



## Choreographer/researcher/teacher

### Developing a/r/tography as an approach to dance pedagogy at Stockholm University of the Arts in a professional learning community of teachers

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#### Abstract

This article follows the becoming a/r/tographic of four colleagues working within the field of dance pedagogy at Stockholm University of the Arts. The four colleagues – Tone, Camilla, Stina, Madelaine - are part of a larger professional learning community of staff that together have carried out a 3-year long change project restructuring the BA program in dance pedagogy. As a result, the BA has been given an a/r/tographic approach, emphasizing the entangled positions of the artist, researcher, and teacher in dance pedagogy. Another result is the open course A/r/tography in theory and practice in higher education (7.5 ects), which was developed to qualify staff to work through a/r/tography. The four authors of this article

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were all involved in the first round of the open course, Tone as course teacher, and Camilla, Stina, and Madelaine as staff-students. The course is the entanglement from which they have explored the question that guides this article: How is a/r/tography being developed for the field of dance pedagogy in the context of Stockholm University of the Arts in an ongoing collaborative learning community of teachers? Their exploration is based in a diffractive methodology, thinks-with theory from a/r/tography and expanded choreography, and has resulted in three a/r/tographic expositions on Research Catalogue. The insights arrived at are discussed as: *values; performative pedagogy; expanded choreography; a researching approach as choreographers/researchers/teachers; and professional development of staff in higher dance education.*

**Keywords:** A/r/tography, higher dance education, professional learning community, expanded choreography, diffractive methodology

A/r/tography is a hybrid research methodology and performative pedagogy that emphasizes the three positions of artist (a), researcher (r) and teacher (t), and how they are entangled and have agency on one another. The question we are curious to explore with this article is: How is a/r/tography being developed for the field of dance pedagogy in the context of Stockholm University of the Arts in an ongoing collaborative learning community of teachers? We, the four co-authors, are all part of a staff of in total around 25 teachers. During 2020-23 the staff worked with a major change project, restructuring the Bachelor's Program in dance pedagogy. One result was to design the BA as an a/r/tographic Bachelor's. Another result was the open course A/r/tography in theory and practice in higher education (7.5 ects), designed to qualify staff to teach on an a/r/tographic BA program. Tone, co-author of this article, was given the task of designing and teaching the course by the Dean. The co-authors of this article, Camilla, Stina, and Madelaine, were staff-students on the course when it was run for the first time in 2022-23. This article is based on our dialogue becoming a/r/tographic during the course, and on the roles of course coordinator and staff-students participating in the course. The article is practice-led:

we have explored a/r/tography as we have simultaneously tried to *do* a/r/tography in dance pedagogy in higher education.

In the following, we present theoretical perspectives on diffraction, a/r/tography and choreography. After that we present a) the change project, and b) the open course in a/r/tography which was developed as a result of the change process. Our individual, yet deeply entangled (Barad, 2007) becoming a/r/tographic processes, then follow. These processes constitute the main research material, and we explore what a/r/tography might mean in dance pedagogy through an analysis of them. To do so, we have worked with artful, a/r/tographic expositions on the digital platform Research Catalogue. The links to our three a/r/tographic expositions are found in Figure 1. They were made by Camilla, Tone, and Stina. Madelaine has not made an exposition, but worked through reflective writing. The Research Catalogue (RC) is a non-commercial collaboration and publishing platform for artistic research provided by the Society for Artistic Research, which strives to be an open space for experimentation and exchange ([researchcatalogue.net](http://researchcatalogue.net)). Our expositions are an important part of this article, allowing us to perform and develop an a/r/tographic methodology while being in the process. We encourage the reader to engage with them as part of the reading.

Camilla's explorative process of becoming-artographic as leader of the change project revising the BA in dance pedagogy

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/989428/989429>

Tone's explorative process of becoming-artographic as designer and course coordinator of the open course A/r/tography in theory and practice in higher education (7.5 ECT) <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2088698/2088699>

Stina's explorative process of becoming-artographic as staff-student on the open course A/r/tography in theory and practice in higher education

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2731837/2731838>

*Figure 1.* The three a/r/tographic expositions that this article delves into.

Finally, we arrive at insights about how a/r/tography, for the field of dance pedagogy, is being developed at Stockholm University of the Arts, and discuss these insights as criticality in changing higher dance education in a changing world.

## **Diffraction, a/r/tography and expanded choreography**

In terms of theoretical perspectives, we find ourselves entangled with a knowledge and research logic based in diffraction, continued in our exploration of a/r/tography as a productive entanglement of the artist, researcher, and teacher. This again opens up for exploration of choreography as an expanded notion, and choreography as a way of becoming a/r/tographic. In the following we diffract with theory about these three concepts.

