Masters thesis

Navigating fluidity: how embodied and creative experiential education sustains Gen Z's identities – an autoethnographic perspective

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Navigating Fluidity: How embodied and creative experiential education sustains Gen Z's identities – an autoethnographic perspective.

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Abstract

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Based on the lived experiences of the researcher who is a Gen Z dance graduate, this autotheoretical and autoethnographic research investigates Gen Z's identities and context to develop a new understanding of their sense of self through ideas of embodiment. It seeks to assess the role of arts education in balancing or enhancing identity formation and persona development for this generation. The study examines the prominent role of Gen Z in digital spaces, particularly on platforms like TikTok, to understand its significance and impact on their sense of fluidity, identity, authenticity and offline engagement. Through this analysis, the research aims to offer a fresh perspective of arts education on current issues affecting their students, with a special focus on dance, movement and embodied practices, to ensure relevance for this new generation of students and early career professionals.

Keywords Dance education, Somatic education, Movement practices, Autoethnography, Autotheory, Identity, Gen Z, Embodiment, Fluidity, Social media

Research questions

1. What are the gaps in current dance education provision, as identified through my own and my peers' experiences?
2. What are the needs of current and future dance student cohorts, as they emerge from my experiences and encounters?
3. What strategies are available to readdress these gaps?

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Introduction

This research aims to provide new insights into dance education by articulating reflections and learnings from creative and educational practice from my own personal perspective, informed by the ethnographic outcomes of this investigation. Through a personal and generational lens, I explore how can movement education, dance, and somatic practices support and empower younger generations who are navigating rapid and destabilising changes in the world?

Positioned within the dance education landscape, this work engages with academic disciplines such as somatic practice, practice-as-research, cultural studies, and social sciences, aiming to offer a comprehensive account of evolving student needs. In particular, I focus on my own demographic—Gen Z—addressing questions such as: How do identity, embodiment, and self-recognition develop within contemporary creative educational contexts? The study considers whether these approaches can foster a sense of purpose and direction for students, many of whom, like myself, feel unprepared and demotivated upon completing creative studies.

In recent years, societal shifts like the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis have disrupted traditional structures, influencing creative industries and the provision of arts education. As these rapid changes reshape learning environments, how can creative education bridge gaps between educators and students to create supportive and responsive learning spaces? This study seeks to inform future directions in creative education by examining the experience of practice as research, with the objective of equipping creative educators with strategies and considerations to positively impact both student and educator experiences in the studio.

The motivation behind this research emerged towards the end of my three-year undergraduate studies in dance and choreography, as I reflected upon the journey that was concluding at the time. A defining factor of my educational experience was to see it intersect with the effects of the changes previously mentioned, as I initiated my Higher Education studies in dance in 2020, during a global pandemic and as a migrant working student. As I engaged in student groups, communities and leadership student positions, I witnessed increasing testimonies of other students

who shared similar impressions to me. This was notably accentuated with creative students of other disciplines, who, just as me, felt that, if anything, their undergraduate studies had made them feel even more lost and unequipped, decreasing their motivations of pursuing a creative career.

Witnessing this collective uncertainty led me to question the broader purpose of higher education in the arts and the role of creative practice. These reflections sparked a series of questions that underpin this research, including: What role can dance and creative practice play in fostering resilience and self-understanding for students facing uncertain futures? In examining these inquiries, I aim to articulate a fresh perspective on identity, embodiment, and self-recognition within current realities, such as the post-pandemic and increasingly digitalised world.

This thesis begins by introducing the context of the research, positioning my voice as a researcher in regard to the explored topics and outlining the motivations and main influences behind the work. Then, Chapter 1, focused on articulating a comprehensive and critical literature review, provides the research with a cross disciplinary theoretical foundation and framework that serves as a base of the study. Chapter 2 discusses the methodology behind this work and provides an understanding of the approach of the study, opening the doors for a final set of chapters that, divided by themes, account for an autoethnographical reflection and recollection of practice that provides the research with considerations and examples that address the discussed research questions. Chapter 3 explores self-recognition and personhood, Chapter 4 discusses intention and motivation and ultimately, Chapter 5 explores community and collectivity as a generator, concluding the text with suggestions for further research.

The Apple – Research Context

At the beginning of this year, 2024, I was lucky to have a brief encounter with the creative practice of movement artist Charlie Morrissey. Whilst we discussed our research interests, he shared the following quote in regard to his own practice: *‘How does the apple feel when it falls from the tree?’.* This line of questioning, sparked a new approach to my reasoning of multiple enquiries, instilling a sense of hope that suggested that it was possible to think differently, to shift the focus of what matters

and redefine it by bringing my experience, emotions and learnings to the centre of the discussion. I feel naturally inclined to sensory learning, which for me, allows intellectual cognitive processes to emerge. I create in order to grow, and I grow because of what I create. Despite feeling confident in this assertion, I often find myself doubting if this is enough to be considered 'academic'. In these times of self-doubt, I go back to read bell hook's words on *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003: 185): *'Coming to academia thinking of myself first and foremost as an artist'.*

I am an artist. In my experience, the consistent practice of artistic sensitivity, as a framework for learning to occur, has served a purpose that leads me to be here today, writing this text. It is however because my body exists physically and my existence is shaped by the perception of others that I feel an impending sense of fraud and self-doubt, as if my embodied knowledge holds no valuable information. Whereas I trust the validity of my experiences, emotions and feelings, I tend to question and self-impose doubt on my articulation of these experiences. In my educational journey up to this point, I have always been led into believing that my starting point was external to me, that I had to acquire external knowledge almost exclusively for my ideas to be even worth formulating. It felt like never enough, learning is a life-long task, and aiming to hold all knowledge is not only impossible but incredibly frustrating.

I cannot help but relate to the following lyrics in the Charli XCX's song Apple, which opens her album 'brat' (2024) questioning generational trauma by saying: *'I think the apple's rotten right to the core from all the things passed down from all the apples coming before.'* My undergraduate studies led me to believe that I was not - and would never be - ready to contribute to the unattainable and 'enlighted' line of thought that academia represented, perpetuating a hierarchical system of injustice that I longed to climb, as if becoming a part of the oppressive force would cancel the oppression it exerted over me (Gallego, 2020). At the time, I was not able to reflect on how educational institutions have always induced me into a perpetual impostor syndrome and state of 'netherness', from Kate March's doctoral artistic practice (2024). March's 'Netherness' refers to the state or quality of being nether or beneath; lowness; inferiority. Now that I have begun to trace back all the material and

immaterial effects that this power dynamic has had on my sense of self, I begin to explore where the problem lies.

Since graduating and taking up a position as University lecturer, my inability to recognise myself as an academic is not a matter of lack of confidence, knowledge or rigour, but a learned behaviour. In the same way that, as a little girl, I learned to fear my body getting bigger and, as a migrant, I learned to forget who I was before my experience of migration. I have always learned to mask, to be smaller and quiet, not to be too smart but also to be smart enough to become a 'girlboss'[i]. All these positions that I have been forced into, have made me understand the intersectionality of my many identities, the oscillation of my existence and the unknown of my being. When I stopped trying to escape the netherness, attempting to climb up the academic ladder, I began to look sideways, feeling a clear sense of comradery towards my disenchanted generational peers, those at my level of development, but also, of oppression.

It is difficult to confidently state that this is the right time for me to take a step on the ladder. In regard to my own experience, I am confident on my ability to step up and in the value of this action, however, in regard to the ladder, I cannot assert it is ready to receive it. As I explored research regarding current student experience, I noticed a lack of insight from the perspective of students, often encountering writing made by educators that, despite sharing spaces with students and holding a great amount of knowledge about student experience, did not embody the current reality of being a student. When encountering these texts, I often feel trapped in a glass box, I can see that others are looking at me, talking about me, but if I try to speak my words won't pass through the glass.

I begin by framing my multifaceted identity, shaped by my Gen Z context, particularly as a Zillennial[ii]. I am a migrant, female presenting, queer individual from a lower socioeconomic background, who has recently navigated Higher Education in dance and choreography in a UK based institution, both as a student and as an educator. As a recent graduate who navigates a professional practice of education and facilitation within dance, I have found the momentum to take a leap of faith and write a text that brings student experience to the centre, accounting for the convoluting

context students navigate and the specific nuances that I have observed in my own personal experience as a recent student among my peers.

My teaching practice in Higher Education formally began by becoming a lecturer in dance promptly after graduation, teaching in a module component named ‘Performance and Making’ to year one undergraduate students. It was then, from the position of an educator rather than a student, that I began to question my role within institutionalised learning spaces as I faced classrooms and studios full of young Gen Zs. Gaining distance and perspective by reflecting on my recent time being a student in the same institution that I was now teaching at, made me question the many gaps that needed bridging between the student body and the teaching staff. In my experience, Gen Z students have evidenced that there is a need to analyse and challenge existing educational formats, holistically adapting them to the needs and preferences of each specific student body. This text situates its enquiry within my lived embodied experienced of both the gaps and the bridges between educators and students, explored from an autoethnographic perspective that flows alongside further collected data, literature, social media content, reflections on my creative educational practice and relevant cultural artifacts, as the research expands.

What This Text Is and What This Text Is Not

I was inspired by Merleau-Ponty's philosophical attempt to find a middle ground between intellectualism and empiricism, critiquing that both perspectives assume a pre-existing, ready-made world and therefore do not adequately consider the historical and embodied nature of experience, as developed on *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) . Consequently, it is for this reason that I have adopted an autoethnographic approach to this research, arising out of an intention to, once more, claim the validity and rigor of contemporary embodied research (Toadvine, 2023). As a creative practitioner, I recognise that movement artists generate and possess distinct bodies of knowledge and employ methodologies specific to embodied practices, taking a variety of shapes when transmitted (Barbour, 2012). More specifically, as an artist with a background in dance and movement, I believe that creative embodied practices have the potential to generate new understandings, contributing making an autoethnographic account on dance

educational experiences, its impact and implications, the centre of this research (Barbour, 2006).

In addition, an autoethnographic lens provides this research with the opportunity to navigate the nuances of my experiences as a Gen Z regarding social media, embodiment, social and cultural context and academia in first person. This viewpoint aims to contribute to and fill the gaps on the current existing research around these topics, as it often perpetuates a narrative that 'others' voices like mine. This text is not an attempt to ignite a generational war or to contribute by any means to the previous ones (e.g. #OkBoomer[iii]). This writing – is an attempt to bring value to the lived experiences of my generational peers, to the extent that my experience allows, shedding light into the particularities of navigating the world and academia as a Gen Z this day and age.

As of right now, to interrogate Gen Z requires of a flexible approach that allows my generational peers and me to organically evolve, hence why this interest is not interested on or intends to address the generation as a whole. Establishing a fixed perspective on the matter becomes impossible as we are an evolving generation that, at the time of this writing, spans from young teenagers to adults. This extensive assortment of ages, but most importantly life stages, complicates an accurate recollection of Gen Z experiences, as the younger and older clusters of this cohort might share very little in their lived experiences, causing subdivisions on the initial generational timeframe established, which I will expand on in Chapter 1.

Whereas I utilise the term 'Gen Z', I do not intend to suggest that my commentary and reflections expand to all Gen Z experiences, however, having worked with Gen Z (as peers, participants colleagues and students) as part of my research and educational practice, I feel that there is a gap that requires acknowledgement between those of us born and raised with digital technologies around us and those who came before us. This gap, which will be discussed further in Chapter 1: *Bridges and Gaps: Contextualizing Fluidity,* motivates me to speak about 'Gen Z' as a reclamation of my value as a young person in a specific moment in history, with no desire or aim to speak for the totality of my generation's experiences. Ultimately, it remains crucial to contextualise that my creative educational experiences that inform this text were located in Spain and the UK, as I initiated my dance studies in

a conservatoire environment in Southern Spain and then transitioned into Higher Education in the UK.

This text focuses on my personal experiences, expanded by the inclusion of further voices through conversations, encounters and shared practices with a community of practice formed by a majority of Gen Z individuals with recent experiences of Higher Education, in the creative realm and in other areas of study. This specific demographic or community of practice is mostly conformed by migrants and older Gen Z (Zillenial) with a certain experience of creativity and culture through education, both professionally and recreationally. Through these experiences, I aim to articulate what autoethnographers have named insider knowledge of cultural experience, with the intention to inform current research about the specificities of navigating the world and academia as a Gen Z, not aiming to articulate universal truths but a more comprehensive and accurate account, with no intention to encompass the vast plurality of experiences within my generation (Adams, Ellis and Jones, 2017).

The framing of my argument stems from the following premises that shape the structure of this thesis:

- I am (or we are) because of my context
- I am (or we are) because of my body
- I am (or we are) because of others around me

These three connections serve as a structure for the upcoming autoethnographic account and reflections on practice displayed on the text alongside a critical analysis and review of current literature, which focuses on the development of strategies that facilitate the healthy navigation of our contexts of crisis through a restoring of selfhood and consolidation of communities. Finally, I will discuss innovative approaches to embodied pedagogies of experiential learning within creative education and discuss considerations regarding younger generations.

On naming (or not naming) dance - Disciplinary Focus and Limitations

The practice of conscious embodiment through dance has remained a constant in my life despite the migrations and transitions of my age and geographical location, shaping my understanding of dance as a lens that frames the world I navigate and as a tool that sustain my ability to self-recognise in it. As articulated by Merleau-Ponty (1945: 186), *'C'est par mon corps que je comprends autrui...'* [It's through my body that I understand the other...], emphasising the body's role in cultivating empathy, connection and comprehension. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's insights resonate here, as she describes dance as a 'immediate corporeal reality' that connects us deeply to ourselves and to others, bridging individual experience with a shared human understanding (2015: 40-42).

I do not believe that 'dance' exists on its own isolated world but as part of a bigger set of creative strategies that support one's own development and, consequently, cultivates collective consciousness, potentially promoting positive change. Similarly to Merleau-Ponty, Sheets-Johnstone highlights that 'dance is the becoming of one's own body', suggesting that through this process of 'bodily becoming', individuals come to understand themselves in relation to others and their surroundings (2015, 40). This view resonates with my own perception of dance as a pathway to self-recognition that simultaneously fosters an awareness of the broader world.

I remain conscious of the level of privilege I hold and have held in order to access dance education and sustain a creative practice in the field, which is why I remain hesitant of naming dance or dance education as such. I am conscious of the socio-cultural implications and expectations the word holds, as well as the barriers on access that they may pose for certain demographics, which is why I am opting to use words such as embodiment, movement and an overall creative and experiential learning terminology instead.

My experience of dance education, both as a student and educator, is rooted in institutions such as conservatoires and universities, extending its branches through community settings, vocational schools and recreational contexts which have ignited my questioning around the institutionalisation of dance and the possibilities

for an education on embodiment through these spaces. In this text, I discuss the topic from different perspectives with a focus on Higher Education spaces, since my core questioning and artistic enquiry was developed in these contexts. I do not aim, however, to restrict my commentary to these spaces exclusively. I hold the believe that cultivating embodiment in a way that is nurturing and constructive to individuals and their communities can happen across different contexts, which is why, despite commenting on Higher Education institutions often, I aim for this text to centre around the idea of the educator, who, within the boundaries and possibilities of each context, has the potential to trigger an embodiment-based creative educational practice.

It is because of the plurality of my experiences that I find inspiration in socially engaged art education-based collaborative publications such as '*We contain multitudes: Expanding spaces and forms of mentorship within art education and practices'* (2023) and *'How We Hold: Rehearsals for Art and Social Change'* (2024), which emphasize the need for consciousness and presence in art/community-making. I aim for this text to contribute to the existing body of methodologies for artistic enquiry and educational practices, emphasising generational embodied knowledge as well as unintentional and communal forms of learning in and out of the classroom (Dittel, 2024).

Chapter 1: Bridges and Gaps: Contextualizing Fluidity – Literature Review

This literature review explores key theoretical contributions across several disciplines, including media studies, cultural studies, social sciences and somatic practices, to provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the utility of dance and movement experiential learning in contemporary education. The chapter is structured into six sections covering the key concepts and theories related to the topic of study from a multi-disciplinary perspective, critically analysing the points in which these disciplines overlap and provide this study with a richer perspective. This perspective allows me to explore the nuances of a complex and current topic identifying gaps that require of an interdisciplinary, or even transdisciplinary, approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues discussed.

Overview of Key Concepts: Generations, contexts, connectivity and collectivity

Based on the ideas of sociologist Karl Mannheim (1928), 'generation' refers to a collective of contemporaries who share a common history and a set of experiences that significantly shape their formative years. This is a commonly agreed upon definition; 'a group of individuals born and living contemporaneously' (Merriam Webster Dictionary), expanded on by Collins English Dictionary by explaining that these individuals 'are considered as having the same experiences or attitudes'.

It is often suggested that individuals who belong to a specific generation, who consume similar trends through similar mediums, are likely to cultivate and collectively hold similar values, impressions, convictions and expectations, making shared socio-cultural phenomenon the guidelines that established separating timeframes for each generation, however these are not exact nor arbitrary (Thorpe and Inglis, 2019 ; Dimock, 2019). As seen in the Figure 1 below, there are currently five generations recognised in Western societies as actively participating in workspaces, Higher Education and different communities:

Generation	Birth range
Generation Z, commonly known as Gen Z.	1996 - 2015
Gen Y, commonly known as Millennials.	1977 - 1995
Generation X, named after Douglas Coupland's book that bears the same title, published in 1991.	1965 - 1976
Baby Boomers, named after an unprecedented surge in birth rates following World War II	1946 - 1964
The Silent Generation or Traditionalist - do not participate in workspaces actively anymore but they are still a part of our society and certain communities.	Before 1945, during World War II.

Figure 1. Source: The Center For Generational Kinetics (2022)

However, meeting the timeframe criteria alone doesn't automatically confer the status of an actual generation. Mannheim (1928) suggests that an active acknowledgment of these shared experiences by the potential generation is essential for such recognition. Simply being born in a particular place and undergoing specific events does not inherently signify the emergence of a 'new generation.' Understanding that generations are not born but made, makes exploring social generations a complex endeavour (Thorpe and Inglis, 2019). It is because generations are not enclosed boxes but clues that provide measurable growth that they function as a tool through which individuals conceptualize society and strive to promote change (Centre of Generational Kinetics ; Wohl, 1979: 5 cited in Thorpe and Inglis, 2019).

The framing of this research stems from an understanding of generations as groups of people that recognise themselves and their peers through their shared situations, experiences, preferences and similarities. This framing brings an inherently fluid and fluctuating nature to the concept as it considers that generations do not depend on a structured separation but on a sense of self-recognition within collectivity. Since there are no boundaries or formulas to set the cut-off year for each generation, the changes produced in the socio-political and economic environment of each generation's formative years become crucial to trigger self and collective recognition, emphasising the importance of considering the context in which

individuals exists in order to understand the preferences, tendencies and concerns of each generation (Dimock, 2019), which provides this research with a cross disciplinary interest.

The theoretical perspectives from cultural, media and communication studies propose that cultural products often become a generation-defining element. The emergence of concepts such as ‘media generations’, proposed by communication scholar Golar Bolin, explain that the development of popular media plays a crucial role in our understanding of our own generational belonging (2016). Examples of this are pop music fandoms in which the most impactful period artists’ careers happen in the formative years of different generations, either teenage years or young adulthood, which is when these individuals found themselves constructing their own sense of self and identity: Spice Girls’ fans are generally Millennials, whereas One Direction’s fans are mostly Gen Zs and Nirvana’s fans belong in majority to Generation X. However, despite the deeply intertwined relationship between personal and generational identities with the influence of specific cultural phenomena, aesthetic trends and media products, understanding generations as cultural and social groups can be intricate and therefore debatable, often causing an assumption of the existence of a cultural homogenisation (Thorpe and Inglis, 2019).

Assumed cultural homogenisation has been a cause for debate when discussing younger generations, as previous generations were limited by geographical location whereas younger generations are more globally connected to our generational peers thanks to our involvement in online spaces and communities (Stahl and Literat, 2023). The element of online existence is one of the generation-defining markers that differentiate Gen Z from previous generations, which will be expanded upon in this chapter during the subtitle *Performativity and other gaps in the ‘New Normal’: Exploring digital existence*, as it remains a consistent and relevant element in understanding Gen Zs’ context and its influence on lived experience and embodiment.

