An Autoethnography of Choreographing the Dance Performance "Vintage"

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Abstract

This paper is an autoethnography describing my process of choreographing a dance performance called Vintage, in which my collaborators and I explored the idea of reusing dances we shared. To support our learning of the dances, I used a web application that allowed me to record them as annotated audiovisual clips.

I documented my design and choreographic processes through scoring and journaling, and performed an auto-explicitation interview. I wove these elements together to write an autoethnography that narrates my experience of choreographing Vintage and of using the web application that supported it. My autoethnography offers first-person insights into how choreography is intimate, relational, situated, and emergent. It also illustrates the value of designing technology in the background of the creative process. Overall, the paper illustrates how qualitative research can provide a rich, layered understanding of choreography and dance technology design.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing → HCI theory, concepts and models**.

Keywords

Dance, Artistic Research, Autoethnography, Dance Technology Design

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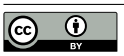
1 Introduction

The field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) has shown a growing interest in artistic applications, particularly in dance. Zhou et al.'s extensive review of the last two decades of literature at the intersection of HCI and dance described the many collaborations between HCI and interaction design researchers and dance artists to design technologies that support and assist the creative process [65]. There is currently a variety of studies that have researched, for example, how dance artists document [9], learn dance [51], transition between dance styles [62], or shift roles during production [32]. However, there are currently very few examples of artistic works created within HCI that provide direct insights into the craft of choreographing dance performances with technologies [36, 65]. While there are notable contributions of HCI researchers who are also dance artists [16, 41, 55], these works tend to avoid delving into the experiences and challenges of creating the performances and focus instead on how the dance context serves as a creative application bed for designing new technology or illustrating new HCI methods. Thus, creative dance processes mediated by technologies remain, in most cases, opaque to the HCI community.

In this paper, I (the author, referenced in the first person singular hereafter) take advantage of my positionality as both a dance artist and an HCI and interaction design researcher to provide a view from within of my artistic journey of creating a dance performance called Vintage and of using technology to support it. During a month-long residency in the Performing Arts Platform in Aarhus, Denmark, I collaborated with two other dance artists, Annika Kompart and Aline Sanchez, to create a performance exploring the idea of reusing dance. We 1) ran a series of rehearsals where we shared dances among the three of us, 2) participated in workshops with two communities of dancers that answered a call for participation, a group of Somali dancers and two Indian classical Bharatanatyam dancers, where they shared their dances with us, and 3) organized two public events where people passing by donated their personal dances to us. To facilitate the collection of dances across these three contexts, I used a web application I designed prior to this project to capture video and audio of the dances. The application allows me to record and edit audio-visual materials. I can also record a voice-over on top of it and add metadata and explanatory text to each item captured. I used the application to record myself, the dancers, and the passers-by in the public event. I created short clips of our dances, which helped me and the dance artists reuse them as embodied choreographic material.

I documented my creative process through sketches of dance scores and journaling my experience. I also performed an auto-explicitation on myself to authentically evoke and textually describe my experience of creating the performance and using the application, three years after the residency had passed. These combined elements allowed me to write an autoethnography that narrates my experience of choreographing the performance. The autoethnography showed that my choreographic process is an intimate, relational, situated, and emergent activity with unique entangled relationships to people and technology. It also revealed the value of foregrounding the creative process by using technology in the background as a tool for developing ideas. These findings allowed me to reflect critically on the intersection of dance-making and



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technologies and to argue for the need to consider technological intervention as a genuine support for artistic processes, even when that requires designing uninnovative applications.

2 Related works

2.1 Choreographic work in HCI

Zhou et al.'s extensive review summarizing important themes in the literature at the intersection of HCI and dance shows that most of the literature describes collaborations drawn between HCI researchers and dance artists [65] to design interactive technologies that support and assist the creative process of the artists [20]. Examples of interactive systems that support the creative process in dance are systems that represent dancers' movements and qualities in real-time [18, 19, 34, 39], enhance dancers' movement awareness [22, 41], allow them to better train with videos [8, 52] or supports their documentation of their choreographic ideas [7, 10]. However, there are only a few examples of artistic works created within HCI that provide insights into the process of choreographing dance performances with technology. The scarcity of choreographic projects in HCI might be because dance-making is messy and generates insights that are hard to generalize or sometimes articulate in academic forms [58].

It is worth citing the contributions of HCI researchers who are also dance artists [16, 41, 55], who propose methods that are personal and often influenced by their individual goals, intentions, and voices. For example, in my previous paper, I describe how integrating technologies into my dance performance SKIN generated tensions when my artistic intent and my research methods did not align [16]. I argued for the need in HCI to open the scope to the practitioners' singularities, methods, and insights. Bluff and Johnston described their long-term collaboration with a physical performance company. They highlighted the complex and evolving relationships between artists and interactive systems over the course of the production [5]. Similarly, Sullivan et al. showed that designing technologies for a dance production required embracing the fluid and intertwined nature of artistic processes [58].