### ***Diffraction***

Diffraction is a concept that has been transferred from physics to philosophy, and further to the field of education. Very shortly, as a physical phenomenon, diffraction means that as waves meet an obstacle, new waves will be created through an interference pattern (Barad, 2007). However, the new patterns created (as, for example, when water meets a narrow opening in a wall), are not created out of nowhere, but contain traces of the old waves. Transferred to a philosophical concept, and further to education, this means that diffraction is affirmative of difference (Ceder, 2015). Through a diffractive methodology, curiosity about difference and a willingness to be changed in the diffraction is signalled (Haraway, 1992). Diffraction has developed as methodology, ontology, and a research logic through what Østern et al. (2021, p. 8) recognize as “a line of post approaches like Deleuze (1993), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Derrida (1976), Foucault (1970), Haraway (1988, 1992), Braidotti (2006, 2013) and Barad (2003, 2007, 2014), who have been central for post-qualitative inquiry as well as the breakthrough of what we sense and see as a performative research paradigm”. The concept of post-qualitative inquiry was invented by Elizabeth St. Pierre in 2010 (St. Pierre, 2011), because of her ongoing frictions with what she calls the ‘conventional humanist qualitative methodology’ (Østern et al., 2021, p. 7). Through a diffractive methodology, which is central in post-qualitative inquiry, research material and results are understood as emerging and performative in entanglements that exceed binaries like theory/practice or

cognition/affect. Instead, research materials, analysis, and results create movement in the ongoing phenomena being researched (in our case, a/r/tography as a way of approaching dance pedagogy in higher education). Results are also performative: they create something new (Østern et al., 2021, p. 7) (in our case, an a/r/tographic BA program in dance pedagogy and an open course in a/r/tography in higher education).

A scholar who has actively taken part in exploring what a diffractive methodology might mean in the field of education is Carol A. Taylor. In 2021 she contributed five suggestions for a reconceptualization of post-qualitative inquiry based on diffraction, and what is at stake «in the mattering of knowledge» (Taylor, 2021, p. 23). Her suggestions are based in a decentering of the specific western understanding of the critical, distanced, and hierarchically reflecting human being. Instead, she understands the human as a material and affective body who always takes part in creative (or destructive) relations with others (human and other-than-human beings). Her five suggestions for a reconceptualization of knowledge, based in diffraction are:

1. Knowledge shifts from talk and text to matter, materiality and mattering.
2. Knowledge is a matter of knowledge-ing.
3. Knowledge emerges: creating conditions for curiosity to flourish.
4. Knowledge is an ethico-onto-epistemological enactment of values and reponse-ability.
5. Knowledge dissemination and communication is a performative practice-ing.

(Taylor, 2021, pp. 27-39)

These suggestions align well with our a/r/tographic exploration. A/r/tography is not originally based in a diffractive methodology; however, it has shifted more in that direction the last years (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019). In the way we explore and perform a/r/tography we see that there is a diffractive logic in operation: our exploration is affirmative of difference, like the differences between the artist, researcher and

teacher in dance pedagogy. These become entangled and start performing one another.

### ***A/r/tography***

An important part of our exploration of a/r/tography has been to read scholarly literature about a/r/tography. We have discovered that a lot – but indeed not all - of the existing a/r/tographic literature originates from the field of visual arts (e.g. Günes et al., 2020; Irwin, 2013; Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019). We have however, also found a/r/tographic research practices and literature originating in other arts fields such as dance (Flønes 2023a, b; Pape-Pedersen, 2022; Reppen et al., 2023) and drama and theater (Beare, 2009; Kristoffersen et al., 2022). Our own exploration of a/r/tography has also continuously resulted in research publications, adding to scholarly literature about a/r/tography from the field of dance pedagogy and choreography, while the writing has served as a possibility to theorize and articulate insights based on our explorative practice (Reppen et al., 2023; Østern, Reppen et al., 2021). In this, we also practice a/r/tography as writing *practice*.

We have worked with a/r/tography as a hybrid research methodology: as a self-study research of our own teaching processes, and at the same time as performative pedagogy. With performative pedagogy, we mean that a/r/tography is a constantly *becoming* pedagogical practice, created through the explorative, researching approach to our own arts-teaching. Doing a/r/tography is about *doing* pedagogy, about becoming pedagogical, over and over again. The pedagogy is never fixed, settled, static, or finished, and the pedagogical practice is understood as an artistic space. As we have explored doing research through a/r/tography, we have emphasized creation and living inquiry, rather than explaining and interpreting (Günes et al., 2020; Irwin & Springgay, 2008). We have explored how theory in a/r/tography is understood as practice: the focus is to theorize through the research process, rather than using theory in a deductive way. We have lived the a/r/tographic processes as always being in movement, investigating processes of becoming, practicing, and theorizing. Rather than clear answers, questions in the a/r/tographic processes often lead to more questions, and in this way the research contributes to more complexity and nuance. We agree that a/r/tography connects to engagement in

the world and opens up to conversations rather than informing (Irwin and Springgay, 2008). A/r/tography is a living practice, involving life: the personal, political, and professional (Güneş et al, 2020).

### ***Expanded choreography***

In the way we develop a/r/tography, we replace the word “artist” with “choreographer”, thus changing artist/researcher/teacher to *choreographer/researcher/teacher*. We do so to emphasize the art of creating and structuring sensemaking in our specific context, i.e. the field of dance.

