

# On the Lived, Imagined Body: A Phenomenological Praxis of a Somatic Architecture

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## Abstract

"On the Lived, Imagined Body" is a reflective remembering from the point of view of a movement performance artist's training session learning to dance with imagined wings when in her lived experience, the body of the dancer is aware somatically of moving with wings that do not actually exist. The overarching conceptualization in this article describes the inner-outer tensions, the kinesthetic, somatic, proprioceptive penetration inward and the visual-kinetic, imaginative reach outward. The landmark work from dance phenomenologist Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1966/2015), *The Phenomenology of Dance*, prompted the author of this article to translate an embodied experiential and imagined event for readers who might never have had the experience of a somatic movement training of dancing with imagined wings as a lived experience. The phenomenology of dancing as if with lived and imagined wings is developed further as a result of two week-long *presencing* workshops taught by contemporary dancer-choreographer and somatics teacher Benoît Lachambre (2015/2016). For movement artists and dance practitioners, experiencing imaginary wings as lived wings means experiencing movement through mindful awareness and conscious intention of a praxis of somatic architecture.

## Introduction

The following description is gathered from first-hand experience, reflecting on the experience of seeming to have wings while dancing<sup>i</sup>, and what is learned in the process. The experience of dancing with imaginary wings is an experience of dancing *as if* with wings.

*As if* with wings is much less the transport into the sky, *being there* in the *now* of a flock of birds in V formation, flapping their wings in concert. Rather, my experience of being in a workshop, feet touching the floor of the studio, and my ears and eyes intently attending to the instructions of the movement coach Benoît Lachambre, make it so that I do not leave my body for

another plane of being. Now is not the time to imagine that I am a bird about to take flight, or a winged angel ascending to the heaven. My task is to remain fully present to the experience of the *here* and *now* of the studio. The *as if* condition is one of shape-shifting into an imagined lived body.

To imagine growing wings, to stretch wings and take flight, I invite the reader to imagine "the imaginary, [to] cease to conceive it as a copy of the non-real and the subjective real" (*creative translation from French*, in Dufourcq, 2011, p. 379). Rather, wings exist because of the power imagination has to manifest wings as lived for the duration of one embodied practice. In my own practice, I understand that imagining wings is an intuitive affair. There is no right, nor wrong way to imagine the wings. Furthermore, every time the reader might lose the imaginary thread, I suggest to pick it up again, however differently and discontinued, according to an imagination at that very present moment.

In a phenomenal sense, the experience of having wings extends to a description of what can happen when ideas take flight. While I imagine moving as if with wings, I reflect on growing wings for the intent of dancing with wings. The aim of practicing to take flight is first and foremost an exercise in conceding that imagination is my teacher. That is what the reader may aspire to imagine as I remember my experience for them: the non-real is really something to learn from.

I am a body-based artist and movement art researcher; my quest allies with how a body moves with artistic intent. What I can offer is what professor Max van Manen (2016) describes in *Phenomenology of Practice* as a means to "refer to the practice of phenomenological research and writing that reflects *on* and *in* practice" (p. 15). Thus, I describe my experience of growing wings *in* the context of a dance workshop for a reader who may never have imagined dancing with wings. I trust that, by reflecting on my experience, the reader may "receive insights and inspiration" from my description of the meaning of the lived feeling of having wings (p. 16).

While I live the imagined wings on my back, I well know that the wings are images, nevertheless, affecting my body composition as well as my external space. I remain present to the space of the studio and to my dancer body. The kinesthetic, somatic, proprioceptive penetration inward and the visual-kinetic, imaginative reach outward, opens-up my rib-cage, allows more air than usual to flow in and out of my lungs, weighs my body to the ground while lifting me up. The result is amplitude both real and imagined. It plays on my body's composition of effort flow and effort drive<sup>ii</sup>. This is what I call shaping somatic architecture.

## Extended Body

Moving bodies, whether moving in the moment or in memory, freestyle, or choreographed, can be incredibly expressive. The phenomenology of the body in movement aligns with somatic approaches such as those of phenomenologist and dance scholar Sondra Fraleigh's Shin Somatics pedagogy, movement educator and therapist Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's Body-Mind Centering approach, and various techniques of performative presencing. A student of somatic movement will strive to move with awareness, consciously, and with intent. A somatically trained dancer understands anatomical details involved in producing movement – aspects of bone structure, how muscles wrap, dynamics of flow, risk and injury, as well as the correlation between the exhilaration of movement and pounding heart beats.

In her introduction of *Moving Consciously*, Fraleigh (2015) writes "somatic movement experiences have the potential to extend consciousness and transform lives" (p. xv). Of particular

interest to me in the praxis of imagining dancing with lived wings is the acquired somatic knowledge of a dancer familiar with imagining movement which serves also to render a phenomenology of the lived movement. Salient to the phenomenological writing practice, Max van Manen (2016) urges his students to ask "how is the body experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied" (p. 304)? In my own writing, I ask how is winged dance experienced in and for itself, while at the same time experienced as a movement toward otherness? Let us consider the conditions of the lived, imagined wings that make this movement possible.

