johnson worked with had grown to a colossal 40 000, including victims of torture from Central America, Brazil, Cambodia, China, Tibet, Haiti, Burma, South Africa, the former USSR and Iran. “To clean up such an atmosphere we need a strong public voice on behalf of the sensitivity of flesh, the sacredness of nature, the importance of health and affection over religious and political

ideologies and over stark greed” (Johnson, 1995, p. xvii). With this, Johnson explains what value ‘somatics’ can have in society. Johnson writes that practices of embodiment are often misunderstood when taken out of context. He states that the tenacious split between mind and body in the West can be blamed for this. Somatic based therapy and methods are based on holistic thinking. This aspect that Johnson writes about, can apply to Gaga as well. As mentioned earlier, Gaga has many similarities with Feldenkrais and somatic based methods. In Gaga, there is a positive attitude towards the other participants: “smile to each other”, “connect to pleasure”. When looking at the phenomenon of Gaga and what affect it has on my informants, I agree that it is, as Johnson writes, the polar opposite of war and torture. This connection would be interesting to investigate further: the therapeutic aspect of Gaga. What the findings in this research can say something about, is the healing effect that Gaga has had on informant B, and the general feeling of happiness and calmness that all of my informants report after practicing Gaga. Still, this is not enough information to jump to any conclusion about the healing aspects of Gaga.

To generalise, the worldview in 2015 is that a great number of people spend a huge amount of time in front of screens: mobiles, iPads, laptops and so on. It is the age of computers and social media, everything moves very fast, and visual communication and images flash by us as a part of our daily routine. One of my informants stated that “Gaga's emphasis on a focused, extended (no stops, no distractions, no breaks) experience, strikes me as an especially important antidote to the increasingly disembodied, distracted, disrupted alienation that technology/internet have brought to contemporary life.” I find this statement really interesting. My informant here states that the non-stop rule in Gaga is a contrast from the distracted way of navigating in our new technology. In Gaga, you move constantly, you are busy thinking about the movement tasks, and your brain and body is occupied with only this, thinking consciously about movement, using our *body image*. Being in a Gaga class gives you a break from daily life, and you are allowed to think only about the movement tasks. The body loves to move, and when you engage your whole body, explore and move as much as you can within your own limits, it feels good. Being in a room full of people moving gives a lot of impression and you can also learn to be more complex in your own movements by copying someone else’s movements. All of my interviewees told me that Gaga had had an effect on them in their daily life as well. They said that they could apply Gaga to almost any situation, when they are sitting on the bus or walking in the street. Informant A told me that the area where she is struggling with the use of Gaga, is when she is sitting in front of her

computer: “It’s a challenging to break that habit of cutting myself from the body because I’m just sitting here typing I’m not paying attention. I’m not consciously directing the focus to my body” (A, personal communication, March 16, 2015). Applying Gaga to this activity is especially hard. In our *body schema* we have not learned to type and at the same time, for example, think about *the rope of our arms* or *spine like seaweed*. If we managed to do this, I think lot of people would get fewer problems with their back or arms when spending hours in front of the computer.

When looking at the phenomenon of Gaga and the cultural phenomenon of Gaga, my informants both say that Gaga has universal human aspects, while at the same time being linked to Ohad Naharin, Bathsheva, Suzanne Dellal, Tel Aviv and Israel. Is there a conflict between those two aspects? After completing this research, I would say not. A large part of human behaviour is related to cultural aspects, and this may shape our habitus. However, when talking about sensations and how we structure bodily experiences through *body image*, *body schema* and mirror neurons, we see that these are universal human aspects. In Gaga, you get the opportunity to go in and explore your movement habits, and you can find new ways to move.

Gaga is like a chameleon. It definitely has a body that consists of qualities and a positive attitude; and it can be applied to almost any situation: a ballet class, walking along the street, lying in bed. When the ‘Gaga chameleon’ is applied, it will change the colour of your activity. But most important of all: Gaga has a value of its own, and taking a class is about taking time to move and explore different sensations. These are all parts of the layers in the movement language Gaga.

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Photos:

Figure 1 (front page). Photograph: G. Dagon

Figure 2 (page 21). Photograph: I. T. Hogstad.

Figure 3 (page 22). Photograph: I. T. Hogstad.

Figure 4 (page 24). Photograph: G. Dagon.