But to define choreography is an ongoing, diffractive task: there is no single definition of choreography. Dance historian and theorist Anna Leon describes how when the concept first turned up in 1700, “choreography literally signified the writing of dance, i.e. dance notation” (Leon, 2020, p. 69) and how “from the 19th and towards the 20th century ... the main meaning of choreography came to be dance-making” (Leon, 2020, p. 68). This is a practice of choreography that is still in use. However, she reminds us that the history of choreography is multiple, and history can dialogue with contemporary expanded notions of choreography. Leon states that “contemporary expanded choreographic practice, theory, and discourse have developed a crucial body of ideas that multiply choreography beyond a physicalised and kinetic dance-making” (Leon, 2022, p. 40) and that this “widens what choreography may be, and what ‘counts’ as choreography” (2022, p. 124). Through an expanded notion of the word, choreography has, for example, been understood to entail the organization of body movement through time and space (p. 124), but the understanding of choreography is multifaceted and has also moved beyond even this. The way Stockholm University of the Arts defines choreography as this article is written, starts like this, translated by us from Swedish to English:

Choreography as concept and field has, during the last decades, gone through a massive change. Previously, the concept indicated the creation of movement-in-time-and-space. However, it has expanded into including movement in a much wider way. Often, choreography pivots off from bodily practices and embodied knowledge. However, it is also possible to start from other-than-human bodies, such as digital bodies. In its expanded notion, choreography includes different structures that are put

in motion, or an organization of movement in virtual as well as physical spaces and places. Through a variety of different perspectives on actions and the contexts for these actions, communication emerges. (Gies et al., 2015, unpaginated, unpublished policy paper at Stockholm University of the Arts)

Other choreographer-researchers who have been important for the development of an expanded notion of choreography are, for example Michael Klien (2008) and Rasmus Ölme (2017). Our colleague at our department, Andreas Berchtold, builds on the latter scholar in his master thesis with a description of how the last decades have brought about an expanded notion of choreography. He writes (our translation from Swedish to English) that:

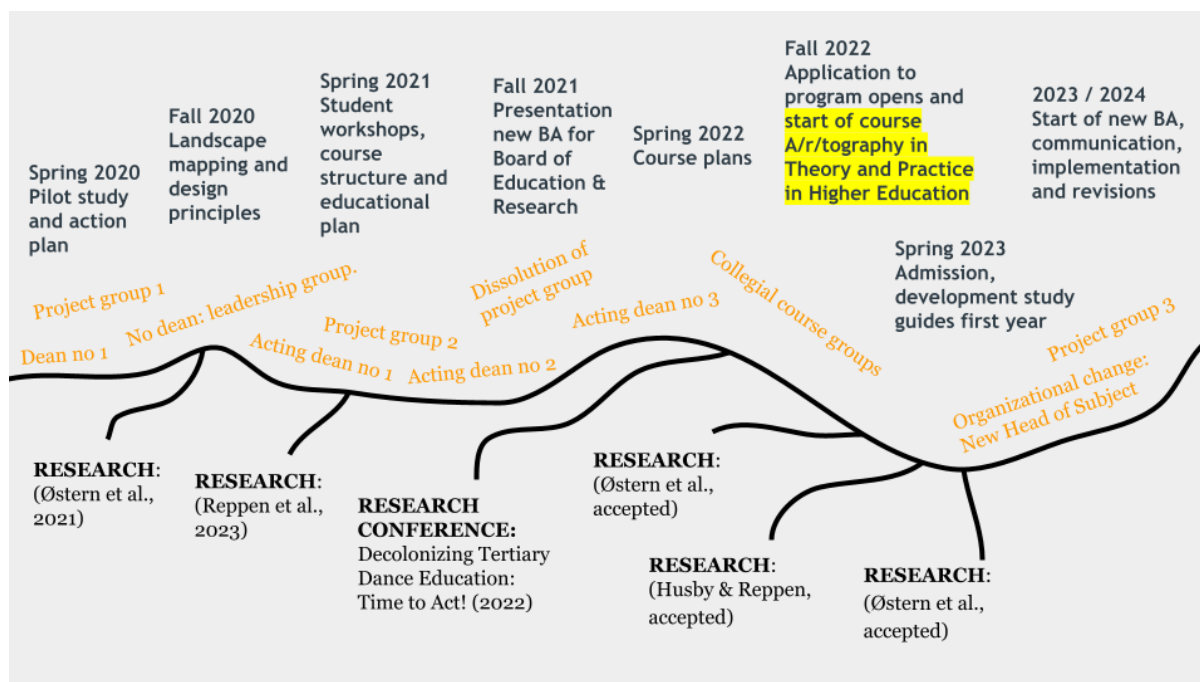
Choreography is used in ever more expanded meanings, which have become synonymous with specific structures and strategies different from a subjective bodily expression, style, or representations. The understanding of choreography has been changed from referring to a system, rules, or tools to produce something predefined, that is dance, to an open cluster of tools that can be used as a general resource for analysis as well as production. (Berchtold, 2020, p. 15)

When a/r/tography is developed for dance pedagogy at Stockholm University of the Arts, the *art* is thus understood as *choreography*, and to work with an a/r/tographic approach means to take part in choreographic explorations, where the many meanings of choreography diffract with the equally many meanings of teaching and researching.

With diffraction, a/r/tography, and the notion of expanded choreography as our theoretical framing for this research, we now move on to a presentation of the change project, and the open course in a/r/tography as an outcome of that.