Have you ever tried dancing with wings? Not with real feathers, but with mind's-eye wings? If you were to attend a *presencing* workshop with contemporary modern dancer, somatic mover, and choreographer Benoît Lachambre, you would experience moving in the studio with wings attached to your body. These imagined wings, this *presencing* of imagined wings, is not only a metaphor for how movement practitioners produce aesthetically pleasing movement capital. "The inescapably embodied" (Williamson, 2016, p. 280) somatic and phenomenal body of the dancer perceives her own body as self, and she has been trained to project herself into the experience of a body-self tending toward otherness. At the time of the workshop, in the space of the studio, we, dancers, live these imaginary wings.

Lachambre (2015/2016) eases us, as dancers and students, into his first instruction: yawn. "Yawning creates space" (B. Lachambre, personal communication, Feb. 13-17, 2015; Feb. 15-19, 2016). He suggests that we need space outside as much as we need space inside to allow for movement to emerge and take shape. Soon after, Lachambre asks us to grow wings. Lachambre guides our movement in space; he tells us a choreography already exists in space. For five days, three hours per day, we walk around yawning to create space. This pathic space, this space of felt possibilities, functions as a space through which the bodily other can be incorporated.

Space is an extended zone of knowledge. The spatial zones of knowledge modify our experiences. Within such space, our body begins to morph, incorporating an idea of wings. Lachambre (2015) thinks out-loud, while he, himself, tries on the idea of wings: "[W]hat are these zones which create a foundation for existence? There are no longer the familiar Cartesian zones" (B. Lachambre, personal communication, Feb. 13-17, 2015). He prompts us to investigate these zones and create non-human forms. Neither moving like a bird nor like an angel, Lachambre asks us to think in terms of an inner vision of space that allows for winged movement to be expressed as outer movement. Rudolph Laban (1879-1958) movement theorist of the early twentieth century, says of theatrical movement that "the problem is to learn how to use this way of thinking in movement in order to master movement" (*creative translation from French*, 1994, p. 42).

Moreover, Lachambre guides the dancers toward a modality of *being choreographed*. He tells the dancers to shed the responsibility of creating since everything exists already in space. "Allow being choreographed" (B. Lachambre, personal communication, Feb. 13-17, 2015). As the process unfurls, we see that the wings already exist in space as an extended body. Growing with wings becomes more akin sensory attunement, or as it ought to be called, *somatic attunement*. It is by these observation that somatic imagination makes otherness feel real: "[S]omatic approach emphasizes sensory awareness (paying attention to sensing) over motor action (doing)," the process of seeing our wings becomes more about "*how* one moves" than "*what* the movement is" (Batson, 2009, p. 2).

In describing the process of moving toward a winged-body, I think it is most productive to look at how philosopher and dance scholar Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1966/2015) has broken up the process of developing visual-kinetic imagery that conceptualizes the absent wings, learning wing-ness, and accepting the unreal as lived. In the chapter "The Imaginative Space of Dance" in

her book *The Phenomenology of Dance*, Sheets-Johnstone suggests dancers are impressed with a "fund of lived experience" from which they draw movement from (pp. 94-95). Sheets-Johnstone speaks of the mental image and "the imaginative representation of an object through a visual-kinetic form" in a "phenomenological approach" (p. 92). I find this interesting because my initial response is to interpret imaginative visual-kinetic forms as they come to me in a more somatically-felt experience of the imaginary image.

In the context of movement art and dance, I have spent more hours training somatically to attune my own body to shape-shifting than training at mentally visualizing the object I want my body to shape. I do not try to mirror the image I have in my head. I try to inhabit the foreign shape. Actually, I do not as yet know how to shape my body together with this newly imaged form. Somatically, I have the skill to shape my body into imagined shapes.

Indeed, going back to my reading of *The Phenomenology of Dance*, I realize that Sheets-Johnstone has laid the ground to explain my shape-shifting experience through a pre-reflective awareness of complex movements, such as moving a real body and an imagined pair of wings. "For example," she writes, "learning a new skill, the body understands the intentional act, yet is not able to coordinate its gesture toward a realization of the act" (p. 20). Pre-reflectiveness and the fund of lived experience work together toward one and the same aim, that is, to move "meaningfully" *as if* with wings (p. 21).

I understand Sheets-Johnstone's imaginative visual-kinetic forms within the context of lived, somatic workshop experience, and I have discovered the following four things: first of all, wings are absent-wings. My body in movement with wings on a moving body is a representation of wings. Second, I intend to move my body with wings through a consciousness of wings. Third, I have no wings, however I appear to be moving with what are absent wings. At this point in my dance, my wings exist as a "revelation of force" (p. 91). I imagine "forms" and "qualities" (p. 91). Fourth, my winged-body appears with me at the moment that I intend the imagined-wings to manifest. I will not hang my wings in the change room as I leave the studio. There will be no wings left there or anywhere else. As a winged dancer, I am combining intention with imaging. These are the steps for the imagined wings to become lived wings in my somatic imagination.

Another way to manifest the imaging of lived, imagined wings is to follow the path of Lachambre (2015), which is that of "allowing ourselves to be choreographed" (B. Lachambre, personal communication, Feb. 13-17, 2015). In this exploration, the wings are not so much represented mentally as they are a gift to the body from external space. According to Lachambre's pedagogy, it is not that the wings must be perceived as actual and concrete; they are to be allowed and received. From this perspective, the space which pre-existed wings choreographs the dancer. The dancer becomes a winged dancer together with the space of the dance. But how might we begin to understand how the wings already exist in space?

