INCLUSION AS FOLDED CHOREO-WRITING

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates how inclusion can happen through folded choreo-writing, a way of thinking about inclusion, choreography, and folding that arose in the meeting between the two authors. We propose folded choreo-writing as a way of making connections through experiences, memories, spaces, relations and politics. Coming from vastly different geopolitical backgrounds, we (the authors) still found collective resonance through a feminist-queer point of view, acknowledging choreography, inclusion and politics as transpositional nomadism (Braidotti, 2006) and the simultaneity of diverse and paradoxical spheres. From this shared theoretical topography and through experiences of how dance can be a place of exclusion that resonated across their differences, we started our folded choreo-writing together. How could choreography counter-act exclusive border-making and thinking embedded in dance traditions and instead offer spaces of freedom and inclusion?

Keywords: Fold, chora, inclusion, choreography

CONTEXT: ABOUT CHOREOGRAPHY, DANCE, AND THE AUTHORS

As authors, we look at dance and performance through a critical standpoint. We acknowledge the potentials that dance and choreography as embodied practices offer to connect and bind

humans to humans and beyond. However, we also are aware that dance as a disciplinary field of knowledge is reflective of power relations, and how bodies and their locations in time and space are segregated and bordered. In this chapter, our point of departure is a counter-move against the system of representation, and the politics of visibility that see/read/locate/inscribe certain bodies within certain subjective borders (gender, race, geopolitics, ability).

The system of representation and its economy of knowledge production are contrast-friendly. It means that they operate and make realities based on the segregation of *this* from *that* producing and produced by a language of *either/or*. Such a binary system values whatever is within the dominant optical field. Whatever cannot fit the terms and conditions of visibility is either fetishized/sexualized/fantasized/assimilated or eliminated. Therefore, for the absent subject of dance and embodiment, and for those who are far from the language of credibility and central location of presence (Western/universal/Euro-American/international/global), there are always risks of fixity within the spatiotemporal borders of otherness.

Our practice of writing space (choreo-graphy) is a political practice of freedom in negotiation with the disciplinary boundaries of dance as a field of knowledge and what counts as body, dance, and dancer. To do so, we counter-map/challenge the pre-established pathways of dancing, seeing and reading dance, and writing about dance. Our practice of folded choreo-writing emerged out of our very meeting at a dance education research seminar in 2019, recognizing shared critical perspectives on the exclusive border-making practices of dance in our very different geopolitical contexts. Maryam is a dancing woman from Iran where dancing is illegal and the dancer is a criminal. Maryam's practice of choreo-writing folds (and unfolds) around the politics of visibility and what reveals/conceals as she moves. She works with the notion of the mobius strip as a practical model of mobility which is safe,

inclusive, and sustainable. Tone is a dancing woman from Norway, where dance is legal, and dance is accepted as artistic expression. However, the space and stage for dance as an art form is still exclusive, preferring normative bodies and Western genres and techniques. Tone's practice of choreo-writing folds (and unfolds) around the politics of normativity: which bodies are given space in dance, as dancers, choreographers and teachers? Constantly folding and unfolding as dancers/writers/researchers, we experiment with what the critical expanded choreography (e.g. Lepecki, 2013) and the post-humanist perspectives (e.g. Braidotti, 2006; Deleuze, 1993; Grosz, 1994; Kristeva, 1980) offer/afford. Our experimentations of expanded choreography are in conversation with the Norwegian dance artists Styve Holte, Kongsness og Sortland who have invited choreographers in a Nordic context into three issues of the edited book series CHOREOGRAPHY (2016, 2018, 2021) in which they invite practitioners and researchers into a destabilization of established choreographic truths to give space for new concepts, definitions, and understandings. Also, understanding choreography as a practice of curation, our curatorial foldings converse with Arnhild Staal Pettersen (Director at DansiT Choreographic Centre), Rosemary Martin (Professor of Arts Education with a focus on Dance and Multiculturalism at NTNU Norwegian University of Science and Technology) and Susanna Hast (post-doctoral research fellow at the University of the Arts Helsinki).

METHODOLOGICAL EXPLORATION: FOLDED CHOREO-WRITING AS INQUIRY

In this chapter, we create *inclusion as folded choreo-writing* as a performative and analytical research inquiry, a way of making inquiry that we explore at the same time as we create it.