## A change project leading to an a/r/tographic BA program in dance pedagogy



*Figure 2.* An overview of the 3-year long change project of the BA program in dance pedagogy, highlighting (marked yellow) when the open course in a/r/tography emerged as a result of the project. (Design by Camilla Reppen)

Several challenges with the curriculum of the BA in Dance Pedagogy at Stockholm University of the Arts had been identified before a major change project was initiated in 2020 by the Dean at the time:<sup>5</sup> a rigid structure, an overwhelming amount of teacher-led classes, a schedule divided between theory and practice that isolated theory courses from practice courses and student critique about structural racism imbued in the curriculum. A change project group was initiated by the Dean, with the task of creating a contemporary and flexible curriculum, where theory and practice were intertwined, and where norm critical and intersectional perspective would permeate all courses. Leadership was given to Camilla, co-author of this article. The change project started with a collaborative landscape mapping of dance pedagogical practices in contemporary times, to get an idea of what signals of change we could

<sup>5</sup> The Dean who initiated the change project was Beata Alving.

identify in the field that could guide us to new renderings of the program (Østern, Reppen et al., 2021). From the mapping we could articulate a number of insights and create several possible scenarios for a future BA in Dance Pedagogy. A/r/tography as a possible structure and basis for the new curriculum was one such insight and possible scenario. A/r/tography was collaboratively, in the larger staff group, identified as interesting because of the way theory and practice are intertwined and explored in a flexible and creative tandem, and also because it kept an artistic approach to practice alive within a dance educational landscape. It became possible to think about dance education through a choreographic approach to teaching and learning dance.

As a result of the 3-year long change process, a/r/tography was thus decided on by staff and students as the methodological foundation of the new BA in Dance Pedagogy. After this article was written, the a/r/tographic BA program in Dance Pedagogy has been developed, promoted, and started<sup>6</sup>. The first cohort of students started the new BA program in August 2023, after this article was written, and student responses to the program are not included as material in this research. However, authors Camilla, Stina, and Madelaine were staff-students participating in the second result of the change project, the open course in a/r/tography, and their experiences and responses to the course constitute the main research material of this article.

### **A second result of the change project: an open course in a/r/tography aimed at staff in higher education**

To qualify staff for teaching on the new a/r/tographic BA, the open course A/r/tography in theory and practice in higher education (7.5 ects) was developed and promoted. The target group for the course was staff teaching arts in higher education. The course, designed, coordinated, and taught by co-author of this article, Tone on the request of the Dean, was offered as an open course which could be enrolled on by anybody fulfilling the criteria. It was taught fully online, and thus participation could take place from anywhere. The teaching language was English. Seven students enrolled the course during this first year. Of them, three were staff from the

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.uniarts.se/english/courses/bachelor-programmes/bachelor-s-programme-in-dance-pedagogy/>

department: Camilla, Stina, and Madelaine, co-authors of this article. They are all experienced staff in dance pedagogy. We thus call them “staff-students” here. The reason they enrolled to the course is that they had taken part in the change project and wanted to be better prepared to teach on the a/r/tographic BA in Dance Pedagogy that was being developed at the same time. To take the course was fully voluntary, and not formally needed to be allowed to teach on the new BA. As this article is written, the open course is now fully established as a yearly offer at Stockholm University of the Arts, and is about to run for the third time. After two rounds, the course was redesigned and the level changed from introductory to advanced level from 2025. This is how the course (right now) is promoted on the university’s webpage:

A/r/tography is a hybrid research methodology and performative pedagogy that emphasizes the three positions of artist (a), researcher (r) and teacher (t), and how they are entangled and have agency on one another. The concepts hybrid methodology and performative pedagogy mean that a/r/tography is both a way of doing research through/with one's own arts teaching practice, and a way of teaching through an artistic, explorative and research-informed approach. A/r/tography is also a writerly practice – an ongoing, performative, and theorizing writing practice.<sup>7</sup>

### **Our a/r/tographic diffractions with the course in a/r/tography for staff**

In the following, we, staff-coordinator (Tone) and staff-students (Camilla, Stina and Madelaine), share and analyze our processes during the course - how we *became a/r/tography* (Irwin, 2013). We encourage the readers to visit the a/r/tographic expositions on Research Catalogue that accompany the written text, as the expositions were an important part of allowing us to become a/r/tography.

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<sup>7</sup> The open course promoted at Stockholm University of the Arts  
<https://www.uniarts.se/english/courses/courses/artography-in-theory-and-practice-in-higher-education/>

***Leading the change process of the BA and participating in the course in a/r/tography for staff – Camilla's process***

In this sub-section Camilla is the I-voice. While reading, please visit Camilla's explorative process of becoming a/r/tography as leader of the change project revising the BA in Dance Pedagogy through her exposition, where she explores a/r/tography as a writerly practice: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/989428/989429>

As staff-student in the course A/r/tography in Theory and Practice in Higher Education (7,5 ects), I have realized that much of my leadership practice throughout the restructuring of the BA in Dance Pedagogy has been imbued with the in-betweenness of the positions as artist/choreographer, researcher, and teacher. I have considered myself a teacher-as-facilitator throughout the change project. As project leader I related to the change project as an expanded choreographic practice, involving my colleagues in exploring the aspects we needed to consider through a "cluster of tools that can be used as a general resource for analysis as well as production" (Berchtold, 2020, p. 15). This was done in a collaborative process, where a certain creative logic unfolded that guided our work towards articulating a new educational plan and curriculum (Taylor, 2021). A position as artist/choreographer was thus becoming entangled in my role as project leader. The artist/choreographer position was becoming particularly prominent as challenges with making ends meet, concerning all sorts of resource shortages, emerged. I was juggling and navigating the spaces of action that these challenges presented as provocations through a choreographic process (e.g. Klien, 2008).