In the spring of 2017, I presented a paper "'On the Lived Imagined Body' and 'Unplugged'" at the *Frequencies Patterning Interconnectivity & Networked Temporality Sensorium Symposium* at York University. In the question period which followed, a dancer who trained with Lachambre at the National Ballet School of Canada told me this anecdote about the exercise of dancing as if with wings (personal communication, April 6, 2017). Martha Graham, modern dancer and choreographer, is remembered as stating that *arms start from the back because they were once wings*. Graham's landmark training repertoire includes elements of contraction and striking techniques. The Graham technique has been an incredibly influential vocabulary in modern dance training repertoires of the 20th and 21st century. Marnie Thomas (2007), the director of the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance from 2003 to 2006, recalls contraction and breathing

exercises that inspire "drawing energy into one self and sending it out" (p. 92). My interlocutor continued his story, reminding me that Lachambre comes from a tradition of rigorous modern dance training. While in his own *presencing* workshop, Lachambre does not address specifically the modern dance techniques by name because most other dancers in his workshop would be familiar with them. Hence, the dancers might strive to imitate Lachambre's body composition to appear as though they too, are sporting Graham wings. Inversely, when Lachambre walks around the studio seeing who has wings, he may likely be incorporating expectations from his Graham training.

What makes my experience different and somatically unique is that I do not have the experience of Graham training. My route for sprouting wings is somatically-based. My learning to sprout wings builds on how Sheets-Johnstone (2015) writes about seeing imagined "visual-kinetic forms" (p. 97). And somehow, without the prior Graham training instructions, I do sprout wings. The instructions to *Walk around with wings; try no wings; try with wings*, resonate through my whole being. Adding wings to my body, my bodily composition is transformed.

"How does consciousness apprehend movement imaginatively?" asks Sheets-Johnstone (2015, p. 97). Lachambre (2015/2016) instructs dancers to create space so as to have space to move in and out of. With "create," space becomes a place that opens-up to possibilities of movement. He instructs dancers to grow wings "like this" (B. Lachambre, personal communication, Feb. 13-17, 2015; Feb. 15-19, 2016). Well, it does free up the shoulder blades! I consciously create space in an effort to sense space. The result is a sense of freeing space for movement possibilities.

In Shin Somatics studies, Fraleigh (2015) tells us: "[W]e are conscious of the expressiveness of the body in motion, where the person is lucid and flowing, or where the form thickens and seems stuck, for instance" (p. 29). Somatic awareness, expands bodily boundaries of the body, skin, mind, and spirit to an external space, mind, and spirit. On conscious expressiveness of the body in motion, Lachambre (2016) explains to the dancers:

The skin envelope is a construct of invisible membrane, opened and porous. Avoid the opaqueness of the body barrier. There is a relationship between the shell within which radiates the internal body, and the inner light as a source of that which is spread inward and projected outside. This dynamic of inner and outer world reflects a state of presence that can be identified as a state of awareness. (B. Lachambre, personal communication, Feb. 15-19, 2016)

## **Transformation**

The relationship between the inner and the outer world is a condition of lucid somatic manifestation. Dancers are not really rigging wings on their back, nor are they careful in the studio not the dance on anyone's wingspan, nor indeed, to ruffle anyone else's feathers. Dancers do not take flight. On being lucid to a somatic image, Alison East describes the image of otherness as: "[W]hen I become deeply attentive to myself, another person, or a tree, an image forms in my mind's eye, a sense of connection that is wholly satisfying. This is a way of seeing that implies a *transformative relationship*" [emphasis in text] (as cited in Fraleigh, 2015, p. 172). From distinct body and distinct wings to working through a sense of connection, dancers transform an "object of the image as the body itself" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015, p. 97). The body feeling and filling the

mind's eye image is already a dance where "presumably one could 'step into' a pre-existing imaginative linear design" (p. 97).

The moment we are standing up on our feet, walking around the studio, striving to sprout wings, the composure of our bodies changes. I see dancers, faces contorted with effort, some with pouts, wrinkled foreheads and half-opened eyes, others with faces of quiet meditation. We are all striving to sprout wings. I feel like my eyeballs are sliding from their sockets and traveling over to both shoulders, around my shoulder blades, down my spine, through my muscles and up, resurfacing at the elbows where I imagine wings attach and fan out. I see bones: scapula, carpal, phalange extend as another set of limbs. As one line rises, one line plunges. I feel wings. Their weight, their gravity and lightness, become an extraordinary me.

My body is wider, higher, larger, and heavier, yet mightier. The lived imagined wings transform me. My teacher walks around the dancers, and comes to me. He says, "yes, yes" and takes a copy of my wings and fits them onto his own body. He walks away, his feet touching the floor of the dance studio, wings heavy and mighty on the back of his body. We are many, living with our wings. Would those passing by see dancers with wings? Or would they just see dancers in a state of furious concentration, pacing about in a dance studio?