Digital connectivity has facilitated a link between generational peers who share cultural references and similar experiences in response to the socio-economic environment we navigate, recognising each other through our common perspective

of our place in society. Despite being globally connected, it is problematic to assume that we are a homogenous generation. It is crucial to acknowledge that, as emphasised by Woodman and Wyn (2015), significant differences and inequalities persist within and among various global regions. Global convergence assumes that we all move in the same direction, overlooking the dissonances in our experiences caused by multiple different factors: ethnicity, sexuality, gender, location, class, (dis)ability… (Scholz and Rennig, 2019 ; Alves, 2023). Geographical context remains crucial in delineating intragenerational differences, however, digital connectivity opens the door for global generational phenomena, particularly concerning Gen Z, since *'digital communications facilitate wider cultural flows, and new attitudes'* causing a digital illusion of global convergence, as we can now peek into these different experiences of other Gen Zs across the globe developing a higher awareness of each other (Woodman, 2016: 24; Thorpe and Inglis, 2019).

Social media functions as a great medium to connect us across our intragenerational differences, allowing Gen Z to recognise and celebrate each other and what unites us as a generation, despite differences in individual experiences, even if these remain. In the online manifesto '*We, the Web Kids'* (2012), author Piotr Czerski explains that, for younger generations, the 'virtual world' is part of our real world and not a separate entity: '*the Internet to us is not something external to reality but a part of it: an invisible yet constantly present layer intertwined with the physical environment. We do not use the Internet, we live on the Internet and along it'*.

The foundational inquiry on this research lies in self and collective recognition, as well as intragenerational digital connectivity, questioning how Gen Z's identities and most particularly my identity as a Gen Z, which have been partially facilitated by existing in online spaces, have shaped self-perception and worldview, influencing behaviours and motivations to act in specific ways (Sagiv et al., 2017). As I think of the popular saying *'tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are'*, I begin to question: *If I am us, who is me?* Approaching questions around identity from a generational perspective can allow this research to explore the tension between individual and collective identities, questioning the role of performativity and digital spaces in both instances. The generational framing of this research facilitates an enquiry into how one's personal identity is influenced or even overshadowed by their connection to a group or community, reflecting on how

trained embodiment through creative education can balance being part of a collective ("us") and maintaining a distinct sense of self ("me").

So… who is me? – Theoretical Considerations Around Identity

Gen Z's identities have been extensively defined as fluid, which accounts for a vast heterogeneity not only among their ability to recognise each other as a collective but within their personal senses of self-recognition (Zabel and Register, 2019). Studies such as the conducted by Zeus Jones' and Dscout, both in 2020 emphasise the dynamic aspects of Gen Z's personal brand, sexuality and gender, concluding in defining Gen Zs' identities as *'diverse, evolving, and nuanced'*. My interest resonates with the term 'evolving', used in the text alongside similar concepts such as 'work in progress', 'the malleable self' and 'adaptability'. These active and dynamic concepts suggest that fluidity is a generational core characteristic for Gen Z raising questions about what has led us to this inherently fluid state.

I can recall the first time I began to understand my own identity as fluid. At the time, I did not have these words or understood myself as fluid, however, I began to observe a shift on my attitude towards external change, an acceptance of fluidity that eventually made me become fluid in my own understanding of myself. During my dance education at conservatoire level back in Spain, my then ballet teacher made a comment to me, referring to my stiff and headstrong mentality that, at the time, struggled to adapt to the changes I was experiencing on my personal life: *'Se como la palmera que se dobla pero no se parte ante el vendabal',* which roughly translates to 'be like the palm tree that bends but does not break in the face of the gale. As I have grown and become more aware of my place in the world, my relation to others and the conditioning effects that my context and background has had in many areas of my life, I have also made peace with fluidity and learned to find enjoyment and opportunity within the fluid nature of my identity.

The work of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2013) develops the concept of *'liquid modernity'*, explaining that modern times are an arena of constant battles where the liquid modern human has been appointed to be the sole executive chief managers of life politics. Bauman proposes that our current state of living human beings in the Western world under capitalism has reached a point of '*perpetuum mobile'*, where something never is but it always becomes, requiring us of continuous negotiation

with each other and ourselves. Reinsborough (2010) talks about a slow-motion apocalypse cause by global capitalism that generates overlapping and back-to-back crises, highlighting environmental, humanitarian, sociopolitical and economic crises, These ever-changing capitalist crises require our identities to become fluid in order to encompass all the fast-changing demands, becoming what Bauman (2013) describes as 'chameleons', who shift with ease aligning with the consumer-oriented logic of owning, disposing, acquiring and throwing away. Crises becomes a fundamental term in this text that will be expanded upon during Chapter 4: *Navigating the Loss of the Utopia: Hope and Purpose in Times of Doom.*

Describing self-perceived identity tends to be an intricate exercise as it essentially pertains to an individual's self-awareness and their perception of themselves. Behaviours, thoughts, emotions and feelings are significantly shaped by one's self-perception while also moulded by our own individual surrounding social environments -cultural background, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, among others-, as the mutual deep interdependence between oneself and society influence each other (Sitompul et al., 2023). The processes of self-perceived identities formation could therefore be considered as interrelational, occurring between the individuals, the mediums through which the individuals express themselves and the wider context in which they exist.

Transhumanist[iv] philosopher Nick Bostrom explains that personal identity has been a constant enquiry for philosophers, with a notable emphasis on the ontology of an enduring identity over time, the significance of personal continuity, the correlation between numerical identity (only being oneself) and qualitative identity (resemblance to a past or future self), the interconnection between our minds and bodies, and the very existence of a self (2011). This text takes inspiration from authors such as Plato and Heidegger on their proposed ideas of dichotomy of 'being' and 'becoming', however, for the purpose of this research, these terms are used in a looser and more general way. The reason behind using these concepts at all is that they account for the 'dynamic', 'nomadic' and 'fluid' nature of Gen Z's self-recognition in their identities, which imply a sense of motion or movement; further emphasising becoming rather than being, process and fluidity over fixed points and final results. Due to the nature of this research, I have decided to address this topic in its plurality, resulting in the conscious use of terms such as "identities" and

“processes” in plural to acknowledge the multiplicity of the self that, I suggest, has emerge within Gen Z identities as conditioned by the context in which we have learned to recognise ourselves.

Bostrom (2011) uses layers to describe the complex topic of identities explaining that these multiplicities of the self are rearranged and built by our interactions resulting in multiple identities:

- The ‘core self’, defined as ‘our experience of being someone’.
- The ‘narrative self’, which encompasses our sense of the past, present and future of this someone we are as well has our attributes.

Whereas the ‘core self’ seems to be a solid immutable concept, the ‘narrative self’ is everchanging and adaptable throughout our lifespan as it interacts with our ‘social identity’, which exists in multiplicity as ‘deliberate modifications’ of the ‘narrative self’ that produce different ramifications of one’s ‘narrative self’, referred to as ‘personas’.

It is often that Gen Zs themselves express an approach to identities in which they are and become at the same time, all the time. As one of the comments on the below Figure X reads: *‘This is who we are at core. We are a process to be lived, organically changing as life happens to us’.* As such, ‘being’ (the ‘core self’) and ‘becoming’ (the ‘narrative self’) are not necessarily understood by my generational peers as mutually exclusive but as processes that happen in tandem.

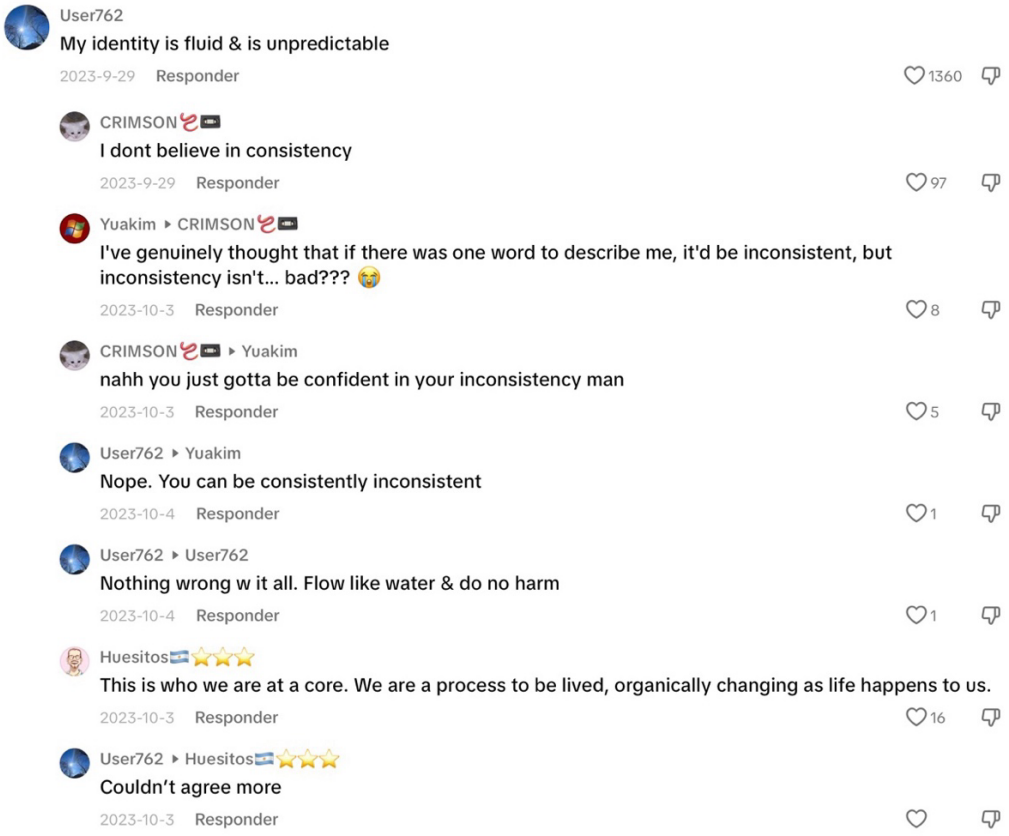


Figure 2. Thread of comments extracted from Matt Lorence's video on TikTok published on September 28th 2023. Source: @littlefreak26 on TikTok

Digital connectivity, as presented in the subsection *Generations, contexts, connectivity and collectivity* above, has expanded the realm of possibilities for self-expression and self-definition (Stahl and Literat, 2023). Online platforms are often portrayed as a space that fosters the exploration and experimentation of one's identity, liberating individuals from various constraints. In this light, connectivity is perceived as an empowering or, at the very least, a broadening ecosystem and tool for self-expression (Brubaker, 2020). Hay-Chapman, et al. (2020) suggests that a part of the Gen Z understanding of social media is that digital spaces are a playground where they can do a "trial run" of the identities they are forming that are 'not ready for IRL (In real life) expression' yet and showcase them to an online community that is undergoing the same trial process and therefore understands these attempts to self-presentation as a playful and simple experimentation. Gen Z perceives identity as an ongoing 'work-in-progress', embracing the amalgamation and redefinition of the elements that shape our individuality allowing them to constantly become and be something new that is in an ongoing state of change, which will be explored further during Chapter 3…. Instead of only being 'parts of', Gen Zs are 'this-and' (Gaterud, 2019).

As a summary, this section has introduced fluid, evolving identities shaped by digital and social influences, facilitating the identification of gaps in current educational approaches through my own experience of fluidity. I aim to propose strategies that foster adaptability and self-recognition in students as, ultimately, this research seeks to make dance education a tool for personal and collective growth, equipping students to navigate a constantly shifting world.

Somatic Considerations: Embodied Learning and Digital Existence

By drawing on insights from both somatic and media studies, this writing aims to highlight the value of an interdisciplinary approach in addressing digital existence and identity formation. Embodiment is a contested term, however there is an agreement that it refers to an approach that refuses the mind/body dualism (Leigh, 2018). Embodiment refers to somatic, body-grounded approach to traditionally abstract and intellectual matters 'such as perception, thinking, memory, decision-making or learning' (Clughen, 2023: 735). Embodied practices and somatic approaches, traditionally related to the realms of movement/dance practice and education, are currently on the rise in multiple spaces of varied nature (workspaces, corporations, therapeutic contexts and educational environments), employing strategies such as meditation, mindfulness or mindful movement such as yoga or Pilates that aim at connecting people to their bodies and, ultimately, improve the core needs of the space and the individuals who populate them (Clughen, 2023).

Catalonian choreographer Cesc Gelabert (2020) talks about embodiment within the realm of dance referring to an internal phenomenon that provides direction, purpose, meaning and conviction to those who engage with it, explaining that dance and movement are mediums to arrive at embodiment but not embodiment in itself as embodiment can be achieved by other practices. Somatic practices, understood as mindful movement practices that encourage interoceptive awareness, support the cultivation and maintenance of an embodied existence (Özel, 2024) (Qutbuddin, 2024). Gelabert, however, does not employ the word 'embodiment' or its Catalonian translation *'encarnació',* since it holds a slightly different meaning. In my understanding, as it has the same meaning in Spanish, *'encarnació'* refers to the act of incarnating something else, whereas embodiment refers to a state of existing

as oneself. Gelabert, as many other Spanish practitioners and researchers, refers to embodiment as *'presència'* – presence – utilising expressions such as '*encarnant el moviment'* – 'inhabiting movement' – when referring to embodiment in dance. This perspective on embodiment informs this research's understanding of embodiment as a state that can be trained through learning how to inhibit experiences, spaces, movements and identities, as it questions what are the strategies that effectively support us to achieve an embodied living.

Embodiment, as a concept, seems to be everywhere now, becoming a hot topic for researchers, educators and coaches, however, *'it does not seem to be commonly known in learning and teaching cultures'* (Clughen, 2023: 736) (Jusslin et al., 2022). Despite its presence on certain research methods and classrooms, these efforts to lead a practice of embodied pedagogies is often the isolated effort of one department, or even individual educators, whose actions do not reach higher levels, failing to have a real impact on the institution-wide approach to teaching and learning (Clughen, 2023). Embodied pedagogies are not new and most definitely not exclusively beneficial for Gen Z. In Chapter 3: *Navigating the Loss of the Self*, this research will expand on the nuances of embodiment in regard to Gen Z, however it is important to first establish an understanding on what embodied pedagogies are and what is their impact.

Motivated by social activism, hooks (1994) proposes that human embodiment leads us to engaged pedagogies in the classroom, ultimately inferring positive effects onto our learning experiences, which we embody and experience as we are. For embodied learners, the body becomes the initial point from which we experience the world, generating knowledge that informs our sense of selfhood (Clughen, 2023). Situating the body as a form of intelligence opens the door for enquiry regarding the strategies put in place to train such intelligence. We have witnessed, in the recent years that UK based Higher Education institutions, have taken steps towards including embodied practices within educational curriculum, such as a culture of self-care practices and wellbeing consideration (Houghton & Anderson, 2017). A substantial portion of psychological research on mental health focuses on how the body can influence an individual's mental well-being, while deeming the body as an object to be diagnosed, not as a subject who learns from the experiences of mental health (Orphanidou, et al., 2023). If we reframe the role that the body holds in

facilitating our learning (both from the outside world and internal), we may step closer to developing strategies to position our bodies in spaces where they can positively and safely learn.

As thinking bodies, both students and educators, we are always learning through a filter that infers meaning into what we perceive and how we act. It is because each body is unique, that each learning experience will be too, even if they happen under the same context (Orphanidou, et al., 2023). As educator, we need to acknowledge that there will never be one solution. There is no one size fits all when it comes to educational strategies, however, this research suggests that training our students awareness of embodiment, and therefore of their own physical and intellectual conditioning in regard to their unique contexts, has the potential to provide them with tools to navigate educational strategies to their benefit.

Recent work has begun to merge theories from somatic studies with social, media and cultural studies, giving rise to new perspectives on the issue of embodiment within the digital realm and shedding light into the importance of looking into digital spaces and social media platform as a way to gain a comprehensive perspective on younger generations since, as articulated by Czerski's (2012), these spaces have become a constant reality in our contemporary existence. One of these online places is TikTok, the online platform that has provided most of the social media content relevant to this research. TikTok is a social platform currently thriving in terms of active users, with an expected amount of 2 billion active users by the end of 2024, which makes the platform stand as one of the big 5 social media platforms in January 2024 (TikTok Statistics, 2024) (See Figure 3).

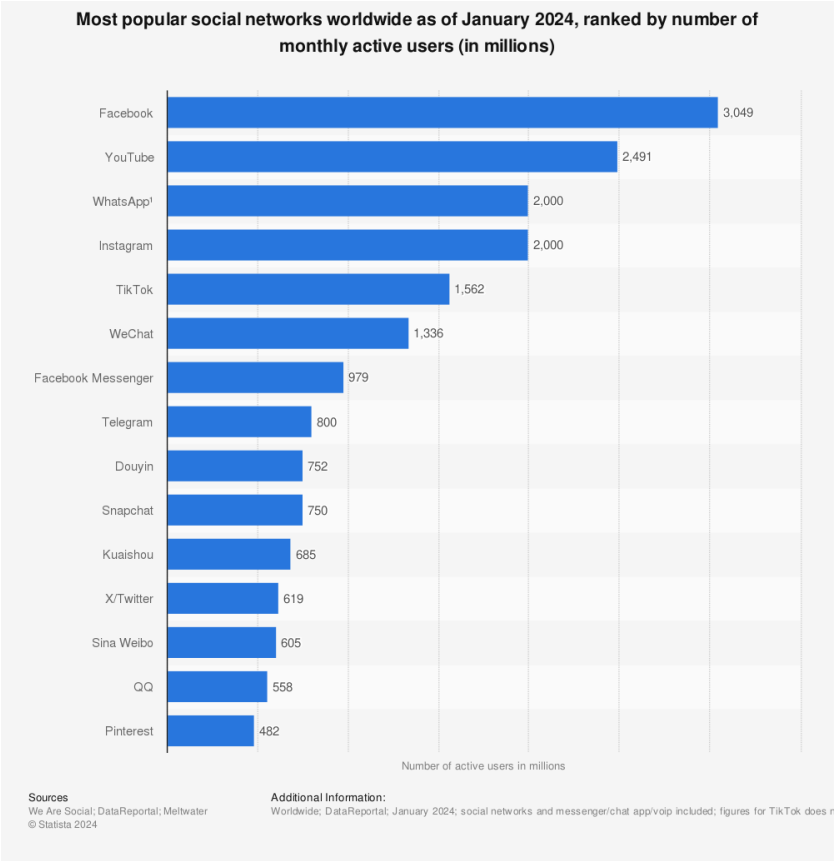


Figure 3. Source: We Are Social; DataReportal; Meltwater Statista (2024)

TikTok has become of crucial importance for this research, as it has served as a viewpoint into the experiences of my generational peers, facilitating the recognition commonalities and emergent related trends. It is important to acknowledge, that despite the efforts to cross my algorithmized feed and confront other realities, I cannot truly know to what extent I have been successful in encountering confronting opinions, however, TikTok has served as a great provider of practical examples that have allowed me to represent my argument more extensively. As this section develops, a variety of examples exported from TikTok that contribute to the framework of this research's argument will be presented. Including TikTok content into this research has revealed real-time trends and sentiments, offering insights that are both current and relevant.

Despite the difficulties of determining the long-lasting impact of social media platforms in such a fast-speed landscape that consumes and produces new apps constantly, TikTok finds itself as one of the most popular social media platforms among Gen Z, with a high level of user engagement and content creation (Anderson, 2020). With a steep increase of popularity during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown,

user activity and engagement regarding the app suggests that TikTok is here to stay (Cervi, 2021). From my experience of it as an active user for over 4 years, TikTok offers a blend of highly shareable short-form videos that result in viral replicable trends, making it an influential medium impacting user's online behaviours, self-representation and self-recognition within the medium.

Similarly to Cervi (2021: 198), this research understands TikTok as a representational reflection into Gen Z's identities, realities and contexts, and, considering that Gen Z will soon conform over one-third of the world's population*, 'it is seminal to understand, or at least get acquainted, with their habitat and with their habits'*. Digital spaces have allowed Gen Z to explore the multiplicity and plurality of our identities, becoming a haven from where we can keep up with the '*perpetuum mobile'*, resulting in the curating, crafting (and re-crafting) of online personas (Wiedmaier, 2020).

Identity Formation Within Online Contexts

This section discusses processes of identity formation and self-recognition within digital spaces as they affect a current student body and will potentially continue to affect upcoming generations who develop under similar circumstances. As discussed previously, the description of one's identity remains an intricate topic, however there are certain contextual elements that provide us with the codes and meanings we require in order to be able to infer meaning into our identitarian findings (Sitompul et al., 2023).