I documented our work continuously in an exposition (see link above or in Figure 1) as a way of making the process transparent, and inviting peers (staff, students, and other stakeholders outside of Uniarts) to collaborate with us. During the working process, and as we learned more about a/r/tography during the course taught by Tone, I came to realize that our work with the change project itself was permeated with a/r/tographic methodology. I see that the exposition is part of my *becoming a/r/tography* (Irwin et al., 2013). As project leader I approached the change project as an exploration of the in-between of leadership, learning, and choreography (see also Flønes, 2023a,b). This could be considered a diffraction of the concept *in-between* activated by the a/r/tography methodology (Irwin, 2013). As in a/r/tography, we put

practices from both teaching, choreography, and research into action (Flønes, 2023a,b; Irwin & Springgay, 2008) during the change project. One might say that there was even a certain aesthetic to the working process, comparable to the characteristics of a/r/tography, where a “cluster of tools” (Berchtold, 2020, p. 15) was used to combine the different parts of the working process into an emerging whole, i.e., the new curriculum.

### ***Preparing for the design of the course in A/R/Tography in higher education – Tone's process***

In this sub-section Tone is the I-voice. While reading, please visit Tone's explorative process of becoming a/r/tography as designer and course coordinator of the open course A/r/tography in theory and practice in higher education (7.5 ECT) through her exposition, where she explores a/r/tography as a writerly practice:

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2088698/2088699>

I was appointed Visiting Professor at Stockholm University of the Arts in 2020 to take part in the change project in dance pedagogy led by Camilla. To be able to put the a/r/tographic change that the whole staff had decided upon into practice and prepare staff to teach through a/r/tography, the open course A/r/tography in theory and practice in higher education (7.5 ects) was decided on to qualify staff for a/r/tography. I was given the task of developing the course by the Dean at that time at the department<sup>8</sup> (see the link to my exposition above or in Figure 1). The course was approved by the educational board at the university and run for the first time in 2022-23. As this article is finalized, the course has run for the third time, now on an advanced level (study year 2024-25).

The change project group had an online zoom meeting with Professor in Arts Education Rita Irwin at British Colombia University in Canada early in 2022. Irwin is a key person for the development of a/r/tography (Irwin, 2013; Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019). The zoom meeting with Irwin made me realize a couple of things that I brought with me into the design of the open course. First, that a/r/tography at British Colombia University was developed within *general teacher education*, where the R (the research) and the T (the teaching pedagogies)

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<sup>8</sup> The dean at that time was Ylva Hofvander Trulsson.

were strong and had strong traditions. A/r/tography was developed to strengthen the A – art - to have real agency on, and challenge those strong traditions. At Stockholm University of the Arts, the starting point was different: embedded in an artistic environment, the A was already strong. T was also rather strong within the field of dance pedagogy, but the R was rather weak. My insights then were that the main impulse to develop a/r/tography as an overarching approach in the BA program in Dance Pedagogy was to change and challenge the understanding of the R and the T so they would be strengthened and feel relevant in an artistic context. Also, secondly, I understood that there are *very few a/r/tographic study programs* around the world where the full design of the program is a/r/tographic – this is also not the case at British Columbia University. That meant that we would have few existing study program designs to consult while developing our own. However, one source of inspiration for the development of the BA in Dance Pedagogy as a/r/tographic was the *Performance in context model* (PCM) developed through a four-year long action research project by Kym Stevens and Avril Huddy (2016) at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. In tertiary dance education they developed PCM as “a holistic collaborative approach to dance teacher education: the marrying of ‘teacher-as-artist’, ‘teacher-as-performer’ and ‘teacher-as-researcher’ [...] with tertiary dance teaching students identifying as teaching artists, as well as researchers of their own practice” (p. 67). Stevens and Huddy did not directly refer to a/r/tography, though their thinking reminds of it. Thirdly, through the zoom meeting with Irwin, it became clear that a/r/tography had mainly, but not exclusively, been developed *with visual arts* as the pivoting point, and rarely with choreography as the main artistic practice. That meant that we had to transfer and bridge to our local dance pedagogy environment at an arts university where choreography is understood as a central artistic practice originating in the field of dance.

### ***Participating in the course in a/r/tography for staff – Stina's process***

In this sub-section Stina is the I-voice. While reading, please visit Stina's explorative process of becoming a/r/tography as as staff-student on the open course A/r/tography in theory and practice in higher education (7.5 ects) through her exposition, where she explores a/r/tography as a writerly practice:

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2731837/2731838>

As staff-student in the course A/r/tography in theory and practice in higher education (7.5 ects), I entered an a/r/ographic moving landscape, where intertwined identities lead to new perspectives on learning, knowledge, art, and inquiry, resonating with the multifaceted, arbitrary, and irrational world around us. As the artist, researcher, and teacher identities are entangled into one (Barad, 2007; LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019), and since we otherwise are skilled in categorizing ourselves in fixed and different boxes, this gave me an opportunity to unfold in the intertwined spaces, allowing me to vibrate in-between. This was a familiar feeling since I have been in these entanglements before, but previously without knowing how to define them.