A most important part of this process, as dancers move in the dance studio is, according to Lachambre's instruction, how each body understands itself. Each dancer must make her own connections between body, wings, space, and her own transformation, thus shaping a personalized architecture. How such understanding transforms the relationship of the actual body to the imagined body is what results in a unique and personalized dance.

## Somatic Presence

Along the intersections of inner body, outer shell (skin) and mighty wings, the dancer traces flows of energy. This energy is a tension between the inner self, the outer self, and the outer other. As I reflect on the experience of walking in the studio with wings, I remember it is not the palpable texture that I touch to validate its reality. What I see and touch, rather, is an effort quality of weight that shifts my flow of movement. Earlier I have cited Lachambre describing what he calls the conscious expressiveness of the body in motion. His words bring to mind the chiasmic reversibility concept of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (in Sheets-Johnstone, 2017, p. 7) describing a hand touching (seeing and feeling) another hand. In the same way, the wings touch my body and my body touches the wings where they connect to my own shape. The textural quality of the wings is a presence not of tangible materiality, but rather, a tangible quality of presence as experienced through weight and flow in space.

The somatic concept of "presencing" is also understood as a circular flow of regenerative energy, which Sheets-Johnstone (2015) speaks of in term of *illusion of force*. It is necessary to pause and to process how Sheets-Johnstone develops its meaning. Sheets-Johnstone goes a step beyond the definition offered by philosopher Suzanne Langer (1953) in *The Phenomenology of Dance* who suggests "what it symbolizes is the form of actual human feelings" (p. 26). Sheets-Johnstone makes two points that are of interest to my phenomenological lived experience of dancing with wings. Firstly, "movement itself is primarily a revelation of force" (p. 26). Secondly, situating a responsive experience within an "ontological basis," the dancer and the audience both experience living the illusion of force "that is, with the nature of the reality of the movement as it is experienced by any human being" (p. 27). How it may be possible for a passerby or for an

audience member to experience a dancer as if winged, will be taken up later in this article. Let us ponder at this excerpt: "[B]y virtue of movement, the human body must be considered as something more than a physical structure: its being incorporates consciousness as well as corporeality" (p. 27).

The body in the exercise of walking in the studio with imagined wings is both a pre-reflective body and a body reflecting on its consciousness. While in the midst of my training, I do not pause to doubt the source of my pre-reflective human wings. It feels like wings. That is enough to walk as if with wings. I trust my body knowing from experience real and imagined, of simply walking differently. I am, myself, wholly committed to the illusion of force. I am fully engaged together with a consciousness of real and imaginary corporeality.

Presently, I address the element of energy force. The energy that flows from lived movement, both as an illusion of movement and as a real movement, is experienced as an energy of presence. Wings do not just happen. They are energetically felt which makes them present. Phenomenologist and digital media dance scholar, Susan Kozel (2015), in her somatic archiving experiments, puts it thus: "[W]hat is felt is not something I know how to feel" (p. 2). Dancers have first-hand opportunities to test this unknown feeling by way of movements that are acts of performance. They come to understand that knowledge is at times both useful, and against utility, as they come to realize that they know they feel something that they do not know how to feel. "It therefore becomes clear that it is not a question at all of perceptual-imaginative relationship" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015, p. 96), but a "question of how knowledge of the actual movement supports the imaginative visual-kinetic form" (p. 97). Somatic presence, is how I dance my understanding of Sheets-Johnstone's illusion of force "on the reflective level" (p. 31), encompassing a "quality of the whole" (p. 98), that is, the body and the wings unified as one whole energetic force, one that has the power to manifest as a lived illusion.

By "somatic" presence, I mean presence in how it is transmitted to me through somatic movement arts training, the knowledge at once an incarnation of the real and the imagined as lived. Teaching somatic presence, and receiving the somatic teaching, is a little bit of a bracketing act. The difference between "not having presence" and "having presence" is visible to the outside eye. However, getting to it requires an inner metamorphosis that depends on a body talking to another body, and to a body listening to another body. It really is not an intellectually-minded transmittable skill. Nor is it a matter of putting the right foot in front of the left one just so. It is a somatically-minded learning.

I speak of "somatic presence" because it is how I was taught the word "presence," meaning a mode of performative attunement, by my teachers: TouVA movement performance art coach, Sylvie Tourangeau, somatic and contemporary dance teacher, Benoît Lachambre, and somatic dance and movement mentor Sondra Fraleigh. Being somatically present describes a quality of conscious reflection activated through movement. Somatic movement educator Amanda Williamson draws on Fraleigh's description of somatic qualities to describe how I understand somatic presence: "[W]e could rightly say that somatic qualities (perceptual qualities) can be discerned in any and all movement, but movement that is structured and interpreted somatically involves conscious, intentional use" (as cited in Williamson, 2016, p. 276).

It is presence that allows the dancer-performer to project what Sheets-Johnstone (2015) describes as "the body in movement as a form-in-the-making" (p. 30). Somatically imagined lines, patterns, and areal designs are activated through forms shaped by movement. Dancer and movement are form-in-the-making as one. This might seem obvious, however the trick is to stay present to its somatic activation. Movement as slight as inner movements, such as mastering

breathing slowing down to a barely existing pulse, to movement as an extremely outward statement of artful acrobatics, all require presence to grab the audience's receptive awareness.