While these works provide valuable arguments in HCI for design researchers to adapt to the complexity and messiness of artistic practice, they tend to avoid delving into the experiences of the artists making the performances. They tend to look at the choreographic process as a context for designing new technologies or critiquing existing methods. This paper examines the choreographic process mediated by technology from within to make it less opaque to the HCI community and to reveal its layered nature, composed of entangled relationships with people, situations, and technologies.

2.2 Research through (artistic) practice in HCI

In the context of HCI, practice-based research usually refers to design practice. Zimmerman et al. formalized research through design in HCI as research undertaken to gain new knowledge through design practice [66]. An overview of the extensive literature arguing for HCI research to embrace design practices can be found in Goodman and Wakkary [27]. In his essay, Gaver argues that research through design is likely to produce theories that are "provisional, contingent, and aspirational" [26]. Rather than aiming to develop comprehensive design theories, he suggests that practice-based researchers should focus on producing annotations of realized design exemplars. He emphasizes that the diversity of approaches in research through design is not a problem. According to him, the research community should refrain from aiming towards convergence and standardization and instead "take pride in its aptitude for exploring and speculating, particularizing and diversifying [...] and manifest the results in the form of new, conceptually rich artifacts" [26]. The way in which research through design is viewed as generating singular artifacts and providing knowledge through design laid the groundwork to open HCI to art practice and artistic research [38]. Indeed, art practice is now seen as a generative ground for experimentation and reflection [4], where "provisional, contingent, and aspirational" knowledge is gained from making art and manifests in new, conceptually rich artworks.

Artistic research is a form of research through practice that has flourished in academia in the past twenty years. Although its instantiations in HCI remain scarce, its influence is evident in the diversity of artistic works and contributions within HCI in the form of art installations and music or dance performances [15, 28, 35]. Recently, Sturdee et al. explored how their artistic and academic practices relate to each other and how they reconcile their creative experiences with the formality of research in HCI [57]. Their paper showed that artistic practices should not be seen as a mere application of technology. Instead, they argue for the value of examining artistic practices and, at times, formalizing them within HCI research [57]. Borgdorff describes artistic research in terms of subject, method, context, and outcome as "research in and through art practice. Embedded in artistic and academic contexts. Artistic research seeks to convey and communicate content enclosed in aesthetic experiences, enacted in creative practices and embodied in artistic products" [6]. According to Manning, linking art practices to research generates new forms of experiences and knowledge "many of which are not intelligible within current understandings of what knowledge might look like" [44]. Similarly, Lowry looked at artistic research as a "queering of the academy" through the production of artistic acts that blur the boundaries of art and science [42]. Manning considers that artistic research comes from the concrete actions that constitute the artistic practice. They emphasize the importance of the process and what it creates in terms of relationships, constraints, failures, and chaos. They also highlight the types of knowledge production that emerge from critical reflections on these relationships, constraints, and failures [44]. In line with Manning, this paper describes my artistic research, deployed in the creation of the performance Vintage. This process comprised various relationships with people and technology, faced multiple challenges and constraints, and worked around surprises and unexpected events. Narrating this process led to critical reflections about dance, collaboration, and technological intervention in artmaking that contribute to the HCI community interested in dance technology design.

3 Methods

In this work, I employed an artistic research methodology, written as an autoethnography. I based the autoethnography on accounts of my experience of choreographing Vintage that I articulated through an auto-explicitation technique.

3.1 Situating the artist-researcher

I, the author of the paper, am an HCI researcher and choreographer and an active member of the dance and technology community for over 15 years. In my practice, I am interested in how technology can serve as a scaffold for kinesthetic creativity to unfold in performers’ bodies. In Vintage, I collaborated with two professional dancers, two dance communities, and over 40 participants at donation booths. While the paper represents my personal voice, it will include these people’s voices through the relationships I formed with them during the creative process. I acknowledge that my perspective does not provide a complete view of the process. However, it offers an in-depth look at my intertwining roles as a choreographer, designer, user of the technology, and HCI researcher. I believe this approach has the potential to yield a deep understanding of how technology intervenes in creative processes.

3.2 Artistic Research

I conducted this work following an artistic research approach, grounded in the creation of a dance performance supported by technology. My methodology is practice-based: knowledge emerges through making, rehearsing, performing, and reflecting on the work. The research is articulated from a first-person perspective, acknowledging my positionality as both a choreographer and a researcher. It is deeply informed by my background, skills, and long-term engagement with dance practice. This enables me to examine how technology intervenes in a collaborative, embodied, and messy creative context, not from an abstract or external viewpoint, but from within the lived reality of creating an artistic work. My artistic research generates situated and experiential knowledge about working with the body, with people, and with technology. Thus, I use my own creative practice as a method of inquiry, in which artistic decisions, interactions with technologies, bodily experiences, and moments of friction or surprise become sources of insight. I present these insights through an autoethnography of making Vintage.