Being, among other things, an improvisation teacher, improvisation has been my focus when connecting to a/r/tography (see the link to my exposition above or in Figure 1). Improvisation can be seen as a diffractive process (Barad, 2007; Taylor, 2021), where improvisers are constantly adapting to each other to create new concepts at the same time together, in the moment, driven by curiosity for the unknown and not yet defined. To improvise, a way of constantly becoming, is a way of understanding, engaging, and moving in reality, an intra-action-relation, being-in and being-with the world as opposed to representing and reflecting on it (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019, p. 15; see also Barad, 2007, 2014; Taylor, 2021 on diffraction). This approach resonates with an ongoing performative pedagogy, where, for me, responsiveness constitutes a central part. Notions that constantly kept appearing and coming back as renderings - such as in-betweens, reverberations, and openings – were *listening*, *being present*, and *giving space* to the process. These concepts became important in the collective inquiry designing processes and expositions, as such structures, when put in motion, lead to communication (Gies et al., 2015). I felt it was an iterative process to continuously discover and rediscover the sweet spot, making possible learning, art making, and researching together with students – challenging and rewarding at the same time.

A/r/tography triggers questions on leadership and opens up for conversations about the teaching role and how the teacher positions themselves. A/r/tography can enable a focus shift towards collective living inquiry (Mosavarzadeh et al., 2022), letting ethics guide you in the process of learning together, which means a common



responsibility to make this happen. This could potentially challenge hierarchical power structures - not necessarily meaning that power structures will automatically disappear. It takes experience, presence, courage, and engagement to be in a collective living inquiry, relating, art making, and learning together.

A/r/tography invites you to let go, which then gives space to the process, letting it take time to unfold in its own way (Irwin, 2013), which presents a challenge since courses in an institution have a set duration. In the context of higher education in dance pedagogy, curriculum and learning outcomes could potentially conflict with being in an evolving process, not knowing where it will take you, and often the project is made clear only after, and not before, it has been implemented (Le Blanc & Irwin 2019, p. 13). Natalie LeBlanc and Irwin (2019, p. 5) refer to Ted Aoki (2005), who argues that the curriculum should be understood as a dialogical multifaced and complex process, undergoing a series of changes as the process unfolds.

To continue an a/r/tographic approach, I think it is pivotal to have collegial ongoing conversations and sharing practices, as a collective living inquiry, where we invite each other to complexify the simple, and simplify the complex (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. 174).

### ***Participating in the course in a/r/tography for staff – Madelaine's process***

In this sub-section Madelaine is the I-voice, leaning on her reflective notes from the open course A/r/tography in theory and practice in higher education (7.5 ects).

As Assistant Professor in Classical Ballet at the Department, I teach dance training, choreography, and teaching pedagogies. I feel unafraid to try methods outside the academic world, and have always been curious about a research approach. But who am I as an a/r/tographer? Through the collective process at the department and the course, A/r/tography in theory and practice in higher education (7.5 ects), I am beginning to understand more and more how I move naturally between the different a/r/tographic roles. How can I capture this, utilize, and to a greater extent, communicate and arrange spaces where the students, as becoming classical ballet dance teachers, can likewise meet themselves as a/r/tographers? These are questions I asked myself as staff-student at the open course in a/r/tography.



Ballet dancers are trained in the codified system on which the dance genre is based. The physical and cultural capital is formed in training. If the goal is for students to become independent learners, the teacher must teach students how to use the technique to fill the movements with meaning. The way to that goal is not straightforward, but a winding, zigzagging process, where I expose myself to the unknown and think as a researcher, thereby complicating conversations (Irwin, 2013) by embracing confusion and prompts. As an artist, I also must confront my identification as a dancer, now being an aging body. It is an exciting, but also a frightening journey, to *become a/r/tography* (Irwin, 2006, 2013).

First, as my explorative practice within the frames of compulsory tasks that we were given during the open course led by Tone, I presented a purpose to my students, based on the expanded notion of choreography developed at the institution (Gies et al., 2015). We – my students in classical ballet and I - discussed how the dance class was choreographed and how we could play with that. I, who had planned and been responsible for the students' learning for so long, had to take on a new role, as we worked out the content of the classes together. I did not know what would happen during the dance class, as creativity and artistic investigation were given more space than usual in the form of trying out more concepts to practice based on the students' ideas. For example, we explored how we can use the language of feedback, how technique had to take a back seat to artistic expression, and how the students could express themselves. Simply, we were deconstructing teaching material and methods in classical ballet. My pedagogical role, the T, which often dominates in my practice, had to stand aside for my roles as dancer and researcher as I explored becoming *a/r/tography*. Through the entanglement of these three competencies, I had to search for how I could support the participants' processes in a different way. Both I and the students noticed this, which gave them courage, inspiration, and space for greater self-action. We became more of a team than divided into hierarchical structures.

But there were also challenges. The students are not so used to being given independent space and access to their *own* investigation in classical ballet with several paths to the goal. We deal with strong traditions/conventions, and it feels difficult not to have guarantees for what, for us, untried methods can lead to. Also,

many students immediately begin to evaluate their prior knowledge in relation to the goal, and this becomes an obstacle. We need to practice being able to work with movement material without prejudice. It is not as easy as it sounds. I can feel like a bad teacher with no control, when I do not know what to expect from the studio work. Working a/r/tographically, I may even find the lesson "boring"- for **me** because I do not become as important in the same way as in the traditional teacher role. I give more space to the students.