## **Absent Presence**

I move, dancing with wings. Maybe this is erroneously phrased. My body does not know how it actually feels because I have never had wings attached to my body but, still, I have a sense of having wings.

A dancer's movement training has equipped one to relate as a whole entity, through both internal and extrinsic knowledge, to imagine her body and its extensions. This imagination draws on memories both actual and fictive. Not only are these images of objects, but they are also of actions and feelings. A dancer has felt dancing with wings because she has felt wings in her hands; felt their qualities of weight, softness, intricate engineering, bony tubular structure, hollow bones, and powerful articulations. A dancer has observed wings flapping. A dancer has a sense of the force of wings in action. The dancer puts this outside knowledge of flapping wings inside of her body. This knowledge is arguably unknown knowledge since it is not knowledge accrued from the image of moving with wings, but from a process of feeling her way from the outer appearing body, and from other remembered bodies, to her inner bodily self. Moving with her winged-body becomes a somatically present reality, which Sheets-Johnstone (2011) speaks of in terms of it becoming a "tactile-kinaesthetic awareness" (p. 116).

While journaling on my experience in Lachambre's workshop, I drew a cape representing the space occupied by Lachambre's wings as I *saw* them. Sheets-Johnstone (2015) says, "to speak of any spatial forms in dance, shapes as well as curves, diagonals, verticalities, and so forth, is to speak of the imaginative visual-kinetic forms immediately created by movement" (p. 93). Journaling, I drew my teacher's imagined wings: "[T]he body is imagined as being drawn, and the drawing exists in the form of an imaginative line which moves out the length of the body parts to form a complete imaginative visual configuration of the body as a whole" (pp. 97-98). The cape I drew is a single line extending from the shoulder-neck junction, from the body of the dancer and outward, touching a figurative floor at the level where the dancer's feet are drawn. The sagittal line and the vertical line of the back shape a triangle. I drew stars to occupy the space of the triangle and to symbolize texture. I wrote the words "magic" and "creating a dream," describing with nouns and verbs the experience of seeing Lachambre demonstrating walking with wings. "Imagine," he had said. I drew a picture of what I had imagined Lachambre had danced.

I saw his wings in that moment of imagining the felt presence of wings. I saw the forms he danced, he created, in the moment of his dance. His wings, "an imaginative visual-kinetic form which does not actually exist" (p. 100), became "a center of force" (p. 100). I saw extraordinary dancers. I saw those who had formed their wings, and those who had not. In the dance studio, I saw wings in the form their bodies shaped into, to support this extra-self. The studio was alive with invisible wings which were nonetheless defining visibly the somatic architecture of the room.

This approach to training prepares us in the somatic praxis of feeling absence.

## **Learning**

I begin to understand how Sheets-Johnstone (2015) puts into perspective a knowledge that "is not

a question of learning something from the image, for no new knowledge can be accrued from it" (p. 92). What can my lived imagined absent wings teach? I learn that the wings I feel as part of me are unreal objects. Where does that take me in my dance? The very real ability to presence visual-kinetic imagination reflects the conditions for feeling one's consciously imagined yet lived experience. Therefore, I learn that I have wings. I intend to move them as I move myself in the space of the studio. I feel my wings move me.

I describe to myself while I dance, the experience of having wings as I am dancing. Being somatically present in the felt event of dancing with imagined wings means to be attentive to "the moment of movement" (Fraleigh, 2015, p. 19). In this way, I learn from my wings, in a manner that allows me to continuously sustain these wings on my body with the intent of dancing with wings. Fraleigh (2015) says: "[R]eflecting on the experience further affirms somatic learning" (p. 19).

Knowledge can accrue from this event. In the studio, I have learned from the teacher how to sprout wings. I have learned that making a conscious effort toward creating space in and out of a porous skin boundary gets me living wings. I have learned to move with a set of intentional objects of consciousness, sustained along an immediate focus of attention. Moreover, I have learned that by sustaining that consciousness, I can sustain my wings, in and of their own uniqueness, from one moment to the next. "Wings like this," as Lachambre has taught us, can be explained as imagined and somatically felt in relationship to the inner and the outer body boundaries. When Lachambre says "yes, yes" and takes the wings from me, he is duplicating my wings. They become his own set of wings. That is a mimetic form of movement learning to a nuanced degree.

Movement is a means of learning to be conscious of an imagined object. Movement is a key to living the imagined wings, to dance the lived, imagined wings, consciously. I remember the feeling of being with wings from the moment wings moved in me. What is troubling with winged movement is that I have no real wing "retentional knowledge" (p. 94). The memory of my winged back does not come from having ever flown. Admittedly, I understand I cannot fly.

On "retentional knowledge," Sheets-Johnstone writes: "[T]he dancer has a fund of lived experience of her body in movement, and consequently, a highly developed pre-reflective awareness of the moving spatial presence of her body" (p. 94). To break away from the mind deciding on what is real or not, I must allow myself to access a blurry pre-reflectiveness, which means allowing knowledge as both real and imagined, that is to say, knowledge as a living production. Furthermore, I acknowledge this pre-reflective knowledge has specific delimitations. While I accept that dancers are dancing with wings, at the same time I know that dancers are walking on the floor of the studio and are not flying.