3.3 Autoethnographic method

Autoethnography is a research method that uses personal experience to describe and interpret cultural experiences, beliefs, and practices [13]. In HCI and design, it enables researchers to articulate experiences of a design, a prototype, or a concept from within, using themselves as subjects of the study [31, 45]. Examples of autoethnographies in HCI include reflections on the value of the removal of technology [43] and self-tracking [29] as well as thick descriptions of intimate, embodied experiences and transformation [2, 23, 30].

To document the making process of Vintage, I captured my actions through everyday journaling, drawing dance scores, and taking pictures and videos. In addition, to be as close as possible to my experience, I ran an auto-explicitation on myself 3 years after the residency. This gap in time is due to my personal and professional circumstances following the residency, particularly as a young mother navigating academia during the pandemic. It is also the time it took me to complete the training on the auto-explicitation technique. I wrote my autoethnography by weaving together the experiences from my introspective auto-explicitation text composed of intimate thoughts, emotions, and dance movements related to specific moments evoked (in italic in the section 4) with more contextual elements of the residency that I identified by revisiting my journal, the photos, videos, and scores that I made. I followed a phenomenological method of narrative research [14]. Poulos explains that autoethnographers seek to craft compelling tales that shed light on particular phenomena encountered in research [49]. He argues that most autoethnographers today write a hybrid form of “confessional-impressionist" tale. Similarly, I crafted my story in a poetic and lyrical language while keeping my focus closely on the self-data that grounds the narrative. Like memoir and creative nonfiction, I used reflexive writing as a method of inquiry rather than as a presentational activity that comes after the research is conducted [50]. The goal is to immerse the reader in a compelling narrative shaped by my intimate experiences of making Vintage and using the technology that supported it.

3.4 Auto-explicitation technique

Experience explicitation, or micro-phenomenology, is an interviewing method that allows for describing a person’s lived experience [46]. Auto-explicitation was introduced by Pierre Vermersh as a development of the experience explicitation or micro-phenomenology interviews [60]. The difference is that auto-explicitation applies to oneself, meaning the interviewer and the interviewee are the same person. It was highly inspired by Husserl’s phenomenology and emphasis on introspection [33]. The main principle of auto-explicitation is to guide the self into an introspective state to evoke one’s lived experiences [59]. Concretely, one engages in introspective, free-form writing to describe these lived experiences [47].

I trained in experience explicitation interviews seven years ago and in auto-explicitation two years ago, which was three years after the residency in Aarhus. Shortly after my training, I ran an auto-explicitation of my experience of making Vintage. I followed the iterative steps I learned during my training [59]. I started by consenting to the process being applied to me. I then guided myself, using my inner voice, in the flow of my writing to evoke moments from the residency. This produced a first draft of approximately 5 pages.

In the first iteration, I read the text and then isolated the various actions that describe the experience and disregarded what Vermersch calls the satellites: the context, the knowledge, the objective, the ego, and the judgments. In the second iteration, I re-read the text and identified the most salient memories. Guided by my inner voice, I deepened my descriptions of these memories by articulating the various layers of my experience, namely my cognitive activities, internal emotional states, corporeality and beliefs [47]. In the third iteration, I re-read the text and focused on the verbs of action and fragmented them temporarily in order to clarify the unfolding of the experience in time and to fully capture "what" was happening. Finally, in the last iteration, I guided myself to re-evoke these moments in time in order to expand them qualitatively. These iterations produced 5 main paragraphs, each constituting a detailed and layered account of the most vivid memories of my experience of the residency. These 5 paragraphs form the core material that I present directly in the auto-ethnography.

3.5 Consent to participate in the performance and be recorded

Vintage is a dance performance independent of the academic study reported in this paper. Thus, as articulated by Benford et al., Vintage is deployed "as a professional and public artwork" in its own right while still being used for this study [4]. We collaborated with Somali and Indian dancers who agreed to share their dances with us. Both groups were paid for the work hours by the hosting institution. The Somali dancers refused to be recorded using the application. The Indian dancers agreed to be recorded using the application. During the public events, all the passers-by consented to share their dances with us and to be recorded using the application. All collaborators signed a consent form that specified how the dances and data would be used in the performance and the research. This was part of a large IRB-approved procedure for a project on HCI and professional artists.

4 An autoethnography of creating *Vintage*

In this section, I recount my creative process as it unfolded during the residency in the Performing Arts Platform in Aarhus, weaving together artistic decision-making, my use of technology, bodily sensations, emotions, and encounters with others. Excerpts from my auto-explicitation journal are included in italics.