With this, we position our research within a performative research paradigm (Hasemann, 2006; Østern et al., 2021), understanding research as an act of creation with the researcher on the inside of the study; moving with and being moved by the research as it unfolds. Østern et al. (2021) write that:

> With a performative research paradigm, we mean that […] research is understood as creation. It produces something new in the world, something that was not there before, regardless of the researcher's involvement. Therefore, research is understood as non-representational, not aspiring to represent a part of the reality that existed independently of the researcher before the research. (Østern, 2021, p. 2)

Each of the three concepts, *inclusion*, *folded*, and *choreo-writing*, is of importance for the inquiry. We (the authors) believe our research is political as it embodiedly seeks capacities and potentials to move counter against exclusion within the disciplinary field of dance (which again mirrors society), and its politics of representation, aiming for *inclusion*. However, we are aware that our capacity to take embodied action counter to the hegemonic power system is context-specific, subject to the time and place. It means that our affordabilities to reach beyond the exclusive and segregating borders are indeterminate, and accordingly, potential, and the potential is political. Talking about the indeterminacy of our embodied capacitary to take counter-actions, we think through the concept of the *Body without Organ*, proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) to unfold how we realize body and theorize embodiment. Understanding body as a BwO affords a corporeality resisting any compatible contour. Therefore, we do not exactly know to what our embodied actions (here: choreo-writing) are potential, how these actions occupy the space (and time), and accordingly, to what extent they can transgress the exclusive boundaries.

The idea of *folding* dialogues with Deleuze's performative view on being and knowledge being created on an immanent plane, where differences are produced through the act of folding (Deleuze, 1993). We understand Deleuze's immanent onto-epistemological plane, as a plane without transcendental essences, underlying structures, or universal laws. Instead, what it is, is ever new becomings of differences through folds on and off the immanent plane. This is how we think about our folding inquiry in this chapter: we keep folding, creating and becoming through differences, constantly pushing towards new openings and inclusions. In the chapter we fold through scrutinizing fragments of memories from our individual practices, experimenting with the potentials of folding (and unfolding), somatically and politically, collectively and individually. The individual practices we are exploring and folding with and through are different, but simultaneously, very similar: the practices we fold throughout this chapter are marked by exclusion. We have, in the position as a dancing woman from Iran, and a dancing woman artistically partnering a wheelchair-using dancer in Norway, experienced the exclusive, normative and controlled boundaries of the dance field. The dance field is not for every *body*. As a counter-act, we have escaped dance with its predefined techniques and aesthetics, and grasped for choreography as an artistic structural possibility for expansion, anarchism within dance, change, and inclusion. The concept *choreo-writing* is inspired by performance-writing (Sandström, 2019), which is a poetic way of folding different types of texts into one another. *Choreography* is a combined term consisting of two parts, chora + graphy. In our work, *Chora* refers to a potential space with ungraspable and unidentifiable boundaries (Kristeva, 1980; Grosz, 1994), and *graphy* is a practice of writing.

This chapter, then, through inclusion as folded choreo-writing as performative and analytical research inquiry, celebrates the indeterminacy, ambiguity, and multiplicity of possibilities to map the borders of chora. The practice of choreo-writing can create instant, contingent and provisional maps for embodied navigations and negotiations through spaces. Therefore choreo-writing is a practice of counter move against the exclusive contours and spheres, including the contours of disciplinary fields.

THE FOLDED CHOREO-WRITING STARTS FROM HERE:

Figure 1

Tone's long-time dancing partner Elen in a film made by Elen Øyen and Nina Therese Aune for 60secondsdance, an online international competition for dance films with the duration of one minute.