Due to its fluid nature, Gen Zs perceives great depth and complexity in identities, both their own and others', embracing a multitude of facets and accepting them in others while imposing fewer limitations (Hay-Chapman, et al., 2020). One of the most unique characteristics of Gen Z is that we have inherited, the resources to define ourselves as a definition in real-time, thanks to online spaces that allow us to collectively come together to define our own generation under our own terms, instead of limiting ourselves to the contextual traits imposed by academic and popular accounts, such as mainstream media and academia, dominated by previous generations (Stahl and Literat, 2023). As Gen Z, we have been provided with resources and access that makes us belong to an unprecedented generation, reported as the 'best-educated generation yet', resulting in an understanding of the

utility of labels while acknowledging the limiting boundaries label constitute to one's ability to self-recognise (Dimock, 2019) (Vice, 2024).

For example, rising Gen Z pop icon Chappell Roan (BBC, 2024) has, on many occasions, expressed a constraint in labelling her sexual orientation, having originally come out as bisexual and later as a lesbian. Roan often refers to the implications that come with 'belonging' to the queer community and certain queer labels as elements that would make her doubt her sense of self and her queerness when trying to conform to what 'being gay enough' may be perceived by the main population, as seen on her 'Making the Album' interview with Capital Buzz (2024). For my generation, fluidity emerges as a response to limiting labels and imposed preconceptions, promoting diversity and acceptance of each others' individuality as change is a given fact among us.

Based on the study undertaken by Vox Media and Horowitz Research, including 800 Gen Zs between the ages of 14 to 24, Gen Zs are reported to believe that identities should be constructed through the deliberate selection of self-defined labels, rather than imposed upon individuals, drawing from a complex interplay of 'intersectional attributes'. Young people today are far less inclined to conform to conventional roles and expectations dictated by their demographic characteristics, questioning to what extent they truly are what they have been traditionally assumed to be; however, this is not to suggest that those limitations and socially constructed labels that define our identities do not exist anymore (Twenge, 2019 ; Gaterud, 2019).

In addition to these existing labels, Gen Z has been exposed to Bauman's (2011) *perpetuum mobile*, resulting on fast produced (and fast extinct) trends whose short and intense lifespans difficult the adaptation from one another in such speed[v] (See Figure 4). Whereas some of these trends refer to aesthetic fashions (which may be deemed as more superficial and therefore less impactful on identity) many of them also refer to behavioural and identitarian fashions. An example of this is the TikTok trend of 'that girl', in which generally young women will contribute to the construction of the self-actualization trend by commodifying not only their aesthetic but their behaviour and habits with strategies such as self-tracking, grooming and strict monitoring of routines (Cijsow, 2022). (See Figure 5). Apart from the problematics

of the white heteronormative beauty standards attached to this trend, engaging in the ‘that girl’ lifestyle—beyond the packaging and presentation of these trending behaviours that can be shared, copied, or monetized—can potentially shape individuals’ sense of self. As they embody this trend, and others like it, the impact extends beyond their online existence (Cijsow, 2022).

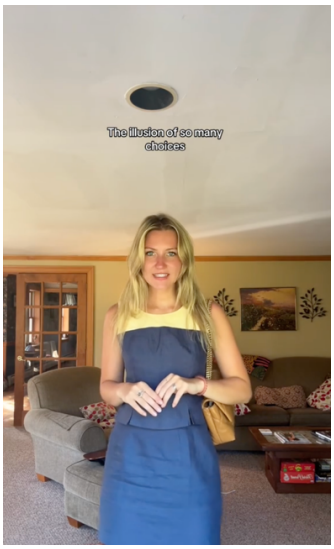


Figure 4. Heidi Becker, *Part 29 | Brainrot bestie does what she wants and looks cool doing it*
Adapted from TikTok, by @heidsbecker, 2024, retrieved from
https://www.tiktok.com/@heidsbecker/video/7377884713786117419?_r=1&_t=8sF6f9utuDp

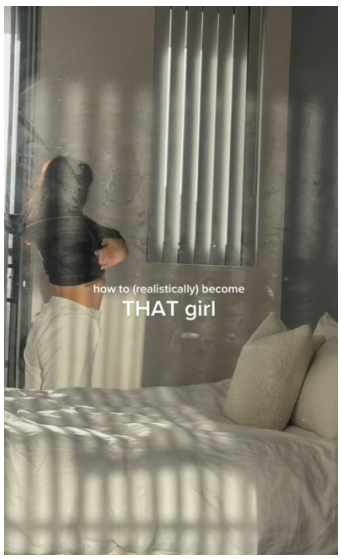


Figure 5. Vanessa Li, *how to (realistically) become THAT girl: become your OWN version of that girl 🤍make small changes that resonate with you, don’t force yourself into a lifestyle that you don’t enjoy & finally, remember that change doesn’t happen overnight (be patient & kind to yourself) 🥰#thatgirl #thatgirlaesthetic #thatgirlroutine#motivation #lifestylechange #focusonyourself #reset#selfcare #loveyourself #healthylifestyle #lifestyleaesthetic*
Adapted from TikTok, by @vnessali, 2024, retrieved from
https://www.tiktok.com/@vnessali/video/7111853715761483009?_r=1&_t=8sF6lTUoXwW

Based on my observations, hyper-consumerism is widely present on TikTok and, despite the emergence of trends that attempt to fight it back – most recently 'underconsumption core'[vi] (See Figure 6) –, this has a great impact on the sense of identity of its users. For some, adhering to these trends may allow us to embed some meaning and sense of self control of our plural nature (as seen with 'that girl', whose core objectives are to provide users with healthy routines of self-prioritisation) but for other, the fast-burning nature of the trends may ignite a sense of stress and anxiety as we try to catch up and match our identities with what is trendy (Cijsow, 2022). For some, who like me have experience of performance and performativity, TikTok may be another stage in which we can perform different identities.

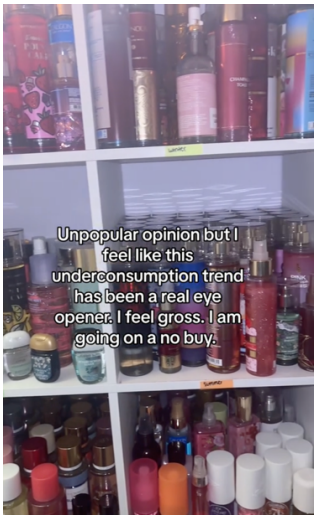


Figure 6. No more over consumption!, *ADHD plus hyperfixation does not go well together. Happy that my eyes have been opened. Going to show you my project pan real soon. Please don't judge 🫣 going to dedicate this page to project pans. #underconsumption #underconsumptioncore #overconsumptionrecovery #overconsumption #bodycare #bathandbodyworksoverconsumption #projectpan*
Adapted from TikTok, by @natsprojectpan, 2024, retrieved from https://www.tiktok.com/@natsprojectpan/video/7395762785541442862?_r=1&_t=8sF76tIMMsa

Performing Identities

Sociologist Erving Goffman defines performance as any 'activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by their continuous presence before a particular set of observers, and which has some influence on the observers' (1959: 2). Goffman explains that during the period of time in which the individual is present, they undertake a process called 'impression management', where the individual choses how to present themselves to the observers of that specific situation marking

a separation between two areas of the self, which Goffman termed: ‘front stage’ and ‘backstage’ (Hogan, 2010). With reference to Czerski (2012), I argue that Goffman’s mutually exclusive binary of ‘front stage’ and ‘backstage’ begins to merge with the conventions of social media.

In the publication *‘The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online’* (2010), author Bernie Hogan exemplifies Roger Barker’s (1968) ‘behaviour settings’ theory by quoting Shakespeare:

> ‘All the world’s a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players;
> They have their exits and their entrances;
> And one man in his time plays many parts,’
>
> William Shakespeare *from* As You Like It (1599)*, spoken by Jaques*

Barker (1968) suggests that human behaviours are not determined by one’s individually unique responses to stimuli but by the norms and goals of the settings in which the individual interacts and reacts (Hogan, 2010). This approach brings the mediums in which individuals exists to the centre of the question, an issue when a generation such as mine is given an endless catalogue of fast-burning online mediums in which we can choose to present ourselves. Considering these different spaces as ‘stages’ in which users perform and accomplish self and identity meanings and understanding that these digital ‘stages’ are a constant reality in our real-life navigation. This consideration ignites my questioning into how an education in performance can contribute to our successful delivery in these identity performance without losing ourselves as we do so (Hogan, 2010). My suggestion is that performance education has the potential to support processes of identity formation when informed of how performance is present within both IRL and online spaces, ultimately conditioning our sense of self and ability to self-represent.

Performance of identity is not an online only phenomenon, as the conflicting nature of self-representation is not exclusive to identity formation through online platforms, however social media reward systems and the inherent recognition craving promoted in these spaces make the conflict more obvious, allowing us to countify the impact of our different identities and therefore notice how they begin to multiply

depending on what/who we are relating to. This phenomenon is illustrated IRL through examples just as the ‘customer service voice’, a humorous term to explain how your behaviour and self-representation changes when working in a customer facing role (See Figure 7).

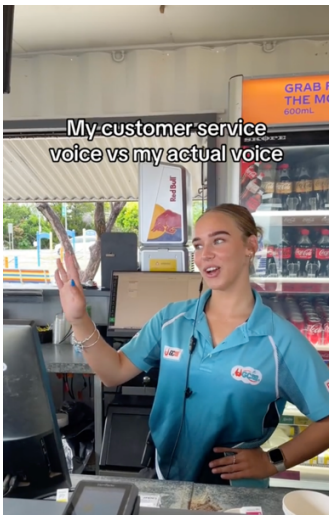


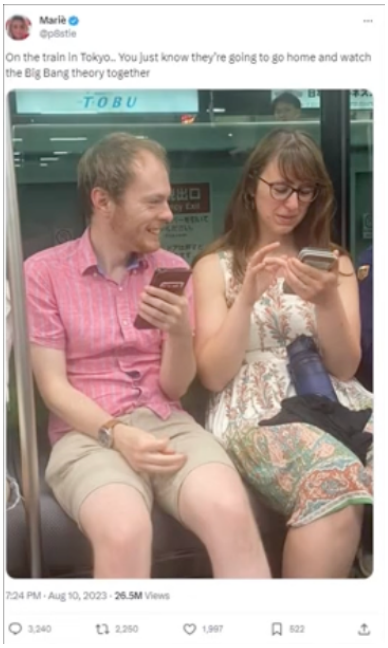
Figure 7. GC Aqua Park, *Literally two different people #customer #personality #fyp #meow #glitter #customerservice #itoldyouweneededmoreglitter* Adapted from TikTok, by @cgquapark, 2023, retrieved from https://www.tiktok.com/@gcaquapark/video/7317189725771533569?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc

Employing Goffman’s concept of ‘impression management’ (1959) strategies, it is important to discuss how they apply to online environments through ‘curation’. Much like the realm of art, where curation involves the meticulous selection and management of objects for display in museums or art exhibitions, curation takes place on social media through an individual’s engagement with the platform (Márquez et al., 2023). Davis (2017) explains that abundance of information and content is inherent to a networked society, therefore users of this society need to develop strategies to navigate through a sea of data that allows them to identify the content that is relevant to them.

When users decide to self-present online, they are faced with ‘complex decisions about documentation, sharing, privacy, and publicity’ (2017: 770). The practice of ‘curation’ is an integral part of social media users' activity within a saturated attention economy (Davis, 2017) as a way of deciding what to pay attention to and how to exist in these digital environments by crafting narratives that contextualize the online content they produce and consume and ‘provide a sense of a digital persona’

(Márquez et al., 2023: 907). In publication '*Remediation*', new media commentators Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin note that the fact of existing online and its subsequent activities has the potential to reshape our conceptions of identity and the processes of identity formation (2000).

TikTok creator[vii] Matt Lorence @littlefreak26 formulates the following opinion regarding Gen Z's plural identities and the role of social media platforms on the matter on a video essay shared on the platform on September 28th, 2023. Lorence argues that we live in a historically unprecedented 'surveillance state'[viii] that not only includes governmental/security surveillance but a widespread popular surveillance that no previous generation has experienced to this extent. By displaying various screenshots of social media posts where users share and scrutinise pictures of strangers (See Figure 8), Lorence argues that this widespread surveillance—something we all both engage in and endure—observes, replicates, shares, and critiques behaviours, aesthetics and personality traits. These elements are then excessively compartmentalised, allowing them to be 'neatly labelled for a Pinterest search', ultimately creating 'defined niches'. Lorence explains that, in order to succeed, influencers and established creators on social media platforms undertake a process of 'niching down', reducing their online presence to one specific type of content that, when consumed by young people who try to replicate this 'niching down' process with their own personalities, results in a categorisation and separation of the different areas that collectively make up one's identity.



[ix]Figure 8. Matt Lorence, Thoughts on the Gen-Z individuality crisis, a continuation of my video on cringe and anti-intellectualism #videoessay #fyp Adapted from TikTok, by @littlefreak26, 2023, retrieved from https://www.tiktok.com/@littlefreak26/video/7283959689623129386?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7301826175713478177

Since, the sense of ‘self-identity’ is learned and developed through socialisation, it could be said that the acceptance and acknowledgment from others are pivotal for the validation of one's online identity becoming fundamental in shaping and curating one's self-image (Sitompul et al., 2023) (Marquez, et al., 2023). As argued by Lorence (2023), if young people proceed to describe and present their identities as unidimensional, niching down their plural nature, they risk losing their sense of self, jumping into another of these niche categories when their previous one falls out of trend or gets scrutinised by strangers online hoping that a new category of identity will fully represent them as an individual.

To explore how this dynamic affects young people today, I will revisit the ‘that girl’ trend as an example. Suppose I present myself online by aligning with this trend, showcasing activities linked to the ‘that girl’ aesthetic—such as healthy eating, Pilates, drinking matcha and oat milk, waking up at 4 a.m. to run, and writing daily goals and affirmations. While these activities are diverse, they are tied to a single, narrow identity within the trend. As other users engage with my content, they may perceive my identity as fitting into this niche. However, the ‘that girl’ trend has faced criticism for being unhealthy, obsessive, superficial and unattainable[x]. Those who participate in it are often labelled with the same adjectives (Hutto and Mandelbaum,

2021). If I, as someone participating in this trend, did not want to be associated with these negative descriptors, I would feel compelled to drastically alter my online identity and aesthetic to align with a different trend to disconnect myself (and my own personal brand) from that previous 'identity' I was portraying. When the new trend gains a bad reputation or fall out of trend, the process would repeat itself.

This phenomenon shares similarities with the concept of 'reinventing yourself' that we have witnessed in the analogue world, in the instance of popstars sustaining long-lasting careers such as Madonna, Beyonce and Taylor Swift. However, this differs from the Gen Z experience because of the speed on which these re-inventions of the self occur in order to keep up with Bauman's (2011) *perpetuum mobile,* ultimately turning into identity crises (See Figure 9).

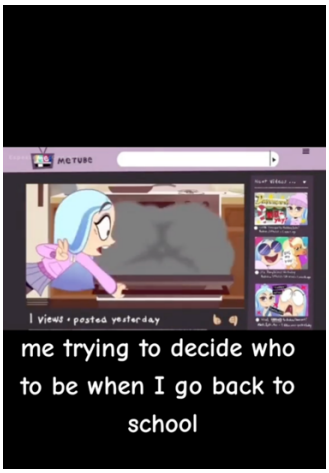


Figure 9. 🌴🌈benjamin🤍🏝️, *HELP ME PLEASE 😭#identitycrisis #rebrand #rebrand #theghostandmollymcgee #meme #relatable* Adapted from TikTok, by @shawnsboytoy, 2023, retrieved from https://www.tiktok.com/@shawnsboytoy/video/7264442829877939488?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7301826175713478177

The concept of 'eras', popularised on TikTok and used by figures such as Taylor Swift in her recent world tour 'The Eras Tour', refers to the online user's tendency to 'niche down' different stages of their lives to one specific element (See Figure 10). Lorence (2023) explains that this never-ending cycle forces young people to 'create a marketable, appealing sense of self which is 'on-trend', but also very unique' and that has 'to get more unique over time to account for the amount of niches plus the speed at which things become 'corny''.

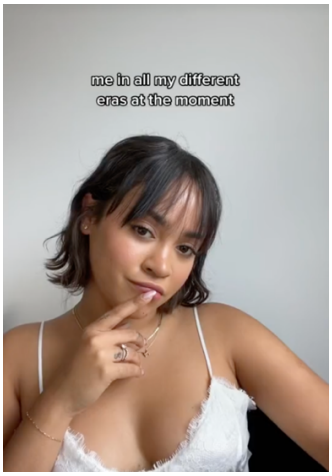


Figure 10. maria bethany, Adapted from TikTok, by @mariabethany, 2022, retrieved from https://www.tiktok.com/@mariabethany/video/7155967979539156229?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc

In conclusion, this section has explored performance of identity IRL and on online social media platforms as a contextualisation of the way digital realities weave into IRL realities for Gen Z. This addresses my questions around mediums for self-recognitions and modes of self-representation, as I begin to explore the role of dance education in supporting or counterbalancing these processes, which will be expanded upon on Chapter 3.

The Networked Self and The Algorithmized Self

This research's interest on TikTok is not only due to its popularity among the Gen Z age group, the demographic that represent the highest levels engagement with the platform (See Figure 11), but also due to an specific identitarian phenomenon that current researchers have named 'the algorithmised self' (Nover, 2020) (Bhandari and Bimo, 2022). TikTok shares common traits with most of its competitors (live-streaming, short, looping videos, disappearing stories features...), however the defining factor of TikTok is its algorithm, commonly called 'For You' (Xu et al., 2019). Whereas in other social media platforms the algorithm increases engagement, interaction and business revenue, in TikTok, apart from achieving these same goals, the algorithm also dictates the user experience (Bhandari and Bimo, 2022). 'TikTok assertively answers anyone's what should I watch with a flood' (Herrman, 2019).

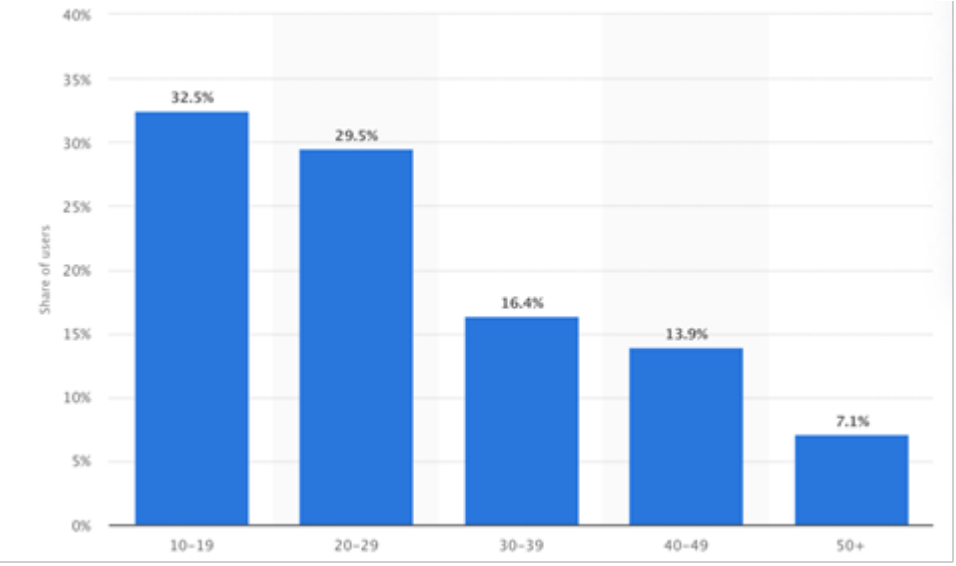


Figure 11. Source: App Ape via Wallaroo Media (2021)

In times of digital hyperconnectivity, the sense of self becomes blurry as new ways of being and constructing a 'self' appear, allowing us to curate the self from outside elements in multiple 'stages' (Brubaker, 2020). The idea of an 'outside', will be developed further during Chapter 3: *Navigating the Loss of the Self*, when commenting on Conley's (2009) ideas of the 'elsewhere'.

Social media platforms provide users with an 'stage for self-presentation and social connection' in which, by performing online multimedia, symbembodied and highly curated personas, the users develop a new layer of their identities: the networked self - where social media platforms serve as arenas for individuals to shape and manage their self-representation and identity (Papacharissi, 2013: 206) (Papacharissi, 2011). Communications researcher and writer Zizi Papacharissi recognises the importance in processes of identity formation, explaining how performances of identity happen in all areas of the human experience. She notes however, that their theatricality is augmented when attempting to self-represent oneself on social media platforms (2018). Further, authors Bhandari and Bimo (2022) explain that the concept of 'networked self' assumes that social media is a neutral stage for self-representation arguing that, in the recent years, this conception has been challenged by the increasing presence of the algorithm in platforms such as TikTok, making decisions for what users experience when engaging in the online platforms.