4.1 Initial stages of the residency

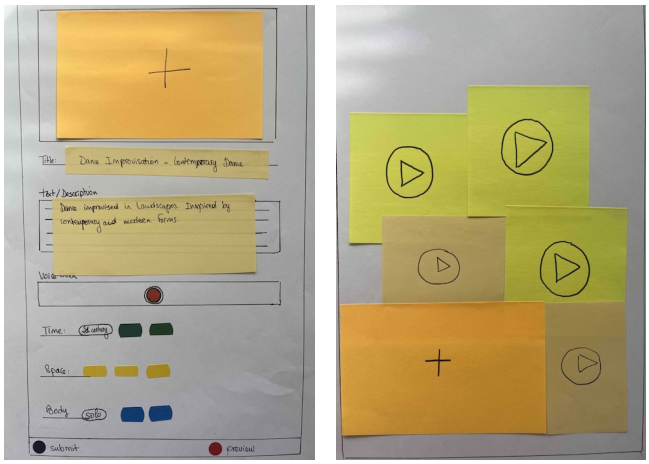
I began working on *Vintage* as part of a collaboration with dance artist Annika Kompart within a residency program in Aarhus. We shared an interest in reusing gestures, dances, and embodied knowledge. The choreographic process was conceived as a practice of transformation: creating new movement material from dances we already knew or would encounter through others. We identified three modes of collecting dances: sharing our own past choreographic material with one another; working with communities of dancers who would teach us their practices; and organizing public events where people could donate personal dances.

The residency organizers facilitated connections with local dance practitioners and helped disseminate a call for participation. A group of Somali Dhaanto dancers and two Indian Bharatanatyam dancers responded. Figure 1 illustrates one of the early meetings with both communities to discuss the performance. The institution also supported the organization of two public events in a space called "Reuse", where people could share their dances with us.

Shortly after the residency began, the project's conditions shifted. Annika informed me that she had been accepted into a Master's program and would only be present on weekends. The hosting institution proposed that I work with a local dancer, Aline Sanchez, whose interests aligned with the project. When Annika returned on weekends, Aline and I transmitted to her the dances we had developed. We agreed that all three of us would perform in the final work.

At the same time, two deeply personal events reshaped my experience of the residency. My uncle died after six months of illness. He was close to me, and his death brought grief that I carried silently into the studio. Three days into the residency, I also discovered that I was pregnant. During a rehearsal involving floor work and spinning, I became dizzy and nauseous. In the first paragraph from

Figure 1: Meeting with the Somali and Indian dancers and planning the performance



(a) **(b)**

Figure 2: Paper prototype of (a) the first page of the application that allows to create a clip by recording audiovisual elements and adding an explanatory text and a title to it, and (b) the second page of the application that allows to select and play the recorded clips

my auto-explicitation, I wrote: *"Aline asked if I was pregnant. I laugh. This is very unlikely. I go to the supermarket and purchase a pregnancy test, just in case. In the evening, I take the test, and two lines appeared. I say to Annika: it can't be true. She looks at the result and says: No, you are pregnant. I can't believe it. I stare at the test for long minutes, maybe hours. The news is bewildering. I am scared and excited at the same time"*. This excerpt from my auto-explicitation shows how I felt vulnerable and oscillated between euphoria and fear, aware that this pregnancy would profoundly affect me both physically and emotionally during the rest of the residency.

4.2 Designing a tool for my own practice

Before arriving at the residency, Annika and I met repeatedly via Skype. During these preparatory meetings, I proposed integrating a web application accessible on mobile phones that I had designed

prior to this project using an autobiographical design approach to document my choreographic process [21, 54]. Prior interactive systems for documenting dance existed [7, 10]. However, these systems were not maintained and were too sophisticated for my needs. My goal was to make it as easy as possible for me to capture dance using video, audio, and text, as these are the media that I rely on most as a choreographer [9, 53]. To do so, the application’s core design features enable recording dance videos on a mobile