In the moment of switching between a fully human body, and an organized chimeric body, I experience vertigo. The liminal shift is felt as a dynamic entanglement of real and more-than. Putting aside any judgement, I fit my real body to the not-real wing sleeves. I scan my body to *see* how the body of these wings are familiar and unfamiliar from those I had imagined wearing a moment ago. Every time I slip into a pair of wings, I am at liberty to imagine new again. How I align my tailbone to my knees to my ankles, and how I balance my gate on my feet depend on the mass of the wing set. Once I have learned what my wings *look* like, I learn how to walk with them.

Although my wings are imaginary, I have decided that they do not exist without substance. I do not pass invisibly through walls and pillars, but require physical space in order for my extraordinary body to unfurl. My mind treats the imagined wings as being of the same bodily substance as my organic living body. This physical body carries the weight and the volume of the

wings. My mind's task, therefore, is not to judge the wings as real or unreal, but to "dance its created space" (p. 91). My mind busies itself in judging appropriate spatial measurements, learning to safely step around the other dancers' wings while taking into consideration my own wingspan.

A phenomenological understanding of knowing I have wings is thus a matter of perspective on how gathering and processing a lived experience occurs. Given that in the human world a dancer never had wings, at least not yesterday, or the year before, such a human dancer has no retentional knowledge of having had wings. All of this process is learned on the ground of a momentarily felt, albeit imagined, lesson. What is retentional is the felt and once-lived feeling of dancing with wings.

## **Spatial Awareness/Somatic Architecture**

Without movement, space itself is static. The task at hand in creating imaginary wing architecture is to find the space where the body has possibilities of movement, while also being receptive to movement impulses that generate space. According to the performative pedagogy of Lachambre, playing in and out of internal and external space creates a dream dimension. Dreams become another way to think and feel about imagined space and "the significance of the imaginative space of dance in relation to [its] composition" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015, p. 99). In other words, composing space as a moving dream is based on a dance that is consciously somatic in its design and architecture. Its somatic structure becomes activated through movement flows transforming space – outer and inner flow together. Dreams of dancing with wings act on the space within which the wings are unfurled just as these dreams act on the extraordinary body of the dancer. Lachambre (2015) instructs the dancers how to create a dream dimension (Fr. *créer du rêve*) (B. Lachambre, personal communication, Feb. 13-17, 2015). By creating space and allowing for space, the dancer draws upon a type of awareness of somatic dynamics which Lachambre calls "architectural transparency" and "shine" (Fr. *rayonner*) (B. Lachambre, personal communication, Feb. 13-17, 2015).

Somatic architecture is a mixture of mental imagery, spatial awareness, and a bracketing of realness. Somatic imagination and intuitive knowledge compose "a phenomenon of bordering" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1984, p. 245). In attempting to describe how Sheets-Johnstone (2017; 1999/2011) speaks of "being true to the truths of experience" (p. 12; p. xvii), I put words to Lachambre's concepts of "architectural transparency" and "shine," which at the time of receiving the instruction, I translated as corporeal concepts without trying to intellectualize them.

As a somatic practitioner, I have a knowledge of an "experiential anatomy" (Bainbridge Cohen, 1994/2012). The skin organ, in particular, is experienced as a border that can *see* inside and outside, both at the same time. This is how I might explain to non-practitioners how it feels to create an "architectural transparency," how Merleau-Ponty expresses "chiasm" and "reversibility" (as cited in Sheets-Johnstone, 2017, p. 7). My skin is porous. Through it, I have access to an inner and an outer zone of spatial awareness. The available space I strive to create inside of my body (by yawning, as per one instruction of Lachambre's workshop) affects the available space to move into and within, outside of my body. Imagine if you will, pockets of freed space between my muscles, fascias, wrist bone, and skin, which allows for my outer space wrist to gracefully flow from a wrist resting on my thigh, toward a wrist touching my forehead.

"Shine," is how I have come to explain how Merleau-Ponty describes the "phenomenon of movement," (as cited in Sheets-Johnstone, 2017, p. 7). When I shine the gesture of putting my wrist to my forehead, the whole of my inner and outer skin border travels through space, the body

opening and filling space as it were, in a manner of moving from one position to another position: from wrist-to-thigh, to wrist-to-forehead.

This experience of a somatic architecture overflows in an impulse for more space, more dream-creation, more movement. As imaginary wings become believable and the unseen seen, an artistic expression effectively creates space. It creates movement that is inherently self-generated, self-iterated, and a dynamic of the very thought of dancing with wings. How an image is lived in relation to somatic imagination conjures images of space. The wings manifest as invisibly felt. For this exercise, Lachambre asks us to have total awareness of the body geography. He leads us toward making use of our body intelligence and spreading this total awareness to our supportive bodily structure. Somatic body geography makes use of the space as both a physical reality and as an idea. The movement dynamic with its spatial condition puts in dialogue the imagined and the lived within intrinsic and extrinsic architecture.