This resulting ‘algorithmized self’ ignites this research’s line of enquiry by questioning how the prevalence of the algorithm conditions our Gen Z identities to be shaped into a specific mould. As a Gen Z who consumes content through social media, I have witnessed how to algorithm benefits ‘niched down’ content in which everything belongs to a trendy aesthetic or to a quickly consumed era. Similarly to Bauman’s understanding of fluidity when referring to the ‘liquid modernity’, Papacharissi talks about ‘a liquid sense of self’ sustaining that the sense of oneself adjusts across the online platforms (and the algorithms) in which it exists to allow the best version of an expression to fully connect to its cultural context. This generates ‘both tension and opportunity for the individual’ and opening a window for theatricality and performance of the self (2018: 3). To understand how these digital platforms allow fluid identities and enhance performativity is to understand why a generation such as Gen Z has become a generation of ‘identity nomads’ (Zeus Jones, 2020). I will expand on this last point later in the section *Nomadism and Symbembodiment.*

Based on Bauman’s (2011) liquid modernity argument, understanding identity through consumption and not through ideology, values or personal history becomes problematic as, in capitalist societies, consumption never stops. The upcoming argument on this research proposes strategies that consider the world as no longer *one* stage, as Shakespeare’s words suggest, but a variety of fast-burning interconnected and superposed stages curated to separate, categorise and market the many areas that make one’s existence, aiming to provide our Gen Z students with a space for clear, supported and playful exploration of their existence within teaching experiences.

As suggested by Cervi (2021), dance scholars and educators play a vital role in both deepening the theoretical understanding of performance and in educating young people on how to use their bodies consciously and responsibly, which is why Practice as Research (PaR) becomes a central methodology in this work. With this literature review providing a foundation, the upcoming chapter outlines the methodological approach that will be employed to address the identified gaps and questions of this research.

Chapter 2. The Apples Coming Before – Methodology and Influences of Practice

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in this research, focusing on the integration of creative practice as research, the use of autoethnography as a reflective tool and the application of multiple data collection methods in relation to generating knowledge from lived experiences.

Autoethnography is employed as a key methodological tool in this study to provide a narrative-based testimony of my personal and professional experiences within educational settings. Initially emerging in the 1970s, autoethnography refers to the practice of culture description by members of said culture (Adams et al. 2017). As described by Hayano (1979; 99) autoethnography '*conducts and writes ethnographies of 'their own people''*. My interest on this approach stems from a sense of (un)belonging tightly linked to my identity as a migrant, lower-class woman in UK academic circles, deeming necessary to speak my own truth regarding the spaces I occupy as a researcher, educator and artist. This decision is highly informed by the notions of auto theory as feminist practice in art, as presented by artist and scholar Lauren Fournier (2021). With a heavy influence from the second-wave feminist principle of 'the personal is political'; autotheory describes an approach to research practices rooted on the intersections between creative practice and academic spaces, performance art and philosophical fiction, allowing for new modes of understanding and thinking to emerge from within the individual who experiments them, or as Fournier explains: 'the practice of theorising from the first person' (p. 19).

By using an autotheory-infused autoethnography, this research aims to capture the interplay between individual lived experiences and broader educational contexts. Influenced by feminist theory, concepts such as Haraway's (1988) 'situated knowledges' have impacted this research by helping to understand lived experiences of Gen Z students. With the concept of 'situated knowledges', Haraway proposes to think outside of the objectivity-relativism binarism that juxtaposes the ideas of absolute truths against the recognition of diverse perspectives and interpretations. Haraway explains that relativism renders all visions as equal when

promoting them as unique and that objectivity, despite masking as neutral and universal, holds a specific position that perpetuates power abuse (white, male, heterosexual and human) (Rogowska-Stangret, 2018). 'Situated knowledges' is used on this research as a starting point that aims to produce a less hierarchical, more accurate account of the student experience, voicing out an honest commentary, self-reflection and critique from those who are currently navigating educational journeys, informed by their lived experience of online existence.

Shawn Sobers' proposal of 'small anthropologies' (2016) highly influences this research due to its roots in arts and humanities, centring my creative practice as an epistemology that constantly generates ongoing questions related to the contemporaneity in which it is developed. Sobers' proposes 'small anthropologies' as a more humble form of anthropological practice. A post-colonial[xi], post-structuralist[xii], less masculine and less heroic option that serves as a perspective on culture beyond binary oppositions, imposed values and assumptions. I believe this approach to be a highly necessary line of questioning when we discuss educational institutions as traditionally, Higher Education institutions have been constructed in colonial, patriarchal and hierarchical privilege which often fails to incorporate progressive and radical thinking at the managerial level (Krauss, 2022).

In my experience, the vestiges of this colonial, patriarchal and hierarchical institutionalised mindset is often passed down to academics from older generations who, sometimes unintentionally, continue to perpetuate these hierarchical, colonial and patriarchal ideas in the classroom by gearing their teaching —particularly in arts and humanities subjects— towards their specific research interests instead of training students to find their own line of enquiry, topics of interest and ultimately conduct their own research (Wilson, 2024). As discussed previously, despite my focus being on creative educators over institutions, I believe 'small anthropologies' to be a very nurturing perspective when discussing the institutionalised educator as it provides my reasoning with a holistic perspective that does not isolate the educator from the context in which they practice. Through the process of autoethnographic reflection, this research not only documents personal experiences but also generates knowledge that is deeply situated in the practice of creative pedagogy.

This reflective approach is essential for uncovering nuanced insights into the relationship between creative practice and educational theory. This will be discussed throughout the text, with an emphasis on new forms of mentorship, supported by innovative approaches developed by creative practitioners in the realm of social studies, performance and embodied practice that question and reimage the concept, format and purpose of institutions. Some examples of these practices, theories and principles, are the Creative Articulations Process or CAP (Bacon and Midgelow, 2014), The Institute for Creative Embodied Practices (Lewis, 2016), The Emergent Strategy Ideation Institute (brown, 2024) and Radical Imagination (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2014), among others.

My practice serves as both the subject and method of inquiry. Within educational settings, this approach allows for the exploration of identity formation through performance, embodiment and somatic practices through my own direct engagement and reflection. As a creative practitioner working in educational contexts, my practice is a central component of this research, functioning both as a method for generating insights and as a reflective process for understanding pedagogical dynamics. My creative educational and research practice stems from the idea of education as a practice of freedom, instilled by authors such as bell hooks, Paulo Freire, Zahra Bei and Kadeem Marshall-Oxley. My reasoning behind this research feeds off the words of Dr Noyale Colin, editor of the book *Ethical Agility in Dance*, who, as me, believes that dance education has the potential to develop 'socially engaged individuals able of forging ethical human relations for an ever-changing world' (2023: 1).

In addition to the autoethnographic approach, this research utilises several qualitative data collection methods to gather diverse perspectives. These include an online questionnaire, focus groups and semi-structured interviews as well as the observation of TikTok as a space of study since its content is deliberately labelled in connection to particular topics (Stahl and Literat, 2023) allowing the identification of relevant data with associated hashtags such as #GenerationZ, *#GenZ, #IfGenZ, #GenZHumor, #Genzie, #GenZLife*, among others. Each of these activities have contributed to the depth and richness of the data employed in this study. This ethnographic approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of Gen Z's identities, aiming to capture an array of authentic voices and opinions which can

potentially help us gain a holistic view of the generation's digital and IRL behaviours and preferences that ultimately impact their educational experiences. This data has allowed the research to understand its existence and relevance in regard to the specific demographic it is discussing (Gen Z), however, it does not seek to make generalisations in regard to the attitudes and thoughts of a whole generation. As previously explained, the centre of this research is my lived experience of the topic as a Gen Z, migrant, lower-class, queer, female student in a Higher Education creative context, which is why I deem necessary to stress the '*auto*' element of this autotheory/autoethnography.

The data that has emerged from the questionnaire, focus groups and interviews carried out in this research have been woven together with the literature explore and my personal insights allowing for a multi-layered understanding of the research problem, where personal experiences, further relevant literature and participant data complement one another. Given the personal and reflective nature of autoethnography, ethical considerations such as privacy, consent, and the representation of personal narratives were carefully addressed. Similarly, ethical guidelines were followed in administering the questionnaire, conducting focus groups, and carrying out interviews, with participant confidentiality and informed consent being paramount.

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the methodological framework of this research, which combines practice as research with autoethnography and various qualitative data collection methods. This multifaceted approach enables the generation of a rich, reflective body of knowledge that is both deeply personal and widely applicable to the study of creative practice in education.

Chapter 3: Navigating the Loss of the Self

In this chapter, I will build on the literature review and methodology outlined previously, weaving in my lived experience of yet unexplored forms of embodiment within and outside of the realms of dance how these have influenced my academic and creative development. Grounded in autoethnography and practice-as-research methodologies, I explore the central role of embodiment in shaping identity. As a dancer and mover for over half of my life, my relationship with my body informs how I engage with the world and learn. My approach to education is guided by a sensorial awareness, developed over the years through my personal movement practice, which guides my approach to education, where cognitive development emerges through embodied experiences, emotions and experimentation. This chapter also raises questions about the nature of embodiment in digital spaces, reflecting my experience as a member of Generation Z, where online and offline identities are deeply intertwined, as discussed earlier through Piotr Czerski's (2012) work. This exploration brings me closer to the main questions of this research as it allows me to reflect on my own processes of identity formation and self-recognition and to analyse what has been the role of creative experiential education in this process as well as to articulate the key elements and strategies that have supported my own journey towards a more solid (not necessarily static or immutable) sense of self.

The End of Embodiment?

Traditionally, online spaces have been understood as spaces where humans navigate a disembodied process of identity construction, as our real bodies appear to be detached from our online persona's bodies (Turkle, 1995). For example, we may find ourselves curating and posting our workout routine on an Instagram Story - portraying an active physical exercise from our online persona - while we lay in bed. As we do so, our bodies may fall out of sync with what the body of our online personas' project. Subsequently, as suggested by Ulrike Schultze, whose research examines how digitalisation shapes personal identity, this can evoke a tendency to separate our experiences into disembodied and unauthentic (online) and embodied and real (IRL) (Schultze, 2014). I am reminded of popular culture references that perpetuate this conception of existing online/in an alternative reality in a disembodied way, such as James Cameron's *'Avatar'* (2009) or Lana Wachowski's

'The Matrix' (1999), where characters fully lose consciousness and authority over their bodies, taking disembodiment to an extreme, in order to enter these alternative dimensions -Pandora and The Matrix- where they become better versions of themselves.

Disembodiment is not necessarily the opposite of embodiment; it represents a particular kind of embodied experience where the body is pushed to the margins and is not seen as an active or essential part of that experience, perpetuating the Cartesian dualism (Hardey, 2002 ; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). As a Gen Z who has experienced both of these existences in tandem, I struggle to comprehend online existence as disembodied. I have spent and continue to spend a great amount of my time existing online which constitutes a different form of embodiment for me, a complete separate entity that does not fall within embodiment nor disembodiment.

When exploring human existence in online spaces, researcher and Performing Arts Coordinator at Le Bocage International School, Maeva Veerapen (2011) proposes the term 'symbembodiment', which suggests that the body remains active and involved even as the user navigates the digital realm, however in a manner distinct from our experiences in the physical world. Whereas the effects of a digital activity being carried out when posting online is minimal to our bodies (moving a couple fingers to hold a phone and tap a screen, tracing the screen with our eyes and practically not much physical activity), humans experience existence through the body that acts as a 'grounding in the world' that 'provides us with the confirmation that our surroundings, actions and ourselves exist' (Veerapen, 2011: 82). As human beings, we engage in both physical and online environments though our physicality and emotions where our bodies play a crucial role in solidifying, manifesting, perceiving and ultimately understanding identity. Through this process of embodying the self, individuals become tangible and distinct from others allowing us to distinguish and validate an individual's humanity (Pitts, 2003). In addition, according to O'Brien, the physical body, and its self-awareness, serves as the foremost method for establishing personhood[xiii] (O'Brien, 1999).

The particularity of online environments, as proposed by Veerapen (2011), is that the emotions that humans display in online settings are a representation of emotions we have learned from the physical world which 'creates a new body schema and

identity' during the online experience (Veerapen, 2011: 84). Think of playing social simulation video games such as *The Sims* or *Animal Crossing*; our avatar may be carrying out a task while our physical bodies sit down or lay in the sofa, however the stress of carrying out that task correctly and within the stipulated time are felt in our bodies through muscle tension, physical discomfort and often even the articulation of sounds or words reacting to what is happening on the screen.

Although I am not a huge video games fan, I do love games of social simulation. I remember being 15 and 'giving birth' to my baby in *The Sims 4* as such an exciting and painless experience, as my body very comfortably sat at my chair. My body has not experienced labour and my mind does not know the emotional implications of labour by simply having a baby in *The Sims 4*. However, I did feel heart-warming emotions towards my now virtual baby, I did feel pride and wanted to show it to my brother and parents. I am unable to assure if these are 'maternal' emotions as I am not a mother, but to me, they felt like they correspond to what I envision as 'maternal', with the situated knowledge of 'maternity' that I hold. On the other hand, I also felt instant detachment 10 minutes after 'giving birth' when turning off my computer to go do something else instead. As my 15-year-old body back then was not a post-labour body, I could easily get up from my chair with no implications on my physicality or emotional state, however, the emotions I felt when playing the game were real emotions, not as intense as real post-labour but real enough to elicit a physical response: going into my brother's room to share the news with him.

I believe it is important to mention that, even as someone who entered the social media territory during adolescence rather than childhood and in an specific familiar context in which my parents maintained a monitoring and limited timeframes of my social media usage as I was introduced to digital spaces, the symbembodied experiences of encountering emotions in both physical and digital realms have been a constant reality in my consciousness that I have never doubted. Going back to Czerski's manifesto presented during Chapter 1, symbembodied experiences have been consistent in my life since I can remember in one way or another, which has conditioned me to experiencing most of my life in a symbembodied way – with the detachment that this carries with it. In my experience, a symbembodied self, resulted from an online environment, is as real and true to my human IRL experience as an embodied self, because both of these are all I have always known. This is a point

that will be expanded on in the section *Back to the… Body?: training presence from a symbembodied perspective* when exploring pedagogical implications of symbembodied existence.

It is necessary to briefly note that Veerapen begins to study symbembodiment within the virtual 3D community popular in the 2000s: *Second Life* (2011). This virtual environment allowed users to build their own avatars and interact with others online; a model that we see currently in other social media platforms such as *Habbo Hotel* and even games such as *Fortnite* and, most recently, *Roblox*, where players can choose, edit aspects of and even buy 'skins' to use as their online avatars. However, this research intends to move away from avatar-based platforms, without disregarding their existence and impact on my generational peers, as I focus my enquiry on the issues that arise with online existence in social media platforms once the 'avatar' - that does not necessarily needs to represent identarian aspects of the user behind it - gets transformed into an accurate representation of the user's identity, either by displaying their images or using their real names, among others. This mode of engagement with online spaces links closer to my questions around identity and personhood as explored further in this research. I find 'user' based online platforms of bigger interest to my enquiry as it attaches our physicality to our online existence in a clearer symbembodied manner, building a direct connection with our identity as we attempt self-represent online in these platforms.

The term 'intravidual', initially coined by sociologist Dalton Conley (2009), refers to the juggling of multiple selves within one's mind. Similar to managing various external stimuli and unlike the traditional pursuit of an authentic self, the 'intravidual' navigates a constant stream of data, impulses and desires across different worlds, including digital spaces. Conley (2009) expand his argument by introducing the idea of the 'Elsewhere Class', where social roles are fluid, causing logistical, psychological, and emotional tensions as we continuously switch between roles. Symbembodied existence, as I use it on this research, refers to an exercise of self-recognition in external factors rather than within our individuality, similarly to the idea of the 'Elsewhere Class, where individuals 'work, play, love and socialise with one eye always focused somewhere else' (Hill, 2010). In my understanding, the 'intravidual' is hyperconnected which affects their ability to find a grounded, solid sense of self. For me, this concept becomes interesting for me as it represents an

extreme manifestation of the symbembodied being, which will be expanded upon the upcoming section.

Self-Recognition in Times of Symbembodiment

This section will gather the previously presented context of digital existence and new forms of experiencing and returning to physicality by discussing how dance and movement foster self-recognition and presence, addressing the value of embodied practices in relation to digital symbembodiment and the identity crises often present in or because of digital spaces. As introduced in the previous subtitle, 'symbembodiment' proposes a new form of understanding human experience, which is deeply connected to our existence and engagement online. In my experience, symbembodiment has appeared in my personal life and creative practice when I have lacked the ability to recognise myself in both my actions and emotions. This has often been caused by a loss of a solid sense of self in the *perpetuum mobile*, failing to find contentment and pleasure within and continuing to be distracted by external forces that have blurred my sense of intention (Bauman, 2011) (brown, 2024).

However, my experience of symbembodiment does not limit itself to the loss of self and its failed attempts to self-represent. When properly framed and focused, symbembodiment has allowed me to imagine futures versions of myself thanks to an ability to self-recognise within these potential futures, allowing me to embrace the opportunities that could potentially lead me into those versions of myself. For example, recently during a rehearsal, my friend and colleague Marta Gimeno Nafria, wanted to teach me to 'fish flop'[xiv] having recently learnt the technique herself. After she demonstrated the movement once, I felt a sense of certainty in my ability to do it, never having done the trick before as I tend to feel quite scared of such tricks. I had no embodied experience of that movement pattern or the experience of its execution, and my usually quite clumsy track record, most definitely, did not provide any indication of my ability to do the trick. *'I feel like I have done it before'*, I remember saying to Marta, *'I have never done it, but I just feel like I can do it'.*

I was indeed able to do the trick in my first try, which took both of us by surprise. When trying to articulate to Marta what was the certainty that I felt, I realised that by

recognising my ability to work certain floorwork patterns (even if not the specific one of that trick) and by simply imagining the possibility of my body executing the trick, I felt the symbembodied experience of it. As someone who has trained in dance techniques for over ten years, kinaesthetic awareness is an integral part of my experience of my own physicality, allowing the development of a meta understanding of the body, however there was because of the symbolism I held as a reference (having done other floorwork tricks before) and the ability to imagine myself in a different position (from someone who could not do a fish flop to someone who could) that I experienced this anticipation that I now understand as a form of symbembodiment. This is not the first time I have experiences something like this, as a dancer I often find myself mentally improvising and even choreographing movement while on the bus or walking down the street, which I then embody once I get to the studio and dance this mentally generated movement dynamics and motions. My symbembodied experiences of movement stem from previous embodied experiences and utilise imagination to project my embodied knowledge into future possibilities.

As explored so far in this text, symbembodiment has become a reality on the rise since the surge of digital spaces that allow for self-representation and socialisation, accentuated by a pandemic that forced most of us to exist mainly online for a couple of years. The phenomenon of symbembodiment continues to manifest itself as identity crises, loss of a sense of intentionality and inability to self-recognise, which has been widely reported in online spaces such as TikTok by self-testimony and conversational commentary. Symbembodiment has also emerged in conversations around precarity and crisis, which will be expanded upon Chapter 4: *Navigating the Loss of the Utopia: Hope and Purpose in Times of Doom.*

With this growing presence of symbembodiment in our daily lives, I argue that dance, movement and embodied practices can potentially provide us with the ability to return to our attention to what is within by training presence and intention. As explained above, I perceive a value in symbembodied experiences, and I do not believe that it would be possible for us to move forwards as creative educators if we fail to acknowledge this new way of experiencing and understanding life. In my practice as an educator, I find inspiration and guidance in the words of afrofuturism

and science fiction author Octavia Butler: *'There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns*' (Benjamin, 2017: 103).

Back to the... Body?: Training Presence and Intention from a Nomadic Perspective

In this section, I will explore how, as creative educators, we can embrace these new suns and not get burned by them, providing our sun-burnt students with protection that allows them to heal. Whether or not our creative educational practices are grounded in movement, I argue that movement and embodied practices are crucial for fully understanding and connecting with all dimensions of the self and that an appropriate training of these aspects in Higher Education, regardless of the creative discipline, has the potential to enhance our student ability to self-recognise their fluid, symbembodied and nomadic identities within their creative practices (Emslie, 2017).