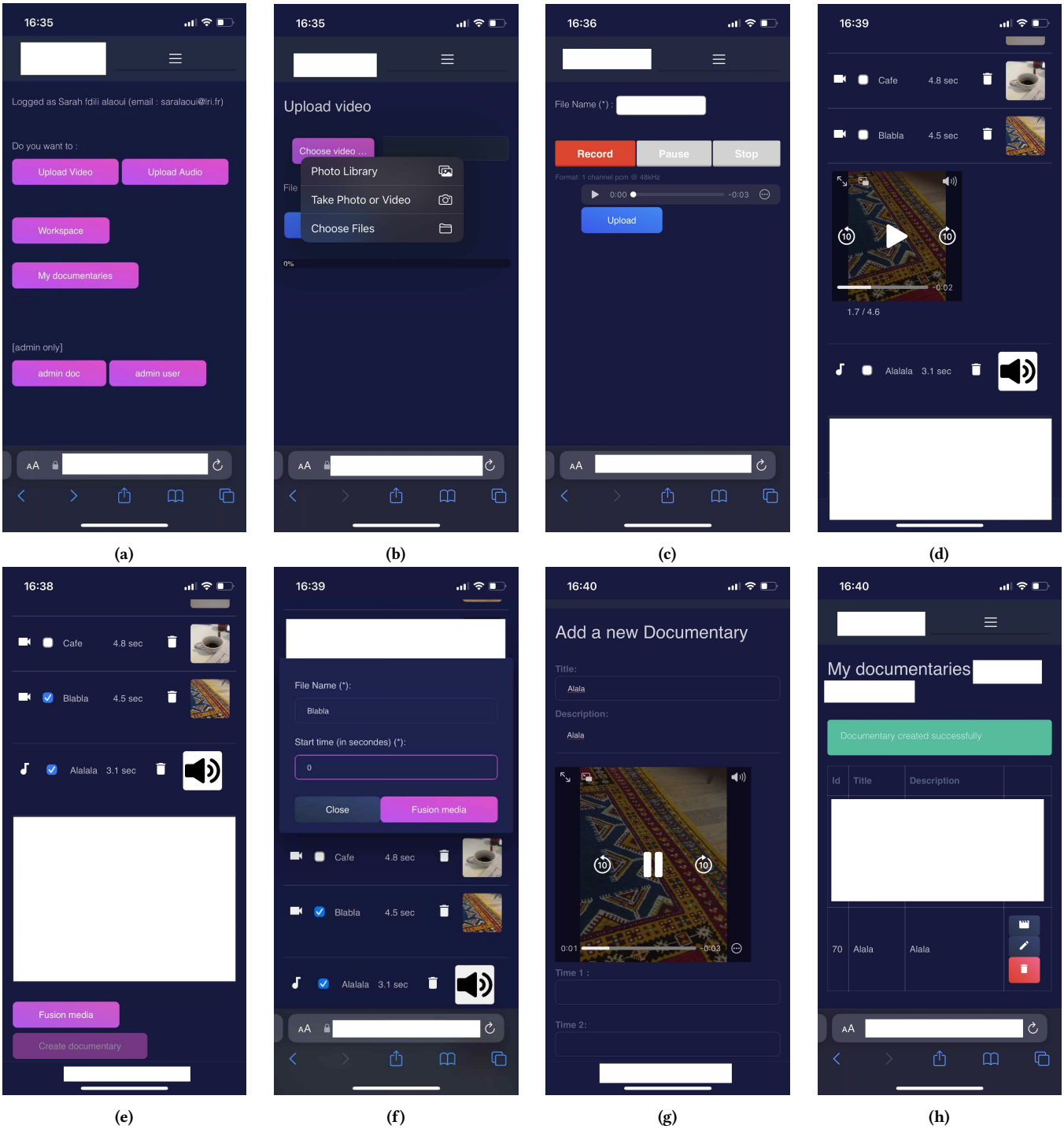


Figure 3: The workflow of the web application

phone and adding audio and descriptive textual annotations. These features support two actions that are central to my choreographic process: capturing movement audio visually and describing it qualitatively. These design choices were motivated by my practical need for a simple, low-resource recording and annotation tool accessible on everyday devices that I could easily bring to the studio and use throughout long rehearsal periods. To design the application, I created a paper prototype (Figure 2) that enabled me to define the interactions for capturing video, adding voice-over, writing short descriptions, and assigning titles to each clip.

After the paper prototyping, I worked with a programmer to implement the system as a web application. We went into an iterative cycle of implementation and testing that led to the final version of the application (shown in figure 3), whose workflow can be described as follows:

(a) I access my workspace by logging into the application with my unique username and password.
(b) I upload a video to my workspace either by recording it with the camera or by uploading it from my device.
(c) I record audio, pause or stop it, and upload it to their workspace.
(d) I navigate my workspace and view or play the list of media recorded.
(e) I concatenate media, either multiple videos together or a video with an audio file, depending on my selection. The concatenation order depends on the order of the video and audio selections made by the user.
(f) When concatenating a video and an audio file, I need to choose which second of the video the audio should start. The result is a video that mixes the original audio with the new one. This allows me to add a voice-over to a video.
(g) I create a clip by selecting a video, whether it is a fused media or as it is initially uploaded, and then clicking the 'create documentary' button. I can input the title and description of the clip as well as a description of the dance itself.
(h) I add the created clip to my list of videos. I can access, view, edit, or play them.

The application was developed using Laravel, with a MySQL database and a front-end in HTML and JavaScript. It was hosted on my university's server.

Once the application was developed, I used it in the studio over multiple months prior to Vintage. The application became part of my creative embodied routine. I used it as a video capture and editing tool, where I created clips that served as choreographic material that I treated both as working drafts and extensions of my embodied memory.