I want to continue investigating how, through a/r/tography, I can contribute to students going through a dance pedagogical education, and how we can challenge tradition and convention in the genre of classical ballet through a/r/tography.

### **Insights: performative pedagogy, expanded choreography, and research as continuous practice-led knowledge-making thinking-with-theory**

The practice of creating an a/r/tographic BA program, designing an open course in a/r/tography in higher education, and taking the course as staff-students, has offered us resistance and challenged us as we have explored becoming a/r/tography (Irwin, 2013). We have looked to theory from the fields of a/r/tography (Flønes 2023a, b; Günes et al., 2020; Irwin, 2013; Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019; Reppen et al., 2023), expanded choreography (Berchtold, 2020; Gies et al., 2015; Klien, 2008; Leon, 2020; Leon, 2022; Ölme, 2017), and diffraction (Barad, 2007; Ceder, 2015; Taylor, 2021) to process our experience and produce insights, which we collect and discuss in the following.

### **Values**

Through a/r/tography, the space for action becomes truly shared among colleagues. The a/r/tographic approach contributes to democratic processes, at all layers of the ongoing change process, and it resists hierarchies (old hierarchies such as within the dance traditions, and new hierarchies that often emerge in a change project through different roles). The change process with the BA program in Dance Pedagogy has all the time been collaborative, even the decision-making, which has led to collective, ongoing knowledge-making and ownership. A/r/tography has opened up for this. Even though we had a clear goal, and indeed also time pressure during the original

change project and also within the frames of the open course, the a/r/tographic approach still emphasized a non-result-oriented approach. It was more like “now let’s test this, and then we can reshape it if it does not work”. The a/r/tographic approach supports the feeling of constant redesign possibilities within education (Irwin, 2013; Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019). Finally, and importantly, a/r/tography resists linear time. Instead, a/r/tography offers slow time, or what we could call eternity time. It is not efficient, because it is ongoing. It is not product-oriented, because it is an ever-emerging and ever-ongoing process – into eternity; it will never be finished during a lifetime in dance pedagogy. And it is not linear, as in linear western time. A/r/tography contributes what we could call *diffractive time*, where there is the slowness of an ongoing process, and the speed of intensified time during specific a/r/tographic discoveries. In this, we can relate to how Taylor proposes the logic of diffraction as an ongoing and entangled «mattering of knowledge» (Taylor, 2021, p. 23). A specific western understanding of the critical, distanced and hierarchically reflecting human being, in this case, the teacher, is de-centered. The a/r/tographic approach instead diffracts with the mattering of dance pedagogical practice and knowledge, pulling the dance teacher as researcher and researcher firmly into the ongoing mattering – or materialization that matters - of dance pedagogy.

### ***Performative pedagogy***

We realize that a/r/tography and becoming a/r/tography supports the larger ongoing paradigm shift in dance pedagogy which sets off the change project with restructuring the BA program. Or, maybe more precisely: an a/r/tographic approach to dance pedagogy feels like coming home, like finding a theoretical framework for pedagogy that does not cause the friction the more dominant and established understandings of pedagogy and pedagogical research do, since those are grounded in a dualism between theory and practice, and also firmly disembodied. With a/r/tography, the dualisms collapse, and our dancing bodies are not only accepted and invited into the pedagogy and the research, but even deeply needed and acknowledged as places of sense-making and research (see Pape-Pedersen, 2022; Østern, Jusslin et al. 2021; Taylor, 2021). Dance pedagogy transfers into a performative paradigm: it becomes performative pedagogy (Jamouchi, 2023; hooks, 1994). Such pedagogy is becoming,

affected, embodied, relational, collaborative, and has a critical and researching approach (see Stina's exposition, link in Figure 1). A/r/tography as performative pedagogy thus helps realizing the values of critical and transformative pedagogy, destabilizing hierarchies and taken-for-granted pedagogies within the teaching of dance. Also, a/r/tography creates curiosity for dance pedagogy (as performative pedagogy) among choreographers and artists who disapprove of the traditional, dominating field of education. A/r/tography as performative pedagogy brings us closer to dance as choreography and art, not further away from it.

### ***Expanded choreography***

A/r/tography supports choreography as an approach to dance pedagogy (Flønes, 2023a, 2023b). Expanded choreographic approaches and tools are similar to a/r/tographic ones, and can easily be combined. We see that a/r/tography offers to work with choreography in its expanded notion in the way Gies et al. (2015, unpaginated) defined the understanding of choreography at Stockholm University of the Arts in 2015 as including "different structures that are put in motion or an organization of movement in virtual as well as physical spaces and places". To be able to work, think, move, and relate as a choreographer in dance pedagogy creates a space to breathe. It creates freedom. Dance pedagogy as a space for freedom, hope, transformation, diversity, and even decolonialization, opens (see also hooks, 1994). Importantly: dance pedagogy becomes a space for artistic processes to happen. Dance pedagogy becomes inclusive of dance as art. To work a/r/tographically through the expanded notion of choreography with dance education thus nurtures our hope as dance choreographers/researchers/teachers.