In her work on nomadic identities, fluidity and its relation to the body, Professor in Dance and Choreographic Practices Vida Midgelow offers a definition of nomadic identities as *'the nomad is the embodiment of lived experience that is fluid, situated and relational'* (2012: 3). Midgelow's approach to nomadism takes embodied experience as a starting point, guiding my interest in exploring the inherent nomadic nature of my generational peers starting from a point of symbembodiment, in order to understand its implications on identity performance and self-recognition. Embodiment, and therefore the embodied subject, as understood by Midgelow, is the result of an overlap between the physical, symbolic and sociological that allows human beings to be both grounded and fluid at the same time, transcending beyond identitarian structures and limits (2012).

My use of symbembodied experience reflects the idea of nomadic identities, however my interest in symbembodiment lies in its inherent connection with the multiplied, networked and algorithmized self, proposed by Conley's 'intravidual' (2009). Nomadism provides a framework to understand fluidity and understanding this fluid, everchanging and emerging framework allows to use it as a tool that generates strategies that support our navigations of loss, adaptation and resilience

through embodied experiential learning in creative education, for both students and educators.

Seeking an embodiment that works for me

In my experience, to become aware of one's own nomadism becomes complicated when we lack the grounding aspect of our existence (in other words, when we experience symbembodiment more often than embodiment) as it can potentially create a distance or separation within our sense of being present in our experiencing. In my practice, I achieve grounding and the subsequent self-recognition by the consistent practice of self-nurture, inspired by Julia Cameron's (1994) *'The Artist's Way'.* In my creative practice, self-nurture takes the form of words as they help me regulate my levels of attention and intention by arriving at them (words) through different methodologies. In the instances when I find myself struggling to recognise myself in my creative process or I feel that I have lost a sense of direction, I employ intuitive writing[xv] as a methodology that allows me to articulate my blocks and worries, overcoming the pressure or bounds of defining myself and my artistry through concise and coherent wording.

I felt inspired by the Creative Articulation Process (CAP), proposed by Bacon and Midgelow (2014). A model that emphasises the lived body, bringing embodied knowledge to the entre of creative practice and promoting a need for clear articulation of an own language. CAP acknowledges that some things may remain beyond our ability to fully know or express, yet the effort to explore and give name to these areas enriches both our known and unknown knowledge. Essentially, a loose adaptation of CAP principles encouraged my practice to dwell in the in-between spaces, allowing new insights to emerge (Bacon and Midgelow, 2014). In this sense, exploring the nomadic nature of not only my being but my creative practice has situated it in a new reality, similar to what philosopher Homi Bhabha (2004) named the *'third space'*: a situation of constant change, negotiation and re-evaluation of my nomadic identity in relation to the contexts that shape it (Teyssot, 2013)

My practice of articulation was developed with the intention of adapting the principles of intuitive writing and CAP to my needs as a creative practitioner with a

preference for embodiment and experiential development moving away from writing on a blank sheet of paper or a notebook which I have always felt intimidated by. To sit down and write on a notebook felt too alienating to me, separating my physical perceptions of my emotions from my intellectual processing of them. It did not feel much different from curating an Instagram post; since I was actively putting something out there, I felt the pressure of that something being worth existing (either on my Instagram feed or in my notebook), either by being aesthetically pleasing or full of meaning and emotionally connection to my truest self. This is a huge task, I may say, and in times of distress and lack of self-recognition, this pressure has ignited a very negative response in me, avoiding committing to this practice and ultimately failing to regain a sense of self-recognition.

Articulation, for me, is about generating words, not necessarily through writing, and since I fully embracing this understanding, I have been able to liberate myself from what I thought this practice should look and feel like. I stopped living this practice from the symbembodied experience of it and started to transform it into an embodied experience that would work for me. In this topic, I acknowledge Cameron's (1994) understanding of 'fantasy' as an addictive self-indulgence that distracts us from the present, however I propose to reframe 'fantasy' as 'imagination'. In my experience imagination remains key to self-liberation and ultimately, achieving an honest self-recognition. My use of the word imagination stems from the concept and practice of 'radical imagination'[xvi] in which it is understood as the capacity to consider situations or things beyond our direct experience, serving as a lens through which we interpret our own realities (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2014). I understand the practice of imagination, under this perspective, as an inherently symbembodied activity that constitutes a deeply personal process, fostering empathy and connecting us to different realities. Our imaginative abilities both shape and are shaped by others' imaginations, enriching our understanding of diverse experiences. This collective exchange of imaginative insights creates shared visions for change and expands the horizons of what is possible (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2014).

By employing radical imagination, my practice of intuitive writing has overcome the imposed limitations of its own symbembodiment, allowing me to experience this practice from an embodied perspective, bringing my body to the centre of the matter once more. Practically, this has manifested in the form of word generation through

both writing and speech, by recording, editing and playing voice notes, and by expanding the limitations of a sheet of paper or notebook into objects, surfaces and even my own body. This open approach to the concept of intuitive writing as word generation has often led me to conversational practices in which I replay recordings or share the documentation of my previous practice as a starting point to generate even more words, this time in conversation with others.

Conversational practices have also emerged from this exercise of self-nurture in the form of intuitive collaging, where words have been borrowed from others and re-purposed to fit what my practice has needed in that specific point in time. Collaging forces me to interact both physical (cuts and crops, printed images, patterns and words) and metaphysical materials (concepts, connections among these concepts, connections with other materials that exist in my memory), constantly negotiating my position in respect to these materials and reassuring my agency on deciding what stays and under what conditions. Referring to and re-using others' words releases a sense of pressure regarding authenticity, allowing me to recognise myself through the experiences of others, reclaiming that I can only understand my identity in relation to others and their contexts. The act of collaging requires of my physical presence, cutting, ripping and sticking paper or other printed materials, and of my intellectual and emotional presence, as I understand and reimagine the words, images and textures I am encountering. The activation of both of these presences instils a sense of intention in my practice, which I have seen expanded as I shared this practice with others in my durational installation share of practice '*çolo queria çaludâh / i just wanted to say hello'* at The Place in March 2024 (See Figure 12).

çolo queria çaludâh / i just wanted to say hello (working title)

'pure leisure, making time just for oneself, is nothing short of a courageous act of radical and subversive resistance' (Schulte, 2019)

materials: one table, two chairs, tablecloth, vase, flowers, printed materials, papers, glue sticks, scissors, pens, pencils, crayons, pastels, tape, teapot, non-caffeine rooibos tea.

this practice responds to my ongoing enquiry in relation to ownership of time and space, shaped by my identity as a migrant andalusian woman.

as a result, this practice exists in a space suspended in time, uniquely mine, housing a collection of personal objects and thoughtfully curated elements that collectively contribute to who and where i – *literally* – am today.

you, as my companion, are welcomed to take in my ritual of collecting, gathering, rearranging, and creating, making it a shared experience as well as our own individual recollection of this present moment.

i extend an invitation to practice detachment by leaving your creations behind, thus enriching both my personal collection and the subsequent experiences of those who follow in your footsteps.

This exhibit is active all day. Audiences are invited to join the space and sit down at the table when chairs are available. Once in the space you can cut, stick, draw, write and manipulate materials to suit your creative needs. The practitioner may or may not be in the space, engaging in her own practice.

Figure 12. Plaque/Statement of practice. Source: Marta Guerra Doblas

This sharing of practice invited audiences to accompany my own flow of self-nurture and self-indulgence incorporating intuitive collaging alongside me. In this space, I was able to witness a transformative force that shifted the attention and intention of those who engaged in the space. I recall specifically encountering a dear friend and colleague who visited my practice on the second day of its iteration since they completely shifted the energy of the space as they arrived. This friend, a movement artist, has been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) and often finds themselves overstimulated in spaces that overload their senses. The space they encountered was a public open space filled with paper cuttings, books and magazines all around the floor, windows and walls. Also, it presented a variety of materials for participants to partake in the practice however they desired: scissors, glue sticks, liquid glue, pens, pencils, pastels, tea… When they arrived at the space, they struggled to understand the dynamics of the space, to understand what interaction was an invitation and what was an interruption, struggling to juggle their agency and ability to co-exist in the space with me, as I sat on one of the ends of the table, focusing on my own practice intuitive collaging.

Eventually, I decided to leave the space and allow the audience members on it, including this friend, to take ownership of it without my presence in it. When I returned, I encountered a fully transformed space that had not only shifted its form by the accumulative nature of the collaging happening in the space but that had, simultaneously, completely shifted the participants attention and intention. They now sat at the table, instead of hesitantly walk around, and focused both their intention and attention in their own individual practices of intuitive collaging. After this sharing of practice, catching up with this visiting friend, they shared their impressions on the whole proposal. Initially, they explained, the space felt daunting: *'too many possibilities, I wanted to do it all'.* Once I left the space, removing an inherently conditioning force as the 'owner' of the practice, they felt much more secure in their own autonomy, allowing them to bring back their attention to their own impulses and ultimately regulating them by focusing their intentions on what they truly wanted to do. *'I felt out of my body',* they explained, *'and then I began to feel more at home'*. As I cleaned after the intervention, I found a creation they had left behind as a gift to the space. Scattered around an A4 piece of paper, it read:

AM I at home
AM I uncomfortable
AM I overstimulated?
Probablyyyyyyy
I like this
It makes me understand you
And me

Learnings from symbembodiment and considerations for the creative classroom

My learnings and reflections from this encounter have informed my practice moving forward by ensuring that I continue to employ imagination as a tool to break the constraints of my sense symbembodiment and simultaneously to reframe my symbembodiment into a positive outlook and potential boundless opportunities. I often refer to a quote by the Austrian poet Rilke (1903), who in a letter to his young protégé urges him to '*be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves. (…) Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.'*

In order to *live everything* within my creative practice, I remain conscious of two concepts already introduced that allow me to understand how symbembodiment manifests itself: precarity and nomadism. By actively seeking to identify the nomadic nature of creative practice (my own and others') I gain an understanding of the need of constant re-evaluation and reflection on the precarity it generates. I find myself always losing when I enter a creative process of making in my practice, I lose perspective and comfort, which often leads me to situations of symbembodiment that does not allow me to embrace the process, to live the questions. When I accept nomadism in my being, in my practice and in the contexts and spaces in which my creative practice exists, I am able to escape the 'Elsewhere Class' and I commit to imagination from an embodied perspective rather than staying stuck on symbembodiment, looking to the outside (Conley, 2009).

In conclusion, my experience has shaped my educational creative practice to prioritise facilitating processes of self-recognition, addressing a lack I observed during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Higher Education. I believe that, in order to address questions around the gaps on our creative educational curriculums, we must begin with facilitating spaces that allow our students to recognise themselves as artist, learners, creators and researchers, that trains their ability to articulate their experiences. This is the motivation behind my emphasis on understanding new forms of embodiment and catering to the specific needs of the current student body, who are a perfect example of how to exists within liquid modernity and how to learn from fluidity, which can ultimately inform the strategies available to readdress the gaps.

Chapter 4: Navigating the Loss of the Utopia: Hope and Purpose in Times of Doom

In this chapter I will explore how the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which I exist have contributed and continue to contribute to an extended symbembodied experience of my IRL experience, delineating how precarity has shaped my sense of temporality, further impacting my ability to imagine future scenarios and possibilities in which I can self-recognise. I refer back to the premise *'I am (or we are) because of my context'*, taking into consideration my embodied and lived experiences of precarity-induced symbembodiment, building upon the already laid out premise of *'I am (or we are) because of my body'* discussed during the previous chapter.

In my time as an undergraduate student, I remember being met by an educator, who acted as my academic advisor, with the premise of 'blue skies'. This educator used to say that I was facing a blue sky of endless possibilities but insisted on painting what they described as 'non-important clouds', as I stressed over the future. Similarly to Cameron's (1994) negative understanding of 'fantasy' as an obsessive distraction that prevents the artist to fully commit to their artistic purpose, this educator painted my 'non-important clouds' as excuses I was making for myself in order to avoid committing to my bigger purpose as a creative, which, in their eyes, was pursuing choreography as a profession. These 'non-important clouds' were my worries in regards of career sustainability, my lack of industry connections and economical support to achieve what they thought my bigger purpose as a creative should be. When I expressed a desire to explore academia, research and education, this educator labelled my interest as 'coward choices'. I am aware that they did not intend any harm but their wrongly directed efforts to motivate me and support my journey of self-recognition in my professional career failed to acknowledge my context. Despite trying to explain the context in which I recognised myself, as a migrant working-class individual with no connections to the creative industries whatsoever, they continued to force aspirations and goals onto me that simply were not in tune with my sense of self and in which I could not recognise myself. In this instance, the problematic issue went beyond the "solutions" I was offered: to attend a networking event or do a placement with a company in the sector. The problematic

of this issue had to do with my lack of self-recognition in my profession as an emerging creative from a disadvantaged socio-economical background, which at the time, I had no words to articulate and blurred my ability to visualise my future in the sector.

In my experience, the way my wider context was overlooked by this educator led us both to a stuck situation in which we could not seem to see eye to eye. Unintentionally, this educator built a new symbembodied persona of who I (or my career) should be, diverting my attention and intention as I tried to become this symbembodiment instead of cultivating my embodied sense of self. Not only they didn't instil confidence or positive encouragement but they did not provide me with a space to explore questions around my identity and context in respect to my chosen career, making it even more difficult to envision a next step or an evolution. From this experience, I began to bring to the centre me educational practice the conscious fostering of a collaborative practice of self-nurture that feeds into one's own practice as well as into the practices of the creative peers that inhabit the space with us. These spaces in my practice have begun with an active intention to listen, also allowing silence and confusion among those students who access the spaces. This approach has often enabled self-recognition of symbembodiment in the students I have worked with, impacting on their attitudes towards their training and future steps. However, the more I have encountered these conversational spaces with creative students or recent graduates, the more I begin to understand their experiences of doomed symbembodiment as part of a nomadic and fluid existence thar results from a bigger contextual element which I describe as 'precarity'.

In the following section, I will explore the persistence of precarity within my sense of self-recognition and the strategies that have aided my navigation and acceptance of said precarity. These strategies have taught me how to navigate symbembodiment through instability by embracing, not overlooking, avoiding or negating change. In my experience, being able to discern 'fantasy' from 'radical imagination' has provided me with strategies of constructive and intuitive self-indulgence that allows me to cultivate pleasure in my embodied creative processes, ultimately arriving at a state of contentment and satisfaction with my presence in them (brown, 2024).

Precarity, New Temporalities and Other Balancing Acts

Whereas digital experience serves as a great illustrative example of symbembodiment, my experience makes me argue that digital existence is not the only element that supports symbembodied experiencing but not the only one. I believe there are several external and contextual factors that have led me to experience areas of my IRL existence from a symbembodied perspective. In this subtitle, I will begin the recollection of examples and experiences that illustrate this phenomenon outside of the digital realm by travelling back in time to 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced most of us to go into lockdown. I, as many others, found myself forced to pause, retrieve and reflect about my existence within a wider global context. It is now after four years that I can reflect on certain aspects that appeared during this time, in which I was privileged enough to focus on my own self-growth and take time to make certain life decisions. It was during the 2020 lockdown that I decided to emigrate and pursue Higher Education, for example.

During these pandemic times, while I was locked up back home in Spain, Spanish social media and mainstream media got flooded with the prophetic message*: 'Saldremos mejores',* which translates to English as 'We will come out better'. This quickly popularised phrase full of hope aimed to instil a sense of possibility in society, suggesting that we will collectively become stronger and more resilient after the historical traumatic events that the pandemic entailed (Saldaña, 2024). From the perspective that time continues to give me, I believe all these prophetic efforts have failed to provide me with a utopian desire caging me into a Thatcherian TINA ('There is no alternative') type of mentality that erodes my ability to even dream of not only a better future but a future at all (Martorell Campos, 2019).

The pandemic became, for many of us, a catalyst in which I realised there was something bigger than ourselves. Despite having had other life and death experience, having lost a parent a couple years prior, I had never experienced emptiness, sorrow and fear to the extent I did during the pandemic. These were emotions that my empathy allowed me to feel through the experiences of others, which mostly arrived to me through online platforms and mainstream media, which generated a symbembodied understanding of these feelings during lockdown. My

embodied experience of lockdown was positive and a time that I remember fondly, as I shared a highly needed pause with dear family members in my childhood home, however, my symbembodied experience of lockdown set the bases for what I now understand as my struggles with social anxiety and motivation.

The pandemic served as evidence of the disparities in our individual realities since it did not set one single set of conditions that everyone experienced equally. This 'new normal' highlighted differences on privilege of certain identities after and during the pandemic (Butler, 2022). The impact that the pandemic and its subsequent lockdowns had cannot be generalised, however it is important for me to acknowledge the timeframe on which it occurred, as this had a specific impact in my personal life and practice, which may or may not expand to a certain extend to the experience of some of my generational peers. I was still a teenager when the first lockdown hit in March 2020 and I had already tried my luck with university at the time and decided to drop out and pursue vocational training in dance, however if I think of other generational peers of a younger cluster, they faced lockdowns during secondary education while the older Gen Zs had recently graduated university or were about to do so when lockdowns started. Some Gen Z entered the pandemic as high schoolers and exited it as university students, missing in the process important milestones such as graduating, deciding on further education options, missing on graduate employment opportunities, etc.

This alteration of my socially expected development and my inability to achieve certain pre-established natural timeframes for my age landed me on a distorted sense on time and an inability to self-recognise my development within that time. This is a phenomenon that has been coined 'the pandemic skip', has an effect on our self-perception bringing it out of sync with the aging of our bodies. The pandemic skip has been reported to be an intergenerational experience after the pandemic (Schneider, 2023). Due to the timeframe in which the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, Gen Zs have expressed a sense of distortion in their perception of time which has been greatly documented on TikTok and other social media platforms where Gen Z report to feel 'time blindness'[xvii] (See Figure 13).

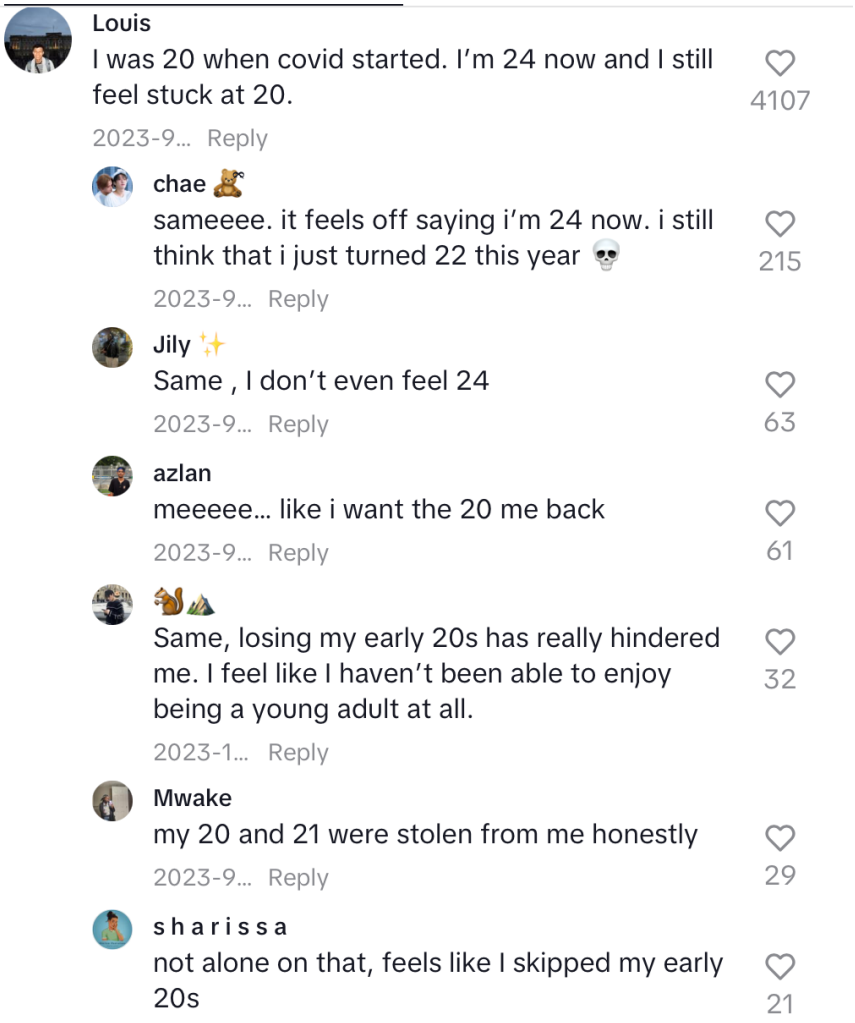


Figure 13. Comment section on @triciasfu video. Tricia Fu (2023) Just a gal rambling on the pandemic skip and trying to make up for lost times. I hope this resonates with some of you but i also feel like i word vomited for 4 min so not sure if coherent 😂 #millenialsoftiktok #genzvsmillenial #chitchat #bigsisteradvice #20s #pandemicskip Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@triciasfu/video/7283936853156384046?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7301826175713478177

In my experience, the pandemic not only misaligned my sense of experienced and perceived time, which caused a further sense of symbembodiment in my IRL experiencing, but it also evidenced an underlying issue that contributed to this misalignment. Precarity, for me as a working-class individual, has constituted a pivotal factor in my ability to self-recognise in certain circles and at certain life stages and it has had a clear effect on my experience of Higher Education and creative practice. Precarity as an element that conditions our ability to embody our daily impressions, experiences and emotions has been reported as a negative aggravating factor that leads into an inability to recognise one's own future, further affecting Gen Zs mental health (Garcia-Gil Berberia and Checa, 2024).