4.3 Collaborating with the Somali dancers

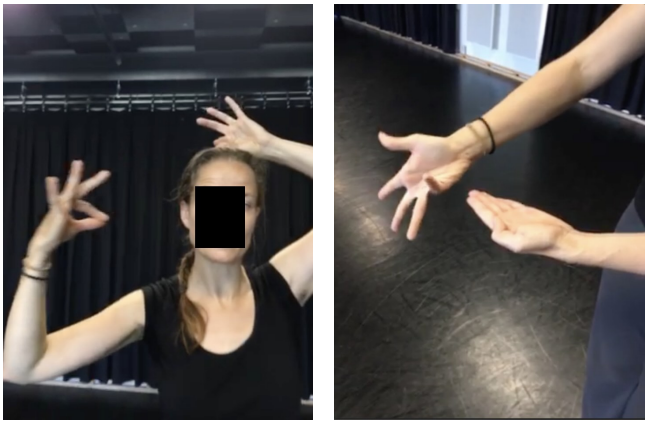
Upon our arrival at the residency, Annika and I met with the Somali women who practiced Dhaanto dance in their community space in the Gellerup neighborhood. We scheduled three dance sessions together. In the first session, I showed them the web application. The older dancers gently said they didn't want to be filmed or their images to be on someone's phone or circulating online. I understood that their decision was based on their religious beliefs. As a Muslim myself, I knew how dancing in front of the camera could be off-limits for them. When the Somali dancers refused to be filmed, I felt frustrated, which manifested as tension in my upper body and jaw. I had designed the application precisely for moments like this: to record dances transmitted orally and at risk of disappearing. I experienced their refusal as a stop in how I had envisioned working together. I was conflicted between the feeling of a missed opportunity to keep a trace of their dance and the need to acknowledge my own positionality and to be careful not to ask them to do something they felt uncomfortable with. As the session progressed, I became comfortable with their decision to stick to oral transmission of the dance. This decision allowed us to build trust among each other. While the Somali group generously shared their dance with us, they maintained agency and authority over it and over their own bodies.

All our studio sessions repeated the same routine. We danced together to various songs they had selected, punctuating it with conversations about living in Aarhus, leaving Somalia, what dance meant to them, and why it was important to keep practicing it. All of the Somali dancers were related: mothers and daughters or aunts and nieces, and all of them were neighbors. The mothers' generation had fled from Somalia when the war started. The youngest generation was all born in Aarhus and had never returned to the motherland. To them, dancing Dhaanto is a way to maintain a connection to the motherland for their young daughters. Dhaanto movements were repetitive and performed in synchrony. They involved footwork and coordination of hands and shoulders. Annika, Aline, and I quickly found the rhythm in our bodies. In the second paragraph from my auto-explicitation, I described my relationship with the women: *"I become attached to the elder women. We teach each other words from our languages. When I announce that I am pregnant, they become very protective, asking me to jump less or to be gentler with my feet when I bump the floor. I appreciate their care for me. I love how amusingly shocked they are by my energy when I dance or jump, exaggerating it on purpose.* After that day at the studio, two of the women followed me on Facebook, and I followed them back. These exchanges suggest that a relationship had formed through dancing together. The cultural connections we shared, along with the care the Somali women offered me as I navigated pregnancy and grief, demonstrate how dancing together created kinship and functioned as a social binder, not just as an artistic expression.

4.4 Collaborating with the Bharatanatyam dancers

Two Indian classical Bharatanatyam dancers from the local dance community in Aarhus wanted to share their dance with us. One of them was Indian, and the other one was from Aarhus. We set up two 2-hour rehearsal sessions per week, during which they taught us the basic principles of Bharatanatyam and shared a fully choreographed sequence. For each rehearsal, they brought sarees and jewelry, such as bracelets and foot bells, which we wore for dancing.

Working with the Bharatanatyam dancers was a contrasting experience from the Dhaanto. They welcomed documentation and actively participated in the video and audio recordings. As shown in figure 4, I recorded the Bharatanatyam dancers using wide or mid shots of the sequences and close-ups of hand gestures or facial expressions. I also recorded them giving oral explanations of the



(a) (b)

Figure 4: Recording of (a) a mid shot and (b) a close-up of the Bharatanatyam sequence where one hand enacts a flower blooming, and the other a bee pollinating it

movements' meanings and used those as voice-overs. Once the videos were edited, I used them to rehearse the sequences in the studio outside the Bharatanatyam sessions and sent them to Annika, who was not present during the week, so she could learn the dance on her own.

Learning Bharatanatyam destabilized me. The expressivity of the face and hands, the sustained plié position, where the knees are bent over the toes while maintaining upright posture and turnout, and the coordination of rhythm through the feet challenged my contemporary dance body and training. In contemporary dance, the hands and face are neutral, whereas in Bharatanatyam, they are expressive. They carry meaning and serve as a form of sign language to help tell a story. For example, in the choreographed sequence, one movement featured one hand enacting a flower blooming and the other a bee pollinating it. I wrote in the third paragraph from my auto-explicitation: *"It is very hard for me to perform the gestures as my fingers feel under-trained. The facial expressions feel over-theatrical for me. I am trained to tame the face and make it as neutral as possible [...] Such theatricality leads to loud laughter.* This excerpt from my auto-explicitation illustrates how learning Bharatanatyam transformed the way I perceive and experience dance. Prior to this exchange, my practice was shaped by ballet and contemporary dance, and by their aesthetic values, such as abstraction and neutrality. Learning Bharatanatyam proved hard for me. It required me to decenter myself in order to grasp the essence of its expressive gestures, postures, and rhythmic structures. It was not simply about acquiring new steps, but about undergoing a fundamental shift in both my body and my aesthetic framework as a dance artist. It required unlearning ingrained bodily patterns from my prior training and cultivating new ways of inhabiting my body, and rekindling my expressivity.