### ***A researching approach as choreographers/researchers/teachers***

A/r/tography challenges research traditions and what is counted as academic research (Irwin, 2013; Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019). It does so in a way that is empowering for practitioners, as it deeply values and respects practice as a place where knowledge is explored and made (Taylor, 2021). This creates a possibility for dance teachers to "take research back", into their practice and their embodied way of thinking, reasoning, and relating, and to have ownership of research. We sense that research could arrive at a place where

research is no longer frightening for dance teacher practitioners, and no longer exercises power from above and from a distance, by somebody else on the outside of the field. Instead, research through the hybrid methodology of a/r/tography could become fun, energizing, and even a necessity. However, at this point it is important to emphasize that we are not yet at that point within dance pedagogy at our institution. A/r/tography is still unknown, not fully grasped, not fully developed, and we as authors of this article are most definitely still in the process of *becoming a/r/tography* (Irwin, 2013). The whole staff supported a/r/tography as the basis of the new BA, but too little time has been granted to the staff to be able to become a/r/tography as teachers in the new program, and the work and the collegial conversations are still ongoing. Also, becoming a/r/tography as teachers means that we have to enter a learning process *together with* our students, which destabilizes the power dynamics in the classroom somewhat (Güneş et al., 2020). This is a strength in a/r/tography as methodology, but can imply a certain amount of discomfort in teachers as they work to change their approach to teaching. Despite these challenges: an a/r/tographic opening is created between us, and within dance pedagogy at our institution.

### ***Professional development of staff in higher dance education***

Importantly, a/r/tography has contributed individual and collective professional development among the four of us writing this article, as part of the larger group of staff working with changing and developing dance pedagogy at the institution. The professional understanding has deepened and brought us together. It has created understanding and respect for our differences, yet challenged us all to keep developing and extending what we already know, entering the unknown. It is important to emphasize that becoming a/r/tography (Irwin, 2013) and exploring what a/r/tography could do to dance pedagogy at our institution has been complex, demanding, and implies taking risks, being and becoming in the unknown. We can see that with a/r/tography, through a diffractive methodology (Barad, 2007; Taylor, 2021), curiosity for the productive differences between the artist/choreographer, the researcher, and the teacher, and a willingness to be changed is nurtured among us. Diffraction as methodology through a/r/tography becomes affirmative of difference among us (Ceder, 2015). A/r/tography thus in itself has been a large insight among

us as staff: in this way, we can work and learn together, and we can stay with complexity and complicated conversations.

### **Final a/r/tographic notes**

A/r/tography, through a diffractive methodology, transforms what counts as mattering in dance pedagogy and whose mattering matters, inviting in practitioners, choreographers, and dance teachers as researchers to knowledge-making. Taylor's (2021) five suggestions for a reconceptualization of post-qualitative research based in diffraction as methodology, practiced through a/r/tography in dance education, helps to de-center pedagogy as something theoretical, disembodied, and distanced from practice and from art. Instead, the mattering of dance pedagogical knowledge becomes something engaged by choreographers/researchers/teachers, who are themselves material and affective bodies that always take part in creative (or destructive) relations with others (human and other-than-human beings). We see that our exploration of a/r/tography in dance education supports Taylor's five suggestions for a reconceptualization of knowledge. We have added elements of insights in parentheses in Taylor's (2021, pp. 27-39) original quotes, and we have changed her phrasing of "is" to "becomes": In our explorative becoming a/r/tography in the field of dance pedagogy, we see that: 1. (Dance pedagogical) knowledge shifts from talk and text to matter, materiality, and mattering; 2. (Dance pedagogical) knowledge becomes an (embodied) matter of knowledge-ing; 3. (Dance pedagogical) knowledge emerges (in collaborative professional learning communities), creating conditions for curiosity to flourish; 4. (Dance pedagogical) knowledge becomes an ethico-onto-epistemological enactment of values and response-ability; and 5. (Dance pedagogical) knowledge dissemination and communication becomes a performative practice-ing (five suggestions by Taylor, 2021, pp. 27-39, slightly tweaked by us)

The explorative process of *becoming a/r/tography* (Irwin, 2013) has had true agency on us four as staff within dance pedagogy at Stockholm University of the Arts.

A/r/tography has energized us, empowered us, and affirmed us as choreographers/researchers/teachers. When once a/r/tographic, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to go back to teaching (and researching) in a non-a/r/tographic way. The different roles of choreographer/researcher/teachers become so entangled

that it is difficult to leave any of them behind again. Also, theory receives a renewed place with an a/r/tographic approach. Theory and practice are firmly bound together; they diffract with one another, and theory becomes also fun, energizing, and necessary. Every a/r/tographic project has the possibility to contribute new theoretical insights, since theory implies an action: theory is put into action through thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) *from practice*.

The transfer of a/r/tography as mainly – but not exclusively – developed within a visual arts context (Irwin, 2013; Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019) to a dance and choreography context is uncomplicated, because it is more about an approach, rather than something that is bound to specific arts disciplines. However, the transfer has in our case implied emphasizing the choreographic, the embodied, and the performance aspects in a/r/tography (see also Stevens & Huddy, 2016). A/r/tography makes different carrier paths become visible for dance teachers, as it emphasizes slightly different yet entangled ways of working with dance education. We look forward to continuing this transformation and expansion of a/r/tography with the help of all arts fields, where we can contribute especially from the field of dance and choreography.

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