 T: As I fold myself into this chapter in a continuous choreographic movement with Maryam, giving and taking weight/memories/energies, I do that from a topography shaped by twenty years of negotiating about space with differently bodied dancers. As I write about in my doctoral thesis from 2009 (Østern, 2009), this has been a constant balancing on and counter-acting the splinters of a dualistic and normative aesthetic worldview that I have found myself part of as choreographer, and (artistic) researcher. Through my six-year long practice-led doctoral project (2003-2009), creating what today continues as the community-based dance company, the Dance Laboratory, I constantly bumped into situations that made me wonder, question, and become increasingly more critical towards the dance-as-art-field that I was part of. One occasion that came into mind as Maryam and I were discussing our choreographic foldings for this chapter is one that I wrote about in my thesis. This was a long time ago, but this again popped up as I moved with Maryam. It was something she said about experiencing

dance class and the stage for dance as painfully exclusive, only for dancers trained technically in a specific way. In 2009 I wrote:

> When disabled performers really are on stage, Kuppers (2001, p. 26) points out how the cultural narratives of disability are so strong that they preempt anything else a disabled artist might try to communicate. The audiences assume that the disabled body is naturally about disability. I remember having comments on this after the performance på Føtter, på Hjul [on Feet, on Wheels)], where Carl, who uses a wheelchair, performed together with three non-disabled dancers. A young man in the audience told me that: For the first 15 minutes, I just had to get used to seeing the disabled dancer. I could only look at him: it was so unusual for me to see a disabled person in dance and in a stage setting. Then, eventually, I also managed to focus on the performance as a whole. (Østern, 2009, p. 103)

 I remember thinking a long time about this comment, and it opened up a new theoretical landscape for me. It was this comment that led me to Petra Kupper's writings back then, during my doctoral process, and her insights about the hypervisibility of non-normative bodies, fully made me understand how flat, controlled, exclusive, narrowminded/bodied, normative, and western the dance-as-an-art field (that I was part of) actually was. The hypervisibility of the unique dancers I was choreographing with was doubled on stage: they were already hypervisible in society – just entering a bus meant becoming hypervisible for them. On stage, this is doubled. The situation has changed since 2009. But not enough, and not with enough power and speed.

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In 2018, my long-term choreographic and dance teacher partner Elen Øyen were invited to the Netherlands as keynotes to the final conference of a large EU-supported artistic/arts educational research project between three European tertiary dance and music institutions. The topic for the three-year-long practice-led project was *inclusion*. We were thrilled to go. This seemed like the right place for us to contribute, as we had been working together artistically and educationally with critical and inclusive perspectives on dance/dance education since 2005. By the way, Elen is a wheelchair-user.

Through the EU project, the three dance institutions exchanged teaching ideas, students, and staff, and developed strategies, toolboxes, practices, and teaching pedagogies that worked towards inclusion. This is what we were told, and this is what we anticipated.

However, from the very moment when we arrived at the conference site, we were soon to discover, that the conference was actually more about exclusion, than inclusion. It might have been *about* inclusion, as a research topic, but it was not *inclusive*. It was not practicing inclusion. After a 3-year long research project, this had still not led to more inclusive practices filtered down in the way the conference was organized. Exclusive structures had remained unchallenged and were still very much so active. One thing was the conference participants: there was very little diversity to see, in each respect. Elen became hypervisible, as she was the only wheeling participant. Another aspect was accessibility: The campus was not accessible in any way, it was like a castle that wanted to be a wheel-free zone. The only way to access the site was to drive a couple of hundred meters further away. A little separate building had a large industrial lift for goods transport. We came in the backdoor.

Finally, the day for our keynote had come.

Then.

When the conference host presented the keynote in front of the audience, she left out Elen's name. Elen and I were sitting next to one another, clearly visible for the conference host, ready to enter the stage, and both our names were printed equally in the program. Still, when we were presented, the host only read the title of the keynote, looked me in the eye, and then said "… with Professor Tone Pernille Østern, we are honored to have you here". This was followed by applause by everybody. Except Elen, who was not applauding. Or I.

Still today, I regret that I did not use this moment as an opportunity for activism. I did not know what to do. I felt my privileges pouring down my back as I got on my feet and wanted to shake them off. I am angry, I am insecure, I am confused, I am a hyena, I am a coward, I am a betrayer. As I hesitantly walked onto the stage, I wish I had said, "Wait a minute, there must have been a mistake, since only one of us was presented. Conference host, would you mind presenting us again?". Instead, I did this correction myself: I said that there was a mistake and that we were actually two presenters.