4.5 The public events

We held two public events at the Reuse space, where people come to get free used furniture in an industrial area of the city. Inside repurposed containers furnished with borrowed furniture and costumes, Annika, Aline, and I invited passers-by to dance (see Figure 5). Over two Saturdays, more than forty people donated dances, some playful, some intimate, some brief, some enduring.

Participants spent time choosing a costume and a song for their donation. They then danced while being filmed, sometimes short sequences of barely 20 seconds, sometimes very long ones of up to 20 minutes. Some of them asked us to dance with them when they needed partners. They donated dances of all kinds. For example, someone shared their clubbing dance, which consisted of a simple two-step, moving from right to left and back again. Another person who practiced Kizomba taught it to me, and we performed it together. Figure 6 shows 12 examples among 27 dance donations that we recorded. All participants agreed to be recorded on the application. They all trusted us with their data and were enthusiastic about us borrowing their dances. To avoid taking up too much of people's time, I recorded each dance in a single shot and did minimal video editing in the application. I also recorded a voice-over with the participants explaining their dances in a single take. Participants also chose the titles for their dances. These recordings felt different from those I made in the studio. They didn't feel like working drafts, but as finished video artifacts where participants had curated the space, the costumes, and the performances. The videos also conveyed a sense of generosity, trust, and intimacy shared with people we did not previously know. Unlike the rehearsal clips, I felt compelled to project these videos during the performance for their poetic value, as visible traces of rare shared moments of dance between strangers.

4.6 Sharing our dances among each other

Back in the studio, Annika, Aline, and I shared choreographies that we knew or made. These dances entered a growing pool of material to be reused. Some dances remained intact, others were transformed through improvisation, recombination, or variation. For all the dances that we shared and transformed, I recorded and edited the videos. In this process, I became acutely aware of how the dances changed as they moved from one body to another and from one process of transformation to another. The web application mediated those changes as we recorded different versions of the same dances performed by different bodies and with different transformations. The application became a choreographic companion, recording the successive drafts of our work and serving as a collective memory for the dancers to converge towards.

For example, Annika shared Mary Wigman's circles, which consist of a simple walk in a straight line, then a circle, then a walk in a new direction at a 45-degree angle from the previous one, and so on. As shown in figure 7, I recorded Annika with the application, using a wide shot of the dance, then a close-up of her drawing the score, with explanations added through voice-over. Annika also shared the Nelken line by Pina Bausch, which consists of a simple, slow walk in a straight line, where the hands make gestures inspired by sign language representing the four seasons. I wrote in the fourth paragraph from my auto-explication: *"I hear Annika's soft voice say while showing the gestures and walking to the rhythm: spring grass is small, summer high grass, the sun is shining, autumn leaves are falling, winter cold. I record Annika dancing toward the camera. As*

she gets closer, she verbalizes the four parts linked to the four seasons. Then I record each part in a close-up. I record Annika's voice explaining the gestures, and I put it on top as a voice-over for each of the four parts. Using the clip I made in the application, we rehearsed the Nelken line together. We later adapted it to be participatory, encouraging audience members to dance with us at the end of the performance. To transform the dances we collected at the donation booths, I shared a process I used in a previous performance. This process consists of altering the dynamics, the body parts involved, and the scale of the dances until they become challenging for us to perform. We then trained to pick from the pool of transformed dances, one after the other, in the order they came to us in our improvisation.

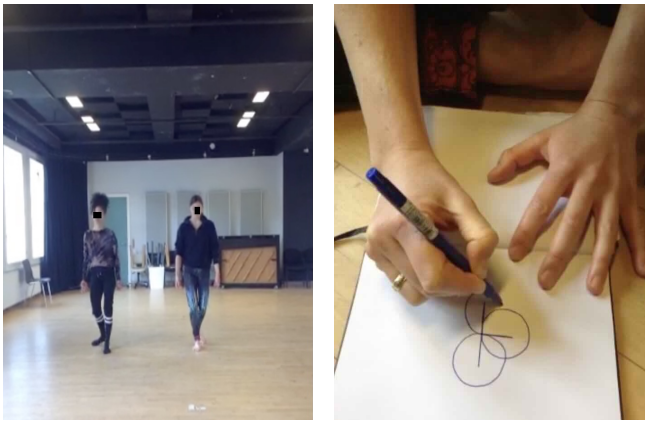
4.7 Performing Vintage

We staged *Vintage* as an exhibition rather than a frontal performance. Audience members moved through the residency's studios, encountering the dances as one might encounter moments of life unfolding in parallel. Each dance was performed in a specific studio space, accompanied by its specific music and costumes. As