Based on the report *The Cost of Independence: young people's economic security* (2022) by The Royal Society for Arts', almost half of young people in the UK between the ages of 16 to 24 years old (47%) struggle or are unable to make ends meet monthly, with variable incomes that provide no stability to their living circumstances. This financial precarity accentuates as Gen Z gets older with a 57% of young people between the ages of 22 to 24 years old that find themselves in a financially precarious situation. Almost half of young people (41%) believe that they will never be able to access home-owning or to live completely independently with no financial support from friends or family; with over half of young people (51%) believing that they will not be able to retire and live comfortably in the future.

All participants of this study stated during focus groups and interviews to have had to engaged in either part-time or full-time work to some capacity during their studies which had a negative impact on the commitment they could demonstrate in the classroom, as often they would need to work multiple jobs or work as many hours as possible outside of their teaching time to make ends meet. Participants recognised precarity in their situations as working students, not being able to dedicate the required time to their studies because of their need to dedicate time to generate an income. Often on unstable low payment employment, this 'generation precariat' has been forced to alter or completely abandon certain life transitions such as moving away from their families, accessing homeowning and forming families of their own (Bessant, Farthing and Watts 2017; Standing 2011).

The precarity induced inability to recognise ourselves within our life milestones as we cannot seem to be able to envision them in the near future has a detrimental effect on our mental health. The development of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety has been reported to be tightly linked to precarity as well as emotional burnout and an overall diminished sense of life satisfaction (Llosa et al. 2018). Various side effects related precariousness and unstable employment have been reported as negatively affecting our wellbeing and mental health (headaches and stress related migraines, fatigue, muscular pain and back ache) (Matilla-Santander et al, 2019 ; Creed, *et al.*, 2022)

Having experienced these side effects myself as a working student, I would even take a step further and suggest that precarity and its effect on our mental and physical health not only affects our ability to imagine a future but also to embody the present, forcing us to result to symbembodied experiencing either as a default coping mechanism in hope to alleviate the heaviness of our precarious existences. When Conley (2009) talks about the 'Elsewhere Class' as symbembodied intraviduals who spend their lives looking elsewhere, out of their selves, preoccupied with the external, it reminds me to the many hours I have spent in class, dancing and moving to an improvisation task while doing some mental maths, counting up the hours I had work that week to see if I could afford to get a snack after class. In my experience, precarity has been one of the main reasons to experience symbembodiment, which is why I now use it as a framework for understanding the intricate causes of instability, whether in life conditions, creative processes or self-recognition. To utilise the inherent precarity of my fluid identity within my creative practice allows me to explore how to respond to precarious conditions, adapt and resist the forces that create these fragile experiences, opening doors for new imaginations and creative opportunities to emerge (Blustein, et al., 2024).

In this research precarity remains a consistent force of my reasoning, as precarious living is all I have ever known. I understand in my own existence how precarity is not only a constant defining factor of my class but also of my inherent fluidity as a Gen Z. I do not claim all Gen Zs have experienced precarity, but I argue that there is a certain level of precarity within Gen Z's existences as fluidity is inherently changeable and therefore unstable. By learning to inhibit precarity, my practice has benefitted from austerity, allowing me to focus on my presence within creative processes. An example of this embracing of instability and precarity is an exercise I engaged with during a workshop with social art and media artist Harold Offeh, in which we were invited to create something on a piece of paper, think about it and come back to show it to the group.

I had been going through a rough period when this workshop happened, it was the beginning of my most recent economical struggle as I was running out of savings, and I was having a very difficult time finding a job. On top of that, I was struggling with physical pain related to my period and mental burnt out as I found myself fighting the healthcare system while trying to figure out what was wrong with my

hormones and body. I entered the studio that day in an already symbembodied state, struggling to commit to my presence in the room, unintentionally looking elsewhere (Conley, 2019). When I was given the instructions of the task, which had to be executed within the timeframe of an hour, I struggled to find the motivation to commit to it, automatically resulting to a default doodling around the page that held no meaning for me and that did not require of my honest presence on the process. This process was quick and disengaging, finishing after a few minutes since I became quite bored of it. As I finished, I decided to go to the kitchen and make myself a tea, accidentally spilling it over the page I had been using.

Now I recognise this was an accidental state of crisis that forced my creativity to emerge. The instability and precarity of my situation that had positioned me in a symbembodied experiencing of the tasks (both the creative task and the task of making myself a tea) had made fail at both. However, from accepting this failure, as I looked at the soaking wet turmeric yellowish splash on the paper, I was able to envision opportunities. By simply accepting not only the failure but also the emotionally draining circumstances in which I found myself and the subsequent tendency to symbembodiment I regained authority and autonomy towards my role in the creative task. What I ended up presenting on the session were a stack of barely dried napkins that I had intentionally stained with turmeric tea after the accidental splash (See Figures 14 and 15).

Figure 14 and 15: Result of tea-stain process carried out by Marta Guerra Doblas (May 2024).

This new window of opportunity opened new questions for my processes that unintentionally made me think not only of the product I was presenting, which was my focus on my first attempt at the task, but of the delivery of this product, of my role within this delivery and the presence of those who witnessed the delivery. I presented the stack of papers on a try and quietly peeled them one by one, revealing different tea-stain patterns in each napkin and asking the audience, my peers, to hold each individual sheet. By the end, the yellow tea stain had expanded across the room, as we all stood on a circular shape, holding a napkin each and presenting it to the group. By committing to my presence in the process and the delivery I was able to turn an accidental state of crisis into an opportunity for collective meaning construction and embodiment of a creative process.

States of crisis, as a result of unsustainable precarious situations, have been present throughout my creative practice and continue to be present in my work as an educator and researcher. Precarity was widely discussed with the participants of this study during focus groups and interviews, where there was an agreement that despite some practicalities being more or less true to their experiences, they all felt precarious to a certain extent. This was extensively related to precarity towards imaginations of future prospects, and most specifically for participants within the creative industries, precarity was recognised in terms of the sustainability of not only their careers but the sector as a whole.

One of the focus group participants, a creative practitioner in social justice, highlighted the limitations of meritocracy by stating: *‘They say meritocracy is real, but actually it's not real. We know now that poverty and exclusion is a part of the system, so it's not about you trying so hard and you trying to reach your best because it's also [dependent] on your historical situation. Where you are born, the resources you can access to depending on where you are, or also the social resources that you have available’.* This contribution has become significant to this research because it challenges the pervasive notion of meritocracy —that success is solely determined by individual effort— by opening the question to how structural factors like socioeconomic background, geographic location and access to resources shape opportunities or sustain precarity and how educational spaces can remain considerate of this.

I aim to learn how to use precarity to the advantage of both my creative practice and my sanity, which has resulted in the usage of states of crisis as a methodology for creative embodied learning. In the upcoming section, I will expand on how this methodology not only embraces precarity and symbembodiment, but it also looks for it, as they serve as a turning point in creative processes, while I provide practical examples of how it has been used in my practice.

States of Crisis

'With our human gift of reasoning we have tried to control or overcome the emergent processes that are our own nature, the processes of the planet we live on, and the universe we call home. The result is crisis at each scale we are aware of, from our deepest inner moral sensibilities to the collective scale of climate and planetary health and beyond, to our species in relation to space and time.
The crisis is everywhere, massive massive massive.
And we are small.'

Writer, activist and facilitator, adrienne maree brown (2017: 3)

In this section I aim to elaborate on the concept of 'states of crisis' within creative educational contexts, inspired by the proposal of the Zimbabwean interdisciplinary artist Masimba Hwati (2023) who suggests that creative educational settings of intentionally fabricated 'crisis', supported by the role of the educator, facilitates a safe environment for students. This proposal is based on the previous exploration of the multiple states of crisis that me and my generational peers have faced and continue to face as we grow. From my personal experience as a student and from my experimental approach to the studio as a leader in various form (educator, choreographer, leading creative practitioner and facilitator), I have experienced and witnessed how promoting states of safe not-knowing allows creative students to forget about the imposed boundaries and implications of hierarchical institutions that, as suggested by Hwati, (2023), tend to privilege some types of art making over others.

What I consider valuable about states of crisis as a pedagogical strategy in creative settings, while remaining aware the negative connotations embedded in the wording, is that they have the potential to evoke a sense of uncertainty and constant re-evaluation, as presented in my testimony during the previous section. In my

experience, inducing controlled states of crisis within the studio can lead to the emergence of new ideas, much like what happens during creative processes. Using states of crisis as a framework for my educational practices allow me as an educator to create a space of practice that remains safe and constructive for my students to experience precarity and instability. There is no one way to execute states of crisis, my understanding is that they adapt to each student body so there is a need for educators wanting to embed them in their practices to get to know their student body first and assess the suitability of the methodology. States of crisis are not the starting point in the process of building a relationship of trust with our students that fosters their creativity and sense of belonging but a result of this process.

I recall my first experience as a lecturer in Higher Education, in charge for the first time of holding a space that followed institutional rules: *I* was there to teach, and *they* were there to learn. Up to that point, I had been in leadership positions within creative spaces from a different perspective: I had either choreographed and directed groups of people from a position of an equal (peer to peer), where performers and collaborators where close in age and position to me, or from a position clearly delineated within different roles, as an adult teaching children. That was the first time that I entered a studio with a leading role facing a group of students/participants so close in age to me but so different in position. Whereas this situation initially made me feel that I had to delineate the differences between my position and their position more so it was not overlooked and I was taken seriously, I quickly realised that I was replicating (or should I say failing to replicate?) a model of transmission teaching that I had experienced (failingly) during my time as a student. In our first session I remember saying to the *learners 'This is your first time being a student at university and this is also my first time being a lecturer. I would really appreciate if you were as patient with me as I intend to be with you'.*

I remember thinking about this approach in preparation for the class and questioning if I was presenting myself as 'too soft'. If maybe I had to 'fake it till I make it'. For me, personally, this was another manifestation of imposter syndrome[xviii], making me believe that I was not ready to be in the position to hold that space safely for both my students and myself. What I found out when moving away from trying to carve further differences in our positions and intentionally met my students with compassion, patience and wonder towards both them and me instead, was that the

honesty that I brought to the space with that statement and my consequent actions in the studio opened the door for trust and collective growth.

This is not to say that vulnerability as an educator did not feel threatening to me, it certainly did. I remember an instance where I heard a couple of students muttering in class as we tried to figure out spacing for a section of the choreography. After they had asked me a specificity about a movement of one of their phrases and I answered by shrugging my shoulders and telling them that I did not know, their whole attitude became condescending towards me, unconsciously questioning my validity and appropriateness as a leading voice on the space. This was not something that they confronted me with but I understood through a silent comment later on the session that I was not meant to hear as clearly as I did. I decided then to pause the course of the class to make a remark - keep in mind this happened a couple months into the term, so we had both warmed up to each other at this point. By responding the way I did, I realised later that I had unintentionally instilled a sense of comfort and normalcy in the 'not-knowing' that is involved in creative processes. Whereas I do not recall the exact words I said, I remember it going down the lines of something like this: '*There's so much I don't know. About this piece and about many other things, which is what I find so fun about making. Working with you guys, I cannot know everything that is why I don't try to pretend like I do. I am not making the movement phrases, you are. I am not performing the piece, you are. I can only know so much about what this piece is which is why I find it so exciting, but I understand it can make some of you feel anxious and unsure.'*

After making sure that I had said my piece to them about this topic, I decided to give them a break, it had been a long day, and I could feel some tensions building that I did not fully comprehend. During this break, the students who had made the initial comment came to me to ask for guidance. After I had said that I did not know how to respond to their initial question, they had had to find answers for themselves, and they had come to me to ask for feedback in the solution they had come up with. I gave them some feedback and directions in terms of the movement, consciously focusing my comments on how good it was to see them come together to solve a problem creatively, validating the effort that they had done in overcoming their initial instinct of having me, the educator, solve the problem for them. I commented on how much they seemed to enjoy the phrase of movement now that they had had a

saying on its making, and they responded by saying: *'We realised we could do whatever, so we just decided to have fun with it'.*

By experiencing, embracing and acknowledging in front of my students that I only can know so far and by consciously leading by the example that not only it is ok not to know but it is also a precious and valuable soft skill to have as a creative maker and educator, I have learned, and tried to teach, what Hwati (2023) calls 'humble patience'. Humble patience has allowed me to change my focus from trying to present myself as the symbembodied experience of who my 'educator persona' should be and act like to the embodied experience of simply being in the room from a position of self-trust and self-recognition. By learning to stand in my own shoes instead of trying to fit someone else's expectations of what an educator should be or act like and all that they should know, I trained my ability to practice humble patience.

My encounter with humble patience began as a student, guided by educators that emphasised actively listening to my body and other bodies in space, actively questioning the dynamics on the room and honestly responding to the questions that emerge on the space. As explained above, new temporalities and experiencing life from a symbembodied perspective had really caught up with me at the time of this encounter. In addition, I had spent a great amount of time, at that point, understanding my creative practice from the perspective of how marketable it could potentially be, focusing my energies on the final product rather than the creative process. This situation had created a separation between me as a creator and my creative output, I did not recognize myself in my work and I kept losing sight of what my practice was, not fully understanding how the concept applied to me.

As someone with a very short attention span and a great capacity to stress, humble patience has ultimately allowed for creativity to emerge in a way that feels honest, as I navigate spaces and processes. Thanks to the consistent practice of humble patience, I have learned to trust resignation in a way that is healthy and constructive to me as a maker and as a person, however, it is important to acknowledge that frustration feels different for each person and can evoke a negative and debilitating response (Wass et al., 2020). What I have learned from my experience as a student is that, as educators, we have the responsibility to do the required previous work to

consolidate what trusting resignation means for us and to develop the strategies that support our individual practice(s) of humble patience. For me it has to do with multi-disciplinary exploration of my interests, conversational practices and exercises of attunement and noticing. For my students, I observed that, generally, exercises focused on somatic internal noticing inspired by somatic practices focused on body listening and regulating worked well, as the engagement with these exercises and scores forced the students to be truly present, noticing small details, encouraged to actively remember these details to then shared with the group as part of directed conversations that reflected on these somatic experiences.

Developing strategies that work for our students is a process for each educator to embark themselves individually first and then with their students, remaining aware of the common need to seek external support when needed to further help students develop the tools to manage these feelings in a way that causes them no harm. Due to the specific resources found in institutionalised learning that differ from spaces of informal learning (access to mental health advisors or first aiders and counsellors is often in-house for educational institutions), I believe 'crisis settings' to be a suitable tool to employ in institutional creative education environments as they cultivate patience, resilience, humility, trust and purpose. From my experience, when the trust on resignation and the strategies of humble patience are in a solid place and happen from spaces of collaboration with all available resources and support, crisis settings consist of a simple principle: make-think-be.

I propose make-think-be as a method to ignite meaningful experiences of creation. Inspired by David Gauntlett's (2018) proposal of *'making is connecting',* make-think-be adapts an instructional tone since it remains an active effort in my practice. As someone who often struggles to create, I long for meaning and purpose in my creative practice. Make-think-be is an imperative I repeat to myself when I find my practice lost in any of the three, separating my ability to create, feel and exists simultaneously through my creativity. It is an imperative attitude to navigate states of crisis as it allows me to embody the moment of creativity with no symbembodied experiences of possible futures, allowing my creativity to not be conditioned by productivity motivated ideas which focus my efforts in creating a marketable product rather than indulging in a creative process.

Following the principle of making something while I think about the action of making and ultimately acknowledging my presence in the room - in relation to the space, other bodies, other practices, other materials -, has enabled me to immerse myself into creative processes with a sense of purpose, being able to maintain a consistent navigation and development of ideas by remaining conscious of how these three actions, ‘make’, ‘think’ and ‘be’ are required to co-exist in tandem.

In order to illustrate an example of a state of crisis setting ruled by the make-think-be methodology, I am embedding the collaborative work I am currently developing in my practice alongside performance practitioner and peer Maggie Chan Tin Lok, which manifested itself under the name *‘📦 I love my playground’* as part of our creative intervention at the London Festival of Architecture 2024 (See Figure 16)

📦 I love my playground

a score by Chan Tin Lok, Maggie

objects:

red flat box

two people in the box, do everything together

touch and sense with feet, not with eye

green tunnel box

crawl like a car going through a tunnel

maintain a box shape with one hand + one leg, or two legs

move around with it without your hands

small yellow box

fit the silver ball into it

blue flute

play your favourite song with this

beanie, socks and gloves

how many people can wear them

how does this costume change your presence on the space

who do you become when you wear the costume

sound system:

a loop station

in a durational sense, give directions within three words

make sounds that describes what you see

if you're done with layering, you can always clear the layers and restart

a cassette tape station

choose whatever cassette sound you want to play

you can collaborate with the loop station as well to create layers of music

Figure 16: 📦 I love my playground, a score by Chan Tin Lok, Maggie (2024)

'📦 *I love my playground*' is a score that sets a playful state of crisis. This is presented on the score by an open set of instructions regarding materials found in the space. This queering of not only the material presented but the navigation of the space itself allows for a state of no rules or boundaries that reframes the not-knowing how to navigate or interact with the space, materials and other bodies in the space into a playful opportunity to collectively generate new experiences and dynamics. When I talk about 'no rules', it is important to acknowledge that these spaces are managed accordingly to a sense of humanity, and whereas a 'no rule' mentality may apply, there are limitations in terms of ethics and harm. Crisis settings are managed from a presentation of the spaces as egalitarian and generative for all participants, which in this instance for example, manifested itself through the multigenerational simultaneous participation of young kids and adults, who parallelly and collaboratively navigated the same scores. Because this score was set as part of an interactive open access exhibition, it resulted in the generation of small tasks and games among the visitors, sometimes directed by Maggie but most times reimagined and repurposed by the visitors of the exhibition to fit their interests and questions (See Figures 17, 18 and 19).

Figures 17, 18 and 19. Images of audience members interacting with '📦*I love my playground*'.
Source: Marta Guerra Doblas

This set of instructions, paired by an active effort to hold a space of inclusivity, support and nurture by the collaborating creatives (Maggie Chan Tin Lok, Ivana Dramisino, Eoin O Fiannachta and myself) resulted in a state of crisis very far apart

from the negative connotations of the word. This state of crisis was created by multiple elements on the spaces that caused a playful enquiry thanks to its durational, accumulative, boundless and purposeless nature, which allowed participants of the space to let creativity and curiosity emerge with no interest on the final result of it. The context in which this state of crisis emerge is also necessary to acknowledge, as an artistic intervention may be an unusual event in a space such as this. We carried out the activity in a shopping centre, as we were invited by the council to take over one of their commercial unused spaces and open up our intervention to the community.

This unexpected nature of the intervention facilitated the fostering of this state of crisis, as participants accessed the space hesitantly, unaware of what it was and what could be expected of it. As per participants' feedback, visitors often felt also hesitant in the way they managed their own involvement in the space and they related to the practitioners involved, either performing or facilitating, in the space. This inability to embed meaning into the space they were accessing and their decision to venture into the unknown allowed us, who held the space, to facilitate a state of crisis that was inviting rather than intimidating. By setting up loose rules with the score and allowing for spaces to both take part, and not do so, the participants were given a sense of autonomy but not necessarily a sense of responsibility in holding the space, only in being accountable for their own decisions when engaging in it. It was ok to engage on the proposal in the same way that it was ok not to do so, because the space, and the creative proposition of intentional crisis, was held by the creatives involved.

This task was divided to our best abilities, Maggie would engage in the performance of the score while facilitating the explanation of it to participants who decided to engage with it, while I would function in a satellite sort of way, matching Maggie's energy but keeping the distance, able to become more approachable to hesitant participants. This was also supported by the efforts of Ivana and Eoin, who held the space in terms of logistics, supporting with the practical and technical crisis emerging to allow the score to successfully happen.