*

M: Tone! Thanks for your folding and hinging around the naming/unnaming, and the evidence of presence as a location to unfold the range and realm of exclusion. When I rethink the academic environments such as conferences, symposia, and other locations, I see a strong desire for preservation and reproduction of a universal grammar of intellectuality, proficiency, and excellence; such a grammar encourages and enforces sanitizing the

unconventional, insufficient, and murky bodies and practices, as well as non-linear, non-sequential and inconsistent spatiotemporalities, just for the sake of homogeneity and academic-artistic integrity. But really, at what costs? Why do the hegemonic and authoritative eyes gravitate towards consistent and homogenized corporealities, and validate only whatever/whoever fits within the central time and place of presence?

<div align="right">*</div>

Elen's ex-centric corporeality was unnamed to become fantasized as *the other* by the ableist/sexist/racist system of representation and its artistic and academic credibility/visibility.

<div align="right">*</div>

Why does naming matter so much?
What are the terms and conditions of having names and faces in disciplinary fields of knowledge, such as dance?

<div align="right">*</div>

What are the promises/risks of becoming faceless/nameless in this field?

<div align="right">*</div>

Not everyone can afford a name and face.

<div align="right">*</div>

The risk of visibility has caused my embodied practice countless numbers of folding and unfolding; as a subject of dance, I twist and turn, shift and roll to become and unbecome myself as a dancer, dance person, physical theatre actress, performer, movement artist, performance artist.

What do such namings afford?

Safe residency and ground?

Valid presence (in time and place)?

Sufficiency and compatibility as a subject-positionality?

                                        credibility?

                          recognition?

          legitimacy?

                                inclusion?

    affordance?

                                                accessibilities?

                              *

 Iran is a choreophobic (Shay, 1999) country. Dance in Iran is illegal and the dancer is a

criminal.

                              *

 Therefore my dance practice takes place at the hinging/pivoting point, in between

possibilities and impossibilities of dancing without being seen.

 Risking in between visibility and invisibility, I see the practice of

choreography as a political practice of mapping/writing a safe

topos for a dancing woman from Iran.

                                                                        *

Veil.

 The Western/universal/Euro-American/international/global politics of visibility and its

economy of gaze produce an image of the other:

a veiled Middle Eastern (Iranian) woman, and supposedly Muslim, who

requires to represent/prove her liberation through her emancipatory

dance.

 Such a reduced image of the other is usually the only *passport* to reach the stages/pages of

compatibility.

 My passport is the veil and my language of liberatory practices is compatible only within

the dichotomous discourse of veiling/unveiling.

Figure 2

Maryam, in studio 113 CAI, University of Auckland, March 2018, Auckland

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Unveiling.

 When it comes to explicitness and presence, within the major

history of feminist practices and their aesthetics of emancipations,

it's important to ask what sort of explicitness is canonically valid and whose explicit

embodied action is included as/through feminism?

And whose narratives of liberation and emancipation count and contribute

to the already archived and established feminist discourses?

 The unfolding, unveiling, and becoming explicit, both as a woman and as a dancing body

might not be affordable for everyone. In a choreophobic context, one might have to think of

an alter-explicitness/ alter-unveiling, and accordingly, as a dancing woman (one/I) might

have to propose an alter-aesthetic language and alter-feminist practices to appear without

being seen.

<center>*</center>

Veiling.

Peggy Phelan (2003) remarks, "visibility is a trap" because "it summons surveillance and law…" (p.6), and instead, she promotes invisibility as it offers more potential and power to be seen. Being visible is a conditioning of normativity, like being heterosexual, which means being accepted by the homogenizing power, the power which encourages the same-ness, alignment, convergence. As Phelan (2003) argues being the same has a risk of losing attention and turning to invisible. Phelan (2003) says, "the power of the unseen community lies in its ability to cohere outside the system of observation which

seeks to patrol it" (p.97).

But how risky is it to become fantasized/fetishized as an absent subject, as a veiled one?

Unveiling is a risk, so is veiling.

<center>*</center>

Saba Mahmood (2005) argues writing as a risk, risk of assimilation, reduction, and elimination, risk of sexualization and fetishization. However, Mahmood also reminds us there is no other choice for the subject of text, to write. I expand: there is no choice for the subject of dance, to dance, and for a dancing woman from Iran, to veil, to dance, and to write (about dance).

Knowing that in my case, dancing and veiling are inseparable, I become an undanced subject of dance who bears unveiling within the practice of veiling. How is it possible?

I see it relevant here to invite Botz-Bornestein's (2013) discussion of the veil and sunglasses and the simultaneous combination of "presence and non-presence" (p.3), as a counter-gaze strategy.