Sammendrag

I denne masteroppgaven har jeg forsket på levd erfaring med bevegelsespråket Gaga i dansesamfunnet Gaga/people ved Suzanne Dellal Centre i Tel Aviv. Bevegelsespråket Gaga ble utviklet av Ohad Naharin på slutten av 1990-tallet. Etter den tid har Gaga spredt seg til store deler av verden. Ohad Naharin og Gaga-administrasjonen har sin base ved Suzanne Dellal Centre i Tel Aviv, dermed var det naturlig å legge feltarbeidet mitt her. Både fenomenet og det kulturelle fenomenet Gaga har blitt diskutert og analysert på forskjellige måter. Jeg har brukt en hermeneutisk tilnærming hvor refleksjon spiller en viktig rolle. I kvalitativ forskning er samtaler og dialog er svært viktige verktøy. Gjennom intervjuer, korrespondanse og samtaler med mine fantastiske informanter fikk jeg verdifull informasjon, uten dette kunne ikke oppgaven blitt skrevet.

Mine funn viser at det å kombinere ulike metoder, som Youngerman og Saukko foreslår, gir en grundig innsikt i Gaga. Å gjøre et dypdykk i mikrokosmos av Gaga og skrive om opplevelsen av bevegelsespråket føltes mer tilgjengelig enn å skrive om den kulturelle konteksten. I Gaga er kommunikasjonen mellom læreren med deltakerne viktig. Ved å bruke B. Farnell (1999) sitt begrep 'simultaneities' for å analysere hvordan Gaga fungerer ser jeg hvordan det verbale språket kombinert med bevegelsespråket i Gaga blir brukt på en dynamisk måte. En Gaga klasse har ikke en satt struktur, den består likevel av noen hovedingredienser som bør være med: "effort has to be there, speed, letting go, countdowns, sensitivity and layers" (B, personlig kommunikasjon, 18. mars, 2015). For å analysere bevegelseskvalitetene i Gaga har jeg tatt i bruk Labans effort-shape analyse. Her kom det fram at bevegelseskvalitetene i Gaga har mange ulike nyanser. Måten det verbale språket med bruk av bilder og Gaga-leksikon blir brukt utgjør en kompleks og sammensatt helhet som gjør at bevegelseskvalitetene gir endeløse muligheter for utforsking av bevegelser.

I dansesamfunnet Gaga/people ved Suzanne Dellal Centre er mange av deltakerne er kjent med somatiskbaserte metoder. I sammenligningen og analysen av Gaga og Feldenkrais-metoden fant jeg flere likhetstrekk: bruk av bilder som utgangspunkt for bevegelse, utforske det sanselige aspektet ved bevegelsene og det å gjøre mer med mindre. Flere av informantene mine forteller hvordan disse metodene har leget deres fysiske og psykiske skader. Det samme gjelder for elever av Feldenkrais.

Når en ser på fenomenet Gaga og kulturelle fenomenet Gaga forteller mine informanter at Gaga har universelle menneskelige aspekter, på samme tid er bevegelsesspråket knyttet til Ohad Naharin, Bathsheva Company, Suzanne Dellal Centre og Tel Aviv. Er det en konflikt mellom disse to aspektene? Etter å ha fullført denne forskningen vil jeg si at det ikke nødvendigvis er det. En stor del av menneskelig atferd er knyttet til kulturelle aspekter, og dette kan forme vår habitus. Likevel, når vi snakker om følelser og hvordan vi strukturerer kroppslige erfaringer gjennom *body image* og *body schema* (Gallagher, 2005) og speilnevroner, ser vi at dette er universelle menneskelige aspekter. I Gaga har du muligheten til å utforske bevegelsesvanene dine, dermed kan du også finne nye måter å bevege deg på. Dette kan brukes i mange situasjoner: i en ballettklasse, når du går på gaten eller når leser en bok. Dersom du bruker Gaga i slike situasjoner vil det fargelegge aktiviteten du gjør på en ny måte, men viktigst av alt, Gaga har en egenverdi. Alle lagene i Gaga er knyttet sammen til en helhet. Som forsker har jeg i denne oppgaven forsøkt å finne og beskrive de ulike lagene i dette fantastiske bevegelsesspråket, ikke for å begrense det, men for å gjøre det rikere.