As a conclusion, in this example, we have seen that a thoughtful, controlled and inviting state of crisis can provide participants with a safe setting for

experimentation, where they can feel accompanied and supported in the process of make-think-be. When transferring these ideas to the creative classroom, the prioritisation of process over product becomes key, opening questions for the utility of even setting final points in creative curriculums where students are required to present what is framed as “final” versions of their work (for example and as suggestion for further research, reconsidering modes of assessment in creative disciplines).

Where possible, crisis settings need to be able to expand for a long enough amount of time that allows for the deepening of a process and emergence of questions, practices and methodologies in the creative journeys of our students. States of crisis should be proposed after an initial dual work of self-recognition where the facilitators have undertaken the required reflection to feel like they stand on solid ground and the students have been previously equipped with tools, exercises and references to take as starting point on their own journeys of self-exploration in these crisis settings.

Crisis are presented as structured proposal of scores, tasks or interactions with the space that follow an instructed guidance: ‘make-think-be’. These settings aim to equip creative students with tools to navigate the emergent fluidity and fluctuation on their own identity as creatives as well as the creative processes they undertake in their practices. They can connect students to the wider scene in which their practices exist – peers, creative practitioners, relevant research and practices and external references.

Chapter 5: Navigating the Loss of the Community: Empathy in Times of Isolation

Following on from the previously explained concepts of precarity and crisis discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter looks to rebuilding community amidst isolation and it will investigate community, scarce mentality and violence, exploring how dance and embodied practice facilitates empathy, social engagement and collective attunement. In this chapter, I will explore the testimony of participants in regards to connectivity over social media and reflect on my creative practice to offer practical examples of efforts to combat isolation and promote collective awareness through tuning practices.

Amidst my generation of ‘digital nomads’ (Bhandari and Bimo, 2022), social media is often targeted as the sole responsible for a perceived ‘lack of empathy epidemic’, that makes young people ‘choose to distance themselves’ instead of attempting to build connections, however, as suggested by Svendsen (Rubio and Nieto, 2024), social media does not replace other forms of socialisation but instead opens the door to a new space for it to happen. There is no straight forward answer for how potentially isolating or connecting social media and digital spaces are, as these impressions ultimately are down to how each person uses and engages with these spaces.

Sherry Turkle (2017) describes digital spaces as fostering a state of being "alone together," suggesting that people often resort to these platforms spaces in hope they can defeat their loneliness. This concept resonated with my interest in examining social media usage among the participants in this study, particularly in relation to their experiences of loneliness. From the outset, it became clear that social media served as a vital connection point for participants, linking them to loved ones, shared interests and communities that reflected their values and concerns.

For instance, one participant highlighted the unique sense of community fostered by TikTok, explaining*, "TikTok is good at creating communities. [...] Like the dance community, professional dancers [on TikTok] are willing to give you like free tips on how to improve your dance and to teach a short choreo you can do from home.*

That's why I love TikTok. […] I like the sense of more and more people having it now so you would do a trend from Dubai when you are in London. I love that" (Focus Group Participant 5). This reflects Turkle's observation about digital spaces offering connection, even as they underscore the complexities of solitude within these virtual environments.

All participants recognised that social media, particularly TikTok, fosters new forms of communication, often forming niche groups that create a sense of belonging. While these platforms offer opportunities for connection, learning, and community-building, participants also acknowledged that these digital spaces do not entirely mitigate feelings of isolation or loneliness. The excitement of new connections and the ability to acquire skills through social media coexist with their ongoing struggles to navigate loneliness. Participants expressed a shared sense of grief that extended beyond their online engagement and permeated various aspects of their lives, leading to a broader perception of loneliness and isolation.

While this experience was widely recognised, the interpretations of these feelings were diverse. Some participants viewed digital spaces more positively, appreciating their connective and generative potential, while others felt reluctant, engaging in these platforms only out of necessity and preferring to remain offline whenever possible. One participant succinctly captured this sentiment: *“I only really use WhatsApp because I have to, because of work. If I didn’t have to use it for work, I would have deleted it by now”* (Interview Participant 2). This feeling of being compelled to participate in digital spaces, often for professional or social reasons, resonated with many of the participants and deeply with my own experience. In fact, with the exception of one participant, all others reported feeling similarly obligated to remain digitally connected. Another participant reinforced this notion, explaining that there is a widespread belief that if you are not active on social media, *“you are a nobody,”* a perception that has influenced my own approach to developing personal creative practices.

This research does not aim to resolve these complex feelings but rather acknowledges the presence of this perceived grief and isolation, something I have experienced myself and observed among my Gen Z peers and students. The goal is to explore strategies that help us navigate these emotional landscapes while

remaining critically engaged with the digital spaces we inhabit. This emerging practice, which as of now exists with the working title of *'Becomings of no-body',* has been extremely helpful to work in my own personal sense of individuality and isolation as it entails a series of exercises that focus on awareness, connection and attunement, which will be expanded further in the section *Communal Bodies: Training Collective Attunement*. As this practice has been shared with my community of practice, it has allowed us to work on our collective attunement, ultimately contributing to our collaborative practices and nurturing our communal awareness.

Commodified bodies, violented bodies

Despite the perceived social media-induced individualism often being labelled as the cause for an increase in apathy and lack of compassion that results in bullying and narcissistic behaviours, we often fail to acknowledge how our Western economic structures and cultures not only contribute to but celebrate individualism and autonomy (Cacioppo and Cacioppo, 2014; Waugh, 2024). The liberal individual, as explained by Svendsen (2024), is the result of capitalist conditioning that isolates individuals by centring all their needs for self-actualisation within the self, overshadowing the individual's need for socialisation by prioritising liberal concerns such as the right for private property (Beck, 2001). To situate the individual as the basic unit of socialization predisposes us to isolate ourselves from the communities and traditions that dictate who we are since, within the liberal system, we are encouraged to become 'self-made' humans, often overlooking the communal aspects that form our identities.

As explored during Chapter 4, our current student population exists on a time of precarity, which induces a mentality of scarcity in which the emotional and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to linger and stay present in our daily lives. Whereas we no longer have to stand two metres apart, I am interested on framing the vestiges of precarity, perceived scarcity and isolation that the pandemic made evident in ways that portray violence in the way described by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins. Collins proposes an understanding of violence that is expansive and situated and that has a multi-scale effect, describing two types of violence, an

obvious and visible, and invisible violence '*embedded in the taken-for-granted rules and practices of everyday life'* (Collins, 2023: 2).

When I use the term 'violence', I refer to a lack of care caused by the current neoliberal systems in the West hemisphere, which, as suggested by The Care Collective, prioritises competition over cooperation, profit over people, individualism over collectivity and production over care. Violence symbolises the devastating result of current systems which hold no effective experience of collective care as the organising principle of life. Violence doesn't just happen in obvious, physical ways, but also through the ways our bodies and identities are shaped and treated by society. As suggested by Collins, Davis and Chattopadhyay, violence operates on multiple levels, affecting how people experience the world based on their gender, race, class, or other social identities, resulting in detrimental and harmful consequences such as inequality, lack of resources, or poor health outcomes. These consequences are direct effects of how violence plays out in different embodied experiences (Chattopadhyay, 2018).

My interest in violence stems from an understanding of intersectionality and how it has manifested in my own personal identity to the extent of identifying vestiges of this violence in my educational experience. Violence, as articulated by Collins, exists in a complex relationship with power in an interlocking and interdependent way, exerting heavier violence over those who find themselves at the bottom on these power relations where certain traditionally marginalised traits intersect. For example, if you were to see me from the outside, I present as a cisgender, able, white body; characteristics that often find themselves privileged within the holders of powers in Western capitalist societal structures. Traits such as my queerness, history of migration or class do not outwardly manifest in the perception of my physicality, however, under the framework of intersectionality, they pose me in a much more vulnerable position, making me more likely to experience a heavier level of violence.

Whereas the visible traits of my identity remain, and I do not mean to intend to negate the privilege that they carry; in my own experience, this dichotomy between visible and invisible violence has made it extremely difficult for me to recognise when intersectional violence occurs to me and therefore it has blurred my perception of

its effects on my embodiment, sense of self and ability to relate to others. Experiencing intersectional violence has framed my understanding of it in a broader sense, which informs my approach to this argument. It remains crucial to my reasoning to acknowledge how *'violence works within and across various embodiments'*, leaving *'devastating material differences as effects of these embodiment'* (Chattopadhyay, 2018: 1298).

Identifying these effects has proved to be an excruciatingly painful and isolating process as I have felt my safety and security as an individual navigating the world compromised by the effects of intersectional and systemic violence towards my identity. As seen on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Mcleod, 2024), recognising safety and security lies close to the bottom of the pyramid, representing a foundational necessity for human development (See Figure 20). When we are unable to recognise safety and security in our existence, we struggle to establish a healthy and sustainable sense of connection with ourselves and others, potentially compromising our ability to develop healthy coping mechanisms.

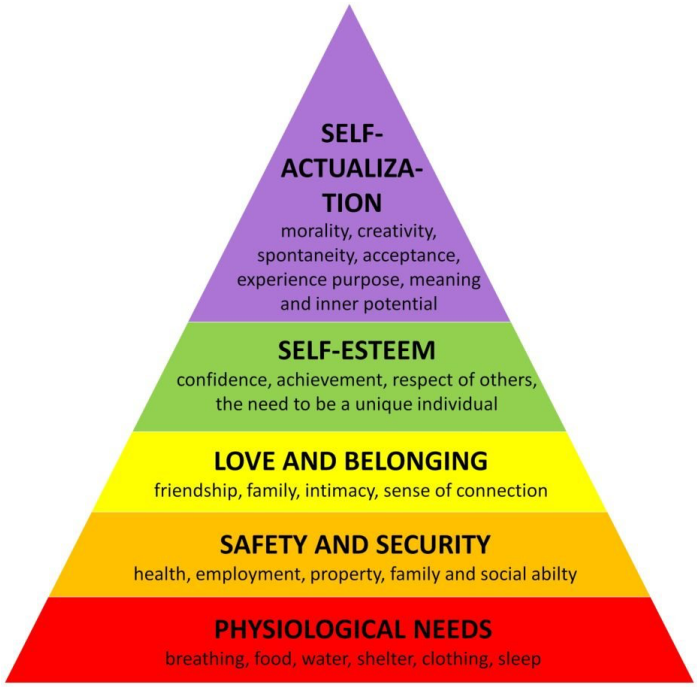


Figure 20: Mcleod, S. (2024) *Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid.* Simply Psychology. Source: https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html

According to the World Health Organisation (2024), over 25% of the population across the world admits to feeling socially isolated and lonely, with over 14 million

young European admitting to feel symptoms of depression after the COVID-19 pandemic (Garcia-Gil Berberia and Checa, 2024). Some studies suggest that social media can help people stay connected with others, offering a way to cope with loneliness and stress (Cauberghe et al., 2021; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003; Nowland et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2020, as cited in Bonsaksen et al., 2023). However, other research has found that spending more time on social media is linked to worse mental health and increased feelings of loneliness (Gao et al., 2020; Geirdal, Ruffolo, et al., 2021, Bonsaksen, Schoultz, et al., 2021; Helm et al., 2022, as cited in Bonsaksen et al., 2023). Therefore, it's still unclear if social media really helps people cope with stress. Researchers at Spanish Youth Council and Oxfam Intermon refer to this data to explain the radicalisation of young people, explaining that the building-up of angry and irascible emotions in European Gen Z is caused by unmanaged feelings of sadness and isolation, accentuated by the negative effects of online engagement.

In addition to this, our consumption of distressful violent content happens through more sources than ever before, from mainstream media that reports on global and local scale visible violent acts to social media platforms that document this violence from a first-person point of view, instilling a generalised sense of unsafety and a greater global awareness (Chialant et al., 2016; Moscrip, 2019). Gen Zs, who are globally reported to be the most ethnically diverse generation to date (Pew Research Institute, 2020), with a higher exposure to violent content and, as understood through intersectionality, a predisposition to suffer violence, significantly more likely to feel unsafe and distressed. Feeling unsafe, especially as an adolescent or early adult, generates psychological distress, undermining the achievement capacity in other areas of life, including education and personal and social wellbeing (Valente and Crescenzi-Lanna, 2022) (Chattopadhyay, 2018).

From the conversations held with participants in this study, all of whom had recently completed undergraduate degrees at various institutions across the UK, a shared experience of institutional violence emerged. Participants expressed how these institutions continued to uphold outdated models that no longer served them or their peers, exerting violence over their identities and bodies. For example, neurodiverse participants reported feeling accused and shamed by teaching staff when they tried to explain their struggles with course navigation. These students' experiences

highlighted how educators' lack of awareness, or refusal to acknowledge the ways institutions historically uphold patriarchal, hierarchical systems that exclude and oppress certain identities, leads to the perpetuation of violent attitudes (Hwati, 2023). As noted by Blustein et al. (2024), this distance created between the perpetrator of these violent behaviours and the victim further reinforces systemic barriers.

One participant, for instance, pointed out that grading systems and classroom structures felt counterintuitive to their learning needs: *"I personally have ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder] and I also have a few other mental health issues, so I've actually had to fight against the system... and I can very much tell that not all the teachers are equipped for it"* (Focus Group Participant 3). This participant had already explored the routes available to them through the learning support services and resources of their institution, where they were met with long waiting times and a misunderstanding of the nature of their creative course, which led to a non-appropriate and insufficient adaptation of their learning. Experiences like this highlight the disconnect between educators, support services and students' diverse needs, a gap that reinforces exclusion.

The idea that institutions are designed for an outdated "student prototype" was echoed by another participant, who felt that academic systems are rigid and inflexible in adapting to contemporary societal changes. This sense of rigidity was compounded by the generational gap between students and their educators, as noted by a third participant, which had also unsuccessfully sought support from teaching staff and student services: *"I think we're very much a generation that has autonomy and we're potentially more capable, or more willing, to voice what we need. And the generation which we're being taught by is not the generation that's the most receptive to that or that has experience with that. So, for example, I was told that I was the first disabled student that the course had had, so it was up to me to figure out how to deal with it... I spent most of my degree trying to teach teachers how to teach me"* (Focus Group Participant 2).

These testimonies underline the assertion that institutions, through outdated systems and lack of understanding, are perceived as actively exerting violence over the identities and bodies of students, particularly those from marginalised groups.

As previously explained, this violence manifests in both visible and invisible ways—through exclusionary practices, lack of support, and harmful attitudes—forcing students to bear the burden of navigating systems that fail to accommodate their needs. Some examples of these systems are learning and access support that require long waiting times and provide few effective resources to support student needs and dated curriculums that do not incorporate new understandings of accessibility within educational spaces, as highlighted by participants.

In my own experience at the time of my undergraduate studies, I was unable to recognise the violence I suffered from a hierarchical educational system that, perhaps unintentionally, perpetuated a system of oppression towards identities like mine. I felt unsettled and uneasy in my experience as a student, realising later that violence had manifested in my student journey leaving an effect on my self-recognition. It manifested as a lack of acknowledgement of my status as a student worker and a subsequent lack of consideration towards my need to work to sustain myself as I studied and as a lack of consideration towards my status as a migrant as often we (me and my international peers) were denied of the time and space we needed to be able to process and respond to information regarding our studies as we adapted from different educational systems.

These traces of violence and the effects they caused in my undergraduate experienced resulted in a sense of isolation and separation from the teaching staff as I perceived most educators to be very distanced from my reality and not willing to take the steps towards mutual understanding. Despite the overall message of diversity awareness and active efforts towards inclusion, the reality on the attitudes I encountered during my studies violently victimised me for my intersectionality, resulting on a consistent hypervigilant state of alert that I held in me through the three years that my course lasted.

As a student, I have often been told to “leave my worries at the door” as an effort to articulate my identity and the identities of my peers as equal, which has posed an increased struggle the more I moved forward within my educational journey (meaning, the more I have grown, learned and changed as a person). It is important that we think of our educational systems through the lenses of those who transit it, who not only exist as students in the world but whose identities are entangled in a

much bigger picture. Considering that, as commented previously, violence and precarity have a direct impact in not only our sense of embodiment but in our ability experience it at all, there is no “leaving worries at the door”, there is no student body formed of equal individuals; and to assume there is feels inherently violent.

I believe that it is fundamental, in order to frame how dance becomes a useful tool for young people nowadays to solidify a sense of selfhood through embodiment, that we understand that young generations are an embodiment of the convulsed violent context in which they exist, which, instead of overlooked, can potentially be used to deepen their sense of self through appropriate trained embodiment. In my experience as a student, falling into a default state of symbembodiment has been a way of coping with the intensity of being a precarious violented student which has turned to be very isolating and atomizing conditioning my student journey.

When discussing violence within educational experiences in the focus groups and interviews of this study, participants pointed out how the educational systems they experienced tended to overlook the value of social capital[xix] as a crucial resource that could have enriched their academic journeys. Instead, they observed a focus on hard-skills-based training, which they felt displaced the development of soft skills. Soft skills are, in contrast to ‘hard skills’, not directly tied to the professional knowledge gained in a specific academic discipline; instead, they refer to personal and interpersonal attributes, such as self-control, persistence, leadership, and teamwork, encompassing social and emotional competencies (Garcia Chitiva and Correa, 2024; Scheerens et al., 2020). These soft skills were recognised by the participants of this study as essential for navigating the violence, uncertainty and *perpetuum* mobile that characterises modern life (Bauman, 2011).

One participant expressed concern about the individualistic nature of education, saying: *“We are atomised, and we are told to be atomised and to be individuals, rather than being a community first of all. I think this is such a problem that we are not seeing ourselves as a community and I'm not talking about online community. [...] I think that the core of the educational system is based on an industrial way of production, it’s not thought to be dealing with nowadays societies. We are taught to learn skills we don’t even use; we are not taught about emotional intelligence”* (Focus Group Participant 1). This testimony illustrates the participants’ frustration

with an educational system that prioritizes individualism and technical skills over community-building and emotional intelligence. The neglect of these soft skills, which could equip students to cope with the challenges of modern life, was viewed as a significant shortcoming of their academic experience. These reflections suggest that, by failing to foster a sense of community and ignoring the importance of emotional intelligence, educational systems contribute to students' struggles with navigating the complex social and emotional landscapes they face.

In the upcoming section, I will explore my experience of collectiveness and communities of practice as formative elements of great positive impact in my creative and educational practice, inspired by theories of change such as emergent strategies (brown, 2017) and radical imagination (Haiven, and Khasnabish, 2014). This exploration aims to provide this text with some final ideas regarding the self in contact with others, adding onto the previously introduced premise of *I am (or we are) because of others around me.*

Communal Bodies: Training Collective Attunement

This section refers to an exploration of practice named *'Cuerpo conjunto'* that I am currently undertaking as part of my postgraduate studies at London Contemporary Dance School. This creative practice, currently in development, has taken as a starting point a series of smaller practices that have been borrowed and adapted from creative practitioners I have encountered along the way, which have a focus on collective attunement and collectivity as a generative force.

To begin, I would like to refer to a practice that I experienced during my vocational training and that I embedded as part of my educational practice as a Lecturer in Dance within Higher Education and as a facilitator of movement and embodied practices in community youth settings. This practice is conversational and aims to collectively generate an imaginary that illustrates and acknowledges individual embodiments within a bigger group. I got to experience this practice recently, facilitated by Katye Coe, who offered us imaginary that referred to the weather. *'My weather today is…'* would be the beginning of each session with Katye, and we would take turns while sitting on a circle to contribute to the collective weather of the class.

A version of this practice has always felt generative and connecting to me, both as a student and educator experiencing it, as it allows us to accumulate over what other peers in class express. When teaching younger kids, I would use food imaginary and accompany it of motion or sound that related to each contribution. Saying *"I feel like spaghetti bolognese"* followed by a shake and accompanying sound would open the door for younger students to add onto each other's ideas: *"I feel like spaghetti carbonara"* and a new sound or *'I feel like lasagna'* and a new movement. This practice appears limitless to me, as imaginary can shift and adapt to different ages, abilities and contexts. In the R&D phase of my choreographic work *'Manifiesta'* (2023), this practice took place as sharing memes[xx] that felt relevant to the emotions we carried with us to the space, allowing each other to acknowledge the overall mood of each rehearsal and therefore remain conscious, comprehensive and compassionate of each other.