As we are many to move our wings, we collaborate on a shared choreography, thus transforming the somatic architecture of the space. Shaping architectural transparency and shine and making absent wings present bequeaths a dynamic of movement. At its source, architectural shine develops through an agentic action of illusion of force in movement. Lucid dream transforms into a real space; transparent wings shape "within the total phenomenon of the dance" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015, pp. 98-99).

By being receptively aware to the possibilities that the space offers, the body is choreographed from the outside-in, thereby transcending its reality as a source of movement. It follows that reciprocity motivates a choreography of the inside-out. Lachambre (2015) continues: "[T]he bond between spirit and its spatial vessel, the body energy, is energy that permeates the body. The resulting energy is a link that exists as a reality of the imagined image" (B. Lachambre, personal communication, Feb. 13-17, 2015). Or, as Sheets-Johnstone (2015) words: "[T]he imaginative space of dance is its created space" (p. 91). The dancer is with wings as a dancer who flows with movement into dancing with wings. The wings exist attitudinally as an image; they exist somatically as a felt reality. The dancer's body grows to encompass the wings. Movement acts as the circulatory force between the dancer and her wings. The dancer with her wings takes flight.

The same dancer who told me about Graham's famous wing exercise asked me how an audience would see the unreal wings of a dancer (Bellerose, personal communication, April 6, 2017). It is a good question, and one I can answer insofar as I understand movement performance art audiences and dance audiences differently. For durational performance art, especially, the process of developing an action is part of the performance. The audience is attuned to receiving the process of the artist. Not always, but quite often, the convention of a shared space allows for the audience to walk around the artist in performance. Thus, for an audience familiar with experiencing the performing body in a more-than frontal presentation, imagination is already part of the experience. While the movement performance art audience members are attuned to flows of an energetic nature, this is not to say there is no appreciation for aesthetic presentation. The audience, however, witnesses movements for which it holds space, for something to energetically manifest. In this way, movement performance art audience and performer move together in a reciprocal spatial and energetic dynamism.

The dance audience is comprised very often of a majority of spectators whose experience of the dance performance is located in their own dance experience. This experiential fund allows spectators to re-live this or that movement. A spectator may very well have a certain fund of lived experience to draw upon, depending on which technique the dancer appears to show. This is not

to say that dance audiences cannot reciprocate the dancer performer's energetic flow. Nevertheless, the audience members receive the image of the body of a dancer with invisible wings as an image of an extraordinary body, often re-living themselves dancing extraordinary movements. "So long as a dancer and audience alike are aware of movement as a revelation of force, [wings] will constitute a part of the awareness" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015, p. 99) and the unreal wings will be experienced by the audience. The representation of wing-ness comes to exist in a personalized imaging representation via dynamics of spatial and energetic forces at play. The wings do not need to be seen for an image to be lived, for a movement performance artists or dancers alike to take flight.

### **Moving As If One Had Wings**

Somatic possibilities necessitate that dancers be somatically aware of movement and attuned to the movement that already exists. The determination of the dancer to incorporate wings becomes, furthermore, a posture of awareness and conscientious movement. The wings determine the dancer's winged condition, since these wings procure not a felt sense of wateriness, nor rock-ness, but of wingness of the imaginative visual-kinetic kind. In Sheets-Johnstone's (2015) terms, "the pre-reflective awareness of the body in movement as a dynamic form-in-the-making is inherent in any lived experience of sheer body movement" (p. 112).

In the following description, I reflect on how the wings as a quality of wings have meaning. The "grow wings" image is an idea calling for movement quality and texture. Wings are not actually wings, but a lived textural quality of wings actualized in the artfully skilled movement of the dancer and in her ability to make the imaginary a living experience. The wings are an experiential quality of felt experience. They become, for the dancer and between the dancer and the audience, visually-kinetic, energetic and affective qualities of wings manifested in the dance of an extraordinary body dancing as if with wings. The wings qualify as texture and as amplitude. I have said that the drawing I made of a cape-like shape represented a line as wings, and stars as a sense of texture. The actuality of the wings is a vibrancy with textural palpability. As a participant in Lachambre's workshop, I experienced this instruction as a mode of knowledge transmission, in movement effort quality and texture, even as spirits traversing my body, body boundaries rigged with foreign attachment. And I escaped, enlarged, penetrated by the tactility of the wings, with this foreign appendage reaching into my own architecture.

What is amazing is that a textural quality of wings is *presenced* by the dancer from her back. In the workshop, the wings are performed without the assistance of agile facial emotive language, nor do the wings reveal their shape through the motions of hands and arms gesturing suggestions of such a shape. The wings are not unlike carvings. Yet, unlike them, wings move. The dance of walking with wings is performed by alternating stretching, thrusting, tensing, and folding that creates an illusion of an outline filled with *stars*. Certainly I feel the wings in my whole body. Observers ought to see my body transformed by the effort required to manifest the wings through my whole body's composition and posturing. The wings, however, are unfamiliar reality for both the dancer and the observer alike who, nevertheless, have intentionally decided to experience its performance. The observer might not *see* wings, but the experience of *something* wonderfully more-than is presently performed.