As a political act of deceiving and disrupting the system of visibility, the mapping practice of my choreography lead me to create a couple of *papier maché* demon masks to cover my face.

                                                                                    *

I disappear as the subject of dance and veil and re-appear in an undanced/unveiled/ subject. This undoing practice of dance and veil may cause discontinuity, confusion, and deviation from the linear narratives of liberatory embodiments and discourses. What emerges as discontinuous, disruptive, and deviant corporeality is potentially a monster.

Figure 4

Self-portrait; experimenting chora with veil and mask, Auckland, August 2018.

What does such monstrous corporeality afford?

*

A body without organ (Deleuze and Guattari,1987)?

*

I could see through the mask and I could see into the mask.

Who is watching who?

Is it me seeing through the eyes of the mask?

Or the audience seeing my eyes through the mask?

Or me seeing into the eyes of the mask?

 The simultaneity confused, disrupted, and blurred the borderline of self and other, the under

and over, the inside and the outside, the subject of the dance and its object; this

problematized the system of visibility, and its language of realization: where does this

uncanny face (body) begin, and where does it end?

*

Isn't it promising?

<div align="center">*</div>

T: Having talked through our experiences properly after the excluding border-making keynote presentation which segregated us as worthy/unworthy of naming, Elen and I, we managed to eventually turn the situation around, take charge the rest of the conference days, and in the end also carry out the task of wrapping up the conference, which was given to us, as an act of activism.

Choreographic activism: Practicing freedom, and resistance.

Our choreographic activism unfolded through photo documenting the exclusiveness of the conference space from Elen's perspective. Everything at the conference was organized from an ableist system of footed representation, which othered and excluded wheeling participants like Elen. The mirror in the toilet for wheelchair-users was positioned according to footed participants.

Figure 5

Elen checking her looks in the mirror in the toilet for wheeling participants.

Worse was, the naming of the toilet door used the concept "invalide" in Dutch, which means "invalid".

In-valid.

*

There are no in-valid bodies.

Not on a conference for inclusion in dance and music, after a 3-yrs long research project about inclusion.
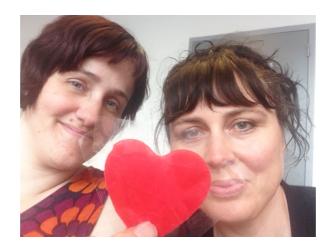
And not anywhere.

*

There are only valid bodies around here. So, we went to a paper shop bought scissors, red cardboard, and tape. And we acted, re-choreographing the naming of the conference toilets.

Figures 6-9

There are only valid bodies around here.

T0.38   **Invalidetoilet**

We used all the photos, documenting our choreographic activism as a PowerPoint for our critical and activist wrap-up of the conference, in front of all conference participants.

To turn the situation around, confront it, name the exclusion by name, take action, it was really, really important to feel that the inclusion we were working for was real and not only something we were talking *about*.

We could breathe again, freely.

Figure 10

Practicing freedom and resistance on a conference.

To work for inclusion involves not only critical perspectives and change but also activism, and standing up for, and standing by, inclusion in those micro moments when inclusion or exclusion is really at stake. I, Tone, learned that those moments are when I need to stop the traditional, exclusive, normative folding from unfolding. Exactly in those moments, I need to not look the other way and refuse to remain untouched in my privileged position. Instead I need to actively offer a (choreographic) resistance that forces the fold to unfold differently.

*

M: As a dancing woman of Iran, my dance is not just subject to the fetish of veil but also as an undisciplined dancer, who lacks the systematic training, I am subject to the fetish of technique.