In my creative practice, implementing a dedicated space to acknowledge my own self-recognition and embodied emotions in the space as well as others has allowed for openness and a more genuine feeling of presence that integrates all the participants in the space. Of course, there as spaces that allow for this connectivity more than others and, in the same way, there are spaces that demand it more than others. In my experience, these practices of self and collective acknowledgement have had a bigger impact within creative contexts in spaces of Higher Education. As a student, having been introduced to these practices has allowed me to first articulate myself within my own independent practice (how do I feel? how do I recognise my emotions within my process? how much of myself I am willing to commit to my practice today?) to then be able to invite others to feed my creative practice. As I have been invited to the practices of my peers, I have learned about them and about myself in relation to their own articulations. Encountering educational institutions that offer a space for this exchange to occur has had a positive impact on my development as a learner, researcher and artist, further evidencing to me that this should be a key element within institutionalised creative education.

I would dare to say that this peer-to-peer recognition and articulations of one's own practice in regard to others has been the not only the most influential mode of

learning but also the deepest companionship I have ever experienced. As a very self-aware individual, I have previously struggled to recognise my individuality within collectives, specially within educational contexts. Much of my energy would often be dedicated to cope with the emotions this overwhelming self-awareness produced in me which made me, once again, result to symbembodiment. I had always struggled to embody collectivity until I encountered a series of practices that cultivated collective attunement from different perspectives, which I have now adapted to suit the interests and needs of my practice, forming a practice I now call *'Becomings of no-body'.*

My use of 'attunement' resembles Nara Figueiredo's understanding of it as a collective connection in which individuals of the collective identify a feeling of 'being together' and sharing a similar mind and/or physical state (Bachrach, 2024). When we are 'tuned', as explained by Figueiredo, we perceive, account for and embrace each other's perspectives through some form of mutual acknowledgement. *'Becomings of no-body'* gathers a series of practices that have allowed me to train the action of 'tuning', a process explained by dance-maker, improvisational performer, and collaborative artist Lisa Nelson as *'bringing two things into a sensible relationship to each other'* (Bachrach, 2024).

My introduction to tuning processes happened within a Higher Education postgraduate context, as I encountered Lisa Nelson's *Blind Unison Trio*, an improvisation practice in which, by observing oneself and others there is a generation of intersubjectivity that constructs the collective improvisation from multiple perspectives. Equally other tuning exercises have allowed me to experience self-recognition within collectivity, becoming both the observer and the observed. In these exercises, which I consider crucial to be further included in the Higher Education creative curriculum, I experienced how my presence in the exercise, the decisions I took or did not take and my embodied awareness of myself and others in the space the space, the exercise and the subjective experiences of those involved. Some examples of tuning exercises are:

1. Various participants in the space should sit and stand, alternating as preferred or as externally instructed, always committing to a previously agreed number of participants in each position.

2. Various participants in the space should navigate the space mindful of the distance or proximity to other participants, alternating these as externally instructed or as previously agreed.

Whereas these instructions may resemble more included improvisational somatic practices, the interest in their inclusion within the Higher Education creative classroom remains in their focus on intentionality, collectivity and communal awareness.

With these principles in mind, I carry out the *'Becomings of no-body'* practices as I intend to release myself from my own self-awareness, since it often conditions my embodiment and self-recognition ability. In order to achieve this, I resource to tuning practices that not only connect me with others in the space but also with the space itself. As expressed at the beginning of this research, I have a predisposition for kinaesthetic learning, meaning that for me, learning becomes more meaningful when my senses are active in the learning process. For me, this extends from fidgeting to the use of specific sounds that enhance my learning (such as brown noise). In these instances, this sensory stimulation allows me to block outside distractions and focus on one task or one experience, and it is often related to learning spaces in which my body remains somewhat passive (on a lecture or sitting at the desk writing this text right now).

Aware of this sensory preference, I began to question if I could only achieve meaningful learning experience through this induced isolation, through the active separation between me and my surroundings, by hyper focusing on one task and executing it individually. It was when I experienced a 'drift' for the first time that my preconceptions began to be challenged. A 'drift' is a Situationist practice that proposes unguided, embodied and tuned in walking around urban spaces suggesting that it generates *'alternative patterns of exploration and protest against the alienation of life under modern capitalism'* (Springgay, and Truman, 2017: 15). This experience of drifting opened the door for different walking practices in which I would aim to tune in to different aspects: patterns of spatial navigation, patterns of attention and engagement of my focus, visual stimuli, auditory stimuli, presence in relation to other objects or beings on the space I transitioned, different experiences of time in different spaces, etc.

Walking (in different spaces, with different focuses and intentions) has become a highly generative method of embodied research within my creative practice, inspired by Walter Benjamin's reference to the *flâneur* (Young, 2024). Allowing myself to become this figure who wanders aimlessly, with no specific goal other than to enjoy the pleasure of spontaneous encounters has resulted on a cultivation of attunement strategies that allow me to encounter these emerging chance moments that appear on creative process and on my daily life as subtle yet meaningful moments of inspiration, even if they never end up becoming a bigger revelation or landing anywhere within my creative output.

Tuning practices, to a certain scale, resemble meditative practices raising my interest on their connective potential. Buddhist Monk, writer and activist, Thich Nhat Hanh, advocated for meditative practice as a shared practice that connects people and supports society, emphasising its role in fostering collective wellbeing, connection and peace. His idea of 'meditation in action' as a socially interactive practice raises a clear connection for me with tuning practices as they enable deep connections with others and a practice of care (Figuereido, 2024). These practices serve me as a means to ground my practice and to contextualise it within my life as a whole, however they did not achieve the goal of separating myself from my surroundings, inducing isolation. If anything, they connected me even deeper to my physicality, presence, embodiment and intention, further enhancing my sense of collectivity (with other people, mediums, objects, materials, spaces).

The *'Becomings of no-body'* practice, despite of being a practice that trains embodiment, has not arrived to the studio per se in my creative practice, instead it serves as a connective network between the many experiences that conform my being, centring self-recognition though embodiment and collective attunement, which undoubtably has had an influence when I then get to the studio. As an educator however, I have employed many of these exercises or practices that form the '*Becomings of no-body'* practice, as they allow me to facilitate spaces of empathy and compassion in the educational contexts I encounter.

The reasoning behind my employment of these practices borrowed ideas from Foster (2020: 174) in regards of empathy, kinaesthesia and choreography, as they

state: *‘Choreography and empathy are very present in discourses constituting the body politic. As the earth’s crisis deepens, the motionality of people and events seems ever more apparent, and choreography has been tapped as a way to identify and analyze the patterns in these motions. As the degree of suffering among the world’s impoverished peoples escalates along with the violence wrought by humans upon one another, the capacity for empathy is being debated and reexamined.’*

In my experience, teaching and learning collective attunement has contributed to understanding the self as something more than the individual, inhabiting the world aware of our inherent connectivity with others and of how this connectivity co-determines who we are in regards to others and vice versa (Figueiredo, 2024). This tension, previously presented as the statement *‘If I am us, who is me?’*, requires of a constant renegotiation of our identities and relationships to others (other spaces, other people, other contexts…), learning to simply be (Figueiredo, 2024). Theories of change such as emergent strategies (brown, 2017) and radical imagination (Haiven, and Khasnabish, 2014), situate embodiment in the centre of this learning, recognising or imagining our presence in a bigger context of change requires us to, first, be at peace with our own personal change, our becomings.

Through my experiences of embodiment and collectivity, I have come to the believe that fostering collective attunement can support radical and critical thinking. This kind of thinking pushes back against isolating structures that condition us to think we are incapable of true embodiment, by distracting us to focus "elsewhere," especially into the digital world (Studd & Cox, 2019; Conley, 2009). Considering that our online personas seem to have arrived to our realities to stay, I believe that it is now more important than ever, as stressed by Foster (2020), that we train collectivity and empathetically through practices of embodiment and attunement.

Conclusion

This research has provided an autoethnographic exploration of dance education and creative somatic practices through the lens of my experiences as a recent graduate and current educator. It focused on the concept of symbembodiment, as introduced by Veerapen (2011), to find that Gen Z, the generation I identify with, navigate life in unprecedented ways, influenced by online existence and consumerism resulting in what Bauman presented as 'liquid modernity' (2011). This liquid, fluid condition is compounded by precarity and violence, hindering our ability to achieve traditional life milestones and dream of better futures. There is much more work to be done in this area, and since this is a topic that is alive, many more gaps will continue to emerge that will require of our experiences and creativity as educators to be able to build new bridges that bring us closer to the experiences of our student body.

Drawing on my personal experiences, the research has articulated strategies within the realms of embodiment to help navigate these instances of symbembodiment and imposed fluidity presented by situations violence and precarity. To illustrate the proposed strategies, this research has included practical examples from my teaching and creative practice, emphasising movement and embodiment as essential tools in times of crisis. Additionally, this research is evidenced by the testimonies of participants of the study, who took part in focus groups and interviews, as well as examples from digital platforms, most specifically TikTok, that have served as illustrative examples of the content discussed in this text. This research underscores the importance of movement and embodied practices, especially considering how younger generations face the isolating and symbembodied effects of *liquid modernity* (Bauman, 2013), which Conley (2009) describes as creating 'intraviduals'.

In order to conclude this study, I would like to acknowledge that my experiences, reflections, strategies and examples of practice have been made possible thanks to spaces of institutionalised tertiary learning environments in the realms of dance and it is because of these past experiences and due to the experience of the postgraduate programme of study in which this text has been developed, that I arrive at some final learnings. For context, I have undertaken this course of study at the same time as I have studied a different postgraduate course (MA Expanded Dance

Practice) at London School of Contemporary Dance. This initial decision of pursuing two postgraduate programmes emerged from a longing to take part on a discussion that was very much evolving and developing as my practice as research journey did, so it would allow me to be both the researcher and the subject of the project. This choice has not only allowed me to challenge the existing paradigms in creative research as a student but also as an academic contributing to build a more accurate and current discourse around education and academia in the arts and, most specifically, in dance.

This busy academic journey has provided me with the ability to bridge theoretical enquiry and embodied practice across two different institutions within Higher Education. This dual experience has allowed me to expand my experience as both an educator and a student and propose new approaches that contribute meaningfully to dance and academia. Through this journey, I have strived to develop innovative strategies that foster spaces for creative practice to inform research and vice versa allowing a dynamic exchange of embodied and theoretical knowledge. My aim has been to cultivate a creative-research practice where neither of these strands dominate or assimilate each other, but rather co-exist in a reciprocal relationship, infusing, supporting and holding each other, evolving through their interplay and interdependence. However, in this journey, I have often found my approach to practice-as-research limited by the clashing egos of academics who refused to actively allow space for my development through my own means (as an artist who happens to be an academic and not exclusively an academic), failing to understand the real purpose of my work and therefore re-direct my research into their own academic interests.

In the past year, I have been pressured to label, choose and categorise what exists in the in-betweenness: my practice, my experiences, my emotions, my knowledge… Therefore, the text you have just read is the result from a failed attempt to do all these things, pressured into thinking that I can only be one thing or write one way for it to be acceptable for academia. I have come to the realisation that maybe I do not need to feel accepted by the academic world to feel that I am of value, that my words are worth listening to. I have decided to write as I would on this final section, in a writing style that I have been discouraged from using in the past, as it has been accused to be ‘too poetic’, which apparently means ‘less academic’. In my

experience, not allowing voices often othered in academia to define their findings, practices and contexts in their own terms, languages and writing styles harms the actual generation of new and relevant knowledge, specially within the realms of practice-led research.

In this journey, I have encountered an academia promotes many campaigns, social media posts and posters that assure modern academia to be revolutionary and radical but that hides an academia that does not act consequently; an academia that prioritises merits, titles and contacts, perpetuating outdated visions of the purpose of academia and promoting an intellectualisation that is de-attached from the duty of service that academia has over our societies.

My hopes at the beginning of this process were to find bridges that would connect our current student body and academics teaching in creative education in a nurturing, honest and sustainable manner. Therefore, the starting point of this research was understanding, seeking to articulate the needs and wants of a group currently underrepresented as academics but highly present as students in academic circles (young people and most specifically my generation, Gen Z). This approach is influenced by the idea that the design of educational curricula needs to be informed by a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of the groups who will consume its content, in order to tailor it as well as the educational practices involved in its delivery (Pueschel et al., 2020), However, what I have come to understand in the evolution of this project has been that, despite my efforts to achieve clarity and articulation, it is hard to arrive at genuine understanding when there is a lack of empathy on the receiving end.

In my search for bridges, I have mainly encountered deeper, and deeper gaps instilled by those who are recognised as academics and who continue to distance themselves from the actual experiences of their students. In my search for bridges, I have found many creative peers feeling a desperate sense of frustration when encountering academic spaces that rejected the bridges they were trying to build. I have found a longing to be a part of actual change and a disinterest to contribute to commercial publicity stunts from institutions that ensure that change has already happened and that, in fact, it can only happen in a certain way.

By delineating and articulating elements such as precarity, symbembodiment, fluidity and identity through the lens of my experience, I hope to have informed my peers and to have opened a door for this conversation to flourish. I have now, for the first time since I embarked myself into tertiary education seven years ago, lost all hope in building bridges, as I have lost all hope in the current academic system. I believe it to be deeply flawed and wrongly institutionalised, which would not necessarily be negative traits if there was a real and honest intention to listen, learn and change.

Educator and curator Clare Butcher writes the following questions: *'How can we take time to listen deeply and not understand? What surprising things happen when we open our ears to the wisdom of the dinner table, the print studio, the body? In which ways might we, as students, educators, artists, and importantly in this context, readers, become active participants in our own learning and unlearning process?'* (Butcher, 2023: 7). In this process, I have encountered academics unwilling to unlearn their preconceptions about what academia should be, who it should serve and how it should exist. I have also found early-career researchers and educators practicing outside of Higher Education institutions who asked similar questions to Butcher, re-thinking mentorship, spaces for learning and questioning traditional models of what counts as the generation of knowledge.

I have learned by the experience of undertaking these two postgraduate programmes that practice as research has the radical potential to instil positive and meaningful change, when developed on a space free of institutionalised hierarchies and marking and assessment criteria, and when accompanied by mentors who are not only understanding but also empathetic and appreciative. It is because I have experienced it that I believe in the potential of the scholarship generated in creative communities of practices, where diverse individuals share practice and learn together with no structural, meritocratic or intellectual hierarchy, which is why, despite losing hope in the current state of academia, I have not lost hope in my peers.

I hope that my continued efforts and pushes to write non-hierarchical narratives based on the effects of being a creative student in the current educational landscape open a door for others to begin to build, collectively, a new system, and that my

current feeling of exhaustion and doom fades away when those who are better equipped to run the race from here, grab the baton. I do not hold, or intend to hold, all the answers and I do not believe anyone does. I do believe, however, that we all do hold some answers and that we (educators, students, researchers, artists) owe it to each other to continue these conversations, so those who tend to dig deeper between and among us eventually have no choice but to come out of the gaps they have built, listen and begin to learn from the warmth of new suns.

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Endnotes

[i] Generally recognised as originated by former CEO of the online fashion brand 'Nasty Gal', Sophia Amoruso, the term 'girlboss' appears in the title of her 2014 memoir and has eventually become a cultural symbol. Often associated with liberal, cisgender, white feminism and millennial culture, 'girlboss' refers to an ideology that *'glorifies individual professional success'* in women and that promotes that, through embodying *'traditionally masculine ideals and characteristics'* in the workplace, women can conquer gender-based barriers and inequalities (Cavallo and Collins, 2023)

[ii] Due to intragenerational differences on experience, subdivisions of Gen Z have started to emerge. I belong to the first self-proclaimed subdivision, Zillennials, the oldest Gen Z cluster who acknowledges a distance between our experiences and those of the Gen Z a couple years younger than us, hence the rift. An example of this is that, for the majority of Zillennials, technology played a secondary role in our upbringing, as elements like smartphones started to get commercialised to the public during our childhoods.

[iii] The 'Ok, Boomer' phrase, turned into the internet meme #OkBoomer, emerged among young adults who as a response to older adults' behaviours perceived as condescending attitudes of disapproval, disengagement and carelessness towards young generations. Colloquially, 'Ok, Boomer' is used to dismiss statements that are perceived as out-of-touch and offensive (Frey and Bisconti, 2023).

[iv] Philosopher Nick Bostrom defines 'transhumanism' as a philosophical paradigm that rejects the often-implicit assumption of the 'human condition' as a constant, central element of thought, knowledge and development. For Bostrom, transhumanist thought represent 'a new way of thinking that challenges the premise that the human condition is and will remain essentially unalterable', allowing for new futures to emerge (Bostrom, 2011).

[v] Having gained recent popularity within internet meme culture among Gen Alpha, the term 'brainrot' refers to a mental state of overload, saturation and obsession towards a particular subject. In this context, 'brainrot' refers to a mental 'rotted' state in relation to digital engagement and the consumption of viral media which can result in the omnipresence and constant repetition of certain memes (Thinkhouse, no date).

[vi] 'Underconsumption Core' refers to a new trend gaining notoriety and traction on TikTok which promotes minimalism and moderation in consumption, often opting for the thrifting and repurposing of goods as well as the maximalisation of their use and utility. This trend seeks to challenge the culture of consumerism, linked to many of the challenges younger generations face (economic precariousness, environmental and climate crises and social pressures) (Fares and Lee, 2024).

[vii] TikTok defines 'TikTok creator' as 'an individual who produces and shares content on TikTok'.

[viii] As defined by the author Shoshana Zuboff, 'surveillance capitalism' refers to a 'new economic order' that violates human autonomy and freedom by 'unilaterally claiming private human experiences as free raw material for translation into behavioural data' which is then sold as prediction indicators into behavioural future markets and businesses (Zuboff in Kavenna and Parsons, 2019)

[ix] Tweet by @p8stie on X.com reads: 'On the train in Tokyo… You just know they're going to go home and watch the Big Bang theory together'

[x] Many feel that the 'that girl' trend encourages "toxic productivity," pushing individuals to constantly strive for self-improvement to the point of burnout. It has also been linked to disordered eating and perfectionism, as some people feel compelled to replicate the image of the "perfect" lifestyle despite

the mental toll it may take. Some influencers have spoken out about the potential harm of these ideals, suggesting that the focus should be on genuine well-being rather than performative acts (Hutto and Mandelbaum, 2021)

[xi] The term ‘postcolonialism’ emerged from literary and cultural studies as a challenge to Eurocentric views that highlighted the richness of non-European cultures that colonialism had historically suppressed or appropriated. This movement gained momentum alongside postmodernist and post-structuralist theories, which further questioned traditional narratives about colonialism's legacy (Keaney, 2024).

[xii] Post-structuralism expands on structuralism by questioning its emphasis on fixed centres and binary oppositions, instead promoting a view of difference and identity that is fluid and anti-essentialist, not predefined or absolute (Woodward et al., 2009).

[xiii] Personhood, understood as human personhood, refers to a human understanding of the human condition and the specific nuances and uniqueness of humanity, such as intellectual, spiritual, social and affective human capacities (Goroncy, 2022).

[xiv] The Merriam-Webser Dictionary defines a ‘fish flop’ as ‘a semi aerial tumbling stunt consisting of a backward roll into a headstand followed immediately by the easing of the body down onto the chest, belly, and thighs and finishing in a stand’.

[xv] Author Jill G. Hall, describes the practice of intuitive writing as *“letting go of outlines, plans, and expectations and allowing the power of your intuition to guide you through the writing process. Intuitive writing is creating with your heart first, and not your mind.”* (2020)

[xvi] ‘Radical Imagination’ is a term introduced by Haiven and Khasnabish in social change studies, aiming to foster collective awareness of the flaws in dominant systems. Through the use of radical imagination, individuals the social justice movements they contribute to can gather the courage, intelligence and understanding necessary to uncover the marginalized stories often overshadowed by universal historical narratives. This imaginative process is intended to inspire action, cultivate new forms of solidarity, and drive meaningful change (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2014).

[xvii] ‘Time blindness’ refers to a difficulty to perceive time and it is often linked to symptoms of anxiety, depression and neurodivergences like ADD and ADHD (Lallanilla, 2023; Sarkis, 2023).

[xviii] From a female-centred feminist perspective, "imposter syndrome" refers to internal psychological barriers that can foster a “fear of success” in certain environments. This syndrome often leads to feelings of alienation and self-monitoring behaviours, placing the burden of self-improvement solely on women to prevent failure (Rickett and Thompson, 2024).

[xix] My use of social capital refers to its understanding of it in terms of community making, inspired by the social scientists, James Coleman, who describes it as community ties, and by Robert Putman, who expands the conceptualisation of the term by shedding light into aspects such as respect, trust and connectivity among those engaged in/generating the social capital (Horntvedt, 2012)

[xx] The concept of ‘meme’, within the realms of Internet, refers to creative and repurposed media (often combinations of images, text, sound and moving images) that is widely spread and shared online and that is used to contextualised specific existing or familiar situations with a certain level of humour (Tommasini et al., 2023).