In this way, for the dancer and the observer alike, the ekstatic wings exist as a multi-dimensional image within a willful attitude of wonderment. This is why I have written earlier that

the audience's task is not to accept or deny the actuality of the wings, but to receive the attitude of the dancer, bracketing the mind's regulative realities. Accepting the reality of the wings is not, however, the same as living the experience of the wings. To live the experience of the wings, one has to believe in the manifestation of the wings whether actual or imagined. One has to adopt an attitude of wonderment.

During the workshop, I wondered about my wings. I wondered in a worried way if I had gotten the feeling right. I wondered if this feeling of imagining wings had to equate with the feeling of having wings. *Do winged beings have a feeling of wings or is it a feeling of flying?* I wondered where the knowledge that I have wings began? In my shoulders? My spine? My peripheral vision? I wondered. Eventually, I danced. I moved like movers do, like writers write, like the voice speaking words. I wondered, and I marvelled all at once. Worry-freed, I no longer stopped to think about my wings. I moved my body as if with wings.

### **Conclusion: Ideas Take Flight**

The somatic architecture phenomenon is explained through bracketing the real. Somatic architecture may be learned from imagining body and space. Moreover, imagination has the power to shape a body and its movement into a somatic architecture. As imagined wings follow the dancers' motional trajectory, she walks with her wings, never taking off into the sky. Her wings flow behind and above her. When she fans her wings open, the audience is aware of the dancer's wings right in the centre of the illusion. The dancer's training has imprinted actual and imagined lived experience that she draws from as pre-existing awareness of winged movement performance. Absent-wings, this counter-knowledge, this feeling of presence and absence is manifested as felt texture. "It becomes apparent" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015, p. 102). The imagined wings exist both to the audience perceiving the dancer and the movement, and for the dancer somatically rigged to a pair of wings.

Dancers, in training, engage in more than quotidian movements. It is not to say that dance is inaccessible. Nor that more-than quotidian-ness ought to rule out phenomenological inquiry. Somatic awareness is an outcome of many years of training in movement practice. A somatically trained dancer acquires an extraordinary phenomenological sensitivity. As the extraordinary becomes an ordinary practice, dancing with wings becomes an experience that is lived through. "Lived experience names the ordinary and the extraordinary, the quotidian and the exotic, the routine and the surprising, the dull and the ecstatic moments and aspects of experience as we live through them in our human experience" (van Manen, 2016, p. 39).

This is why I express dancing with imagined wings as a lived experience. When I dance with imagined wings, I intentionally imagine my total body with wings. Wingness quality affects my somatic architecture. Lived wings ripple through me, inside and out, and outside and in. Winged energy thus is reciprocated, perpetuated through "a continuously dynamic creation of imaginative visual-kinetic forms" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015, p. 100). Consciously, aware, present and with intent, I become *with* wings.

The dancer is not aware of her arms as existing separately from the rest of her body; she is not aware of the movement of her arms as existing apart from the rest of her body; nor, finally, is she aware of each

dimension of her body as separate, as a distinct frontal, sagittal, and transverse plane.

(Sheets-Johnstone, 2015, p. 100)

In studio, everyday quotidian motions can be re-imagined. My body is made somatically extraordinary. My wings do not exist separately from my body, just as my arms do not exist separately from my body. My arms are a human arrangement of limbs and body that I use in dance, to pull and push myself, to propel myself, to soften a landing, to balance, to point, and to link with other dancers. My wings are an idea of this body; the imagined arrangement of wings and body, which become one and the same lived body.

What is the point of applicability of the study in question? For instance, is dance training in walking with wings applicable, in being a very imaginatively challenging accomplishment, to metamorphoses in other ways?

The intent is not to become a bird, nor to shift into birdness, but rather to trick the mind into believing that the attributes of wings become a human attitude. For this reason, every mover's expression of wingness will be unique and different. Nevertheless, the somatic architecture created through an image of wingness affects the body composition in a way bracketing the human shape allows. Dancing *as if* with wings, while remaining present to the space and place of the dance, exposes the extraordinary livedness and livingness of the body. It teaches us, more precisely, about the livedness and livingness of the body and its imaginative capacities.

Moving intentionally as if with wings opens the possibility to imagine the not-yet imagined, while it also opens trust to learning from an embodied imagination. An embodied practice of imagination, one that is rooted in the experiential and existentials of the body, thus frees up possibilities for a different way to inquire about experiences and creativity and the interpretation of creative experiences.

Being *as if* with wings is a very imaginatively challenging accomplishment which illustrates the power of the imagination. It may also lead to think of a possibility for a living body to tap into memories, perhaps, of a collective-type fund of experiences. That is where I hope to push my inquiry of imagined embodied shapes.

In conducting this inquiry as a movement performance artist, as a somatic practitioner, and as a dancer in training, I have experienced a dancer's existence with wings because I have lived as if through its very reality. As such, I have experienced movement as it were being actualized in an imaginary form.

Winged dance happens because I make it happen in the moment of a dance. And thus, I live my wings like I live my arms, albeit in a visual-kinetic spatialization of my extraordinary body taking flight at the edge of the real and the imagined experience.

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<sup>i</sup> In this article, I employ "dance" to encompass practices of movement performance art, somatics, and dance.

<sup>ii</sup> Rudolf Laban (1879-1958) (in Laban, 1994) organized movement in part as Effort flow and drive (space, weight, time).