What de-territorializes and differentiates my language from the flow language of kinaesthesia is coming from the same discourse of lack that rules the ever-existing fetish between the self

and other, the veiled and unveiled, the abled and disabled, the familiar and uncanny. (Bagheri Nesami, 2021)

*

When I immigrated to Aotearoa, New Zealand, rehearsing and performing outside of Iran as an undisciplined dancer, I encountered a different tight place (other than choreophobia) which caused de-territorializing the plane(s) of resistance, and urged "a stretch, a shift of weight, a roll, and perhaps a fall" (Rothfield, 2005, p.51) in my mode and language of movement due to different operating choreopolice (Lepecki, 2013). I remember once, in a rehearsal for a dance project, the dancers were told to jump in unison and a synchronised way. I was in the midst of experimentation, translating the desired homogenized rhythm and quality of jumps, when I was told by the choreographer to adjust and regulate my jumping, as my jumps were different from the other dancers' jumps. I link this corrective hint to the narrative of having 'good feet' or 'bad feet' as a dancer, to which I encountered within the universal dance discourse. I felt challenged by the question of 'lack', 'gap' and 'difference' in the spatiotemporality of my dance-related jumping practices and the spatiotemporality of the "universal training that is efficient, anatomically informed, and capable of cultivating the greatest versatility for the dancing body" (Foster, 2011, p.71).

*

A dancing woman of Iran, who lives and dances as a migrant within the geopolitics of the first world (as if according to dominant sequentiality, the Middle East is positioned as the third), is required to be loud, luminous, and dramatic, to be valid as an intellectual and sufficient embodiment,. However, movement is not always a luxury, and not everyone can move (luminously and loudly).

"Since the body (without organ) is extremely fluid and dynamic, and the embodied practice reaches beyond the material limits and borderlands, it cannot easily happen to predict how the body occupies the space. Such an indeterminacy can be both risky and promising, eliminating and emancipatory, regardless of moving or not; dancing or not; veiling or not"

(Bagheri Nesami, 2021, p.139).

 The possibility of being potential, without necessarily moving, offers the choice of reversing my main question and allow for both *dancing without being seen*, and *being seen* (as compatible) *without dancing*. As an undisciplined dancer, coming from a region where dance is problematic, I am a latecomer to the hegemonic language of disciplinary dance and its universal artistic and academic narratives. However, the gap between the languages of the local and global, the dance and what is not valid as dance, according to Elif Shafak (2010) stimulates and creates an elusive space; I call this gap a liminal space, a space that holds potential, or as Cixous (Cixous, Cohen & Cohen 1976) says a *way out*, to emerge as the Other (an-other subject) to transcend beyond the geographical references and their material limits to produce an alternative knowledge. It does not matter if it is situated as too long, too late, too far, too slow, too still, inconsistent, imperceptible, untranslatable, and uncanny; this knowledge is only accessible to those who allow themselves to take the risk and transcend beyond themselves, altering their practices and encountering a glimpse of others.

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Micro-moments

The promise of uncanny

Resistance

Who is valid?

Who can afford it?

Changing names

Micro-dance

A simultaneously paradoxical positionality: included and excluded

*

CONCLUSION AS IF THIS IS THE LAST FOLD

T & M: Concluding such a folded text is almost impossible, as the constant folding and unfolding creates disruptions, distractions, and confusions. Such distractions move counter to the linear, consistent, coherent and sequential narratives, that are validated and acknowledged as 'high' language of arts and academia.

 Reading such a non-linear folded text requires resilience. Resilience causes exhaustion. The repetition of folding/unfolding also causes exhaustion. The exhaustion in the Deleuzian sense (1995), creates resonations and vibrations and therefore, makes the contour of the (dancing) body indeterminate and incompatible. Chora + graphy, in our work, refers to a collaborative folded writing practice through which we scrutinize experiences, memories, spaces, relations,

and politics and how they resonate with one another. Through inclusion as folded choreo-writing as research inquiry, we offer a potential space for dance with ungraspable and unidentifiable boundaries. Then, it is not clear (to the system of visibility and its language of realization) where the wheelchair or veil begins, where they end, and what each extension can afford? As corporeal extensions, veil and wheelchair are conjunctions of flux, "in a continuum of reversible intensities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 22); their intensities unsettle the borders and enable transpositional and nomadic shifts across exclusive spheres.

 This chapter consists of the fragments of dance-related moments and memories, choreo-written through the folds, to create a *chora* capable of holding simultaneously both active and still, disciplinary and non-disciplinary, valid and invalid, archival and non-archival, uncanny and familiar embodiments, together. This folded collaborative writing, as choreography, sustains its political potentiality at the pivot of each fold and twist, where the co-existence of the paradoxical spheres and moments are possible. We see our folded choreo-writing as a political counter move against the exclusive contours and spheres of dance, welcoming the invisible and non-normative to create new inclusive spatializations.

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