(a) (b)

Figure 5: (a) The setup of the donation booth and (b) Aline and I talking and dancing with participants in the booths ©Performing Arts Platform

Figure 6: 12 examples of dance donations in the booth



(a) (b)

Figure 7: Recording of (a) a wide shot and (b) the drawing of the score of Mary Wigman’s circles

illustrated in figure 8, Annika, Aline, and I shifted between studio locations, costumes, music, and partners continuously. For example, in one studio, we joined the Indian dancers to perform the Bharatanatyam sequence. In another studio, we joined the Somali dancers to perform the Dhaanto sequence. In another studio, we wore colorful leggings and shorts and improvised using the transformed material from the donation booths. The rhythm was frenetic, the music was fast, and the dances felt thrilling and exhilarating to perform.

Toward the end, all of us, including the Somali and Indian dancers, and the audience members, performed the Nelken line as shown in figure 9. During this dance, I became aware that I was visibly pregnant. In the fifth paragraph from auto-explicitation, I wrote: *"When I arrive to perform the Nelken line, I take off my previous costume and put on a purple dress. For a short moment, I am naked under the eyes of the audience members. I feel comfortable and attuned to this new version of myself, this new body. Being pregnant is new to me, but I can already see my body changing. My breasts are very heavy, the veins are showing, and my belly is bloated. I can see it sticking out of my purple dress. I do not care. I find this beautiful. I am happy in this beautiful purple satin dress. I dance Pina Bausch’s Four Seasons. I bring the audience into this happy dance, and everyone joins in, and we go up and down the stairs. The dance is languorous. My hips move on the rhythm of jazz, right and left, in a slow and sensual rhythm. My arms make sign language gestures. Spring grass is small: I wriggle my fingers enacting the grass. Summer high grass: I perform the same gesture higher. Autumn leaves are falling, and one hand becomes a leaf that falls. Winter is cold; I squeeze my elbows and hands together in a little shiver. This movement makes me laugh. I feel like I’m squirming in the snow. My head tilts slightly to the side. I feel cute, funny, and warm. I feel the joy of laughter. It’s an inner laugh, a shy, soft, and social laugh, but it’s not there to please anyone. It’s genuine. The shivering gesture makes me feel like a child. It is simple, extroverted, irreverent, and expressive."* During the Nelken line with the audience and the dancers, I felt a quiet sense of alignment between my changing body, the sadness I had felt from losing my uncle, and the soft joy of sharing moments of dance among these different groups of people. This sense of softness lingered as the performance came to an end and we shared a meal prepared by the Somali women for the event. Conversations naturally unfolded between the dancers and audience members as some recognized their own dances in what we performed or in the projected videos (Figure). Performing Vintage felt less like presenting an artwork and more like celebrating the tenderness, care, and kinship that emerged through a fleeting moment of dancing together.

5 Discussion

In the following section, I discuss how my auto-ethnography sheds light on the choreographic process and the role the technology played in supporting it.

5.1 Reflections from a situated and relational choreographic process

My autoethnography revealed that dancing is not solely about the production of movement, but about people spending time together and being shaped by one another. During the residency, I came to understand why the Somali community transmits Dhaato dance within their diasporic context, through our shared conversations about culture and the meaning of our dance practice. At the same time, encountering the symbolic language of Bharatanatyam led to profound shifts that defamilirized how I danced and how I understood my own practice [63]. These encounters led to new relationships grounded in care and friendship, which we carried into the creative process. This paper illustrates how making a performance, as expressed by Manning, is a process of “creating a platform for forming relationships" that enables creativity to emerge [44].

My auto-ethnography also showed that artistic ideas are situated and contingent on circumstances that often extend beyond the studio. My artistic research would have been significantly different had I not been heartbroken by my uncle’s death and euphoric from my surprising pregnancy. The change in Annika’s schedule, who spent much of the residency away, pushed us to work more closely with Aline, who brought different dance propositions. This also forced me to use the web application to share recorded dance clips with Annika, enabling her to learn the material remotely. Mediating collaboration across distance was not a role I had originally envisioned for the application. Working in Aarhus further steered the project in unforeseen ways. I did not plan to collaborate with Indian and Somali dancers, but they voluntarily answered our call and serendipitously crossed our path. That shaped the project, our ideas, and the outcome quite significantly. I did not expect the Somali dancers to refuse to be recorded. When I designed the application, I imagined it would be particularly suitable for traditional dance groups that lack a means to record their dances. Yet that group resisted the technology and preferred oral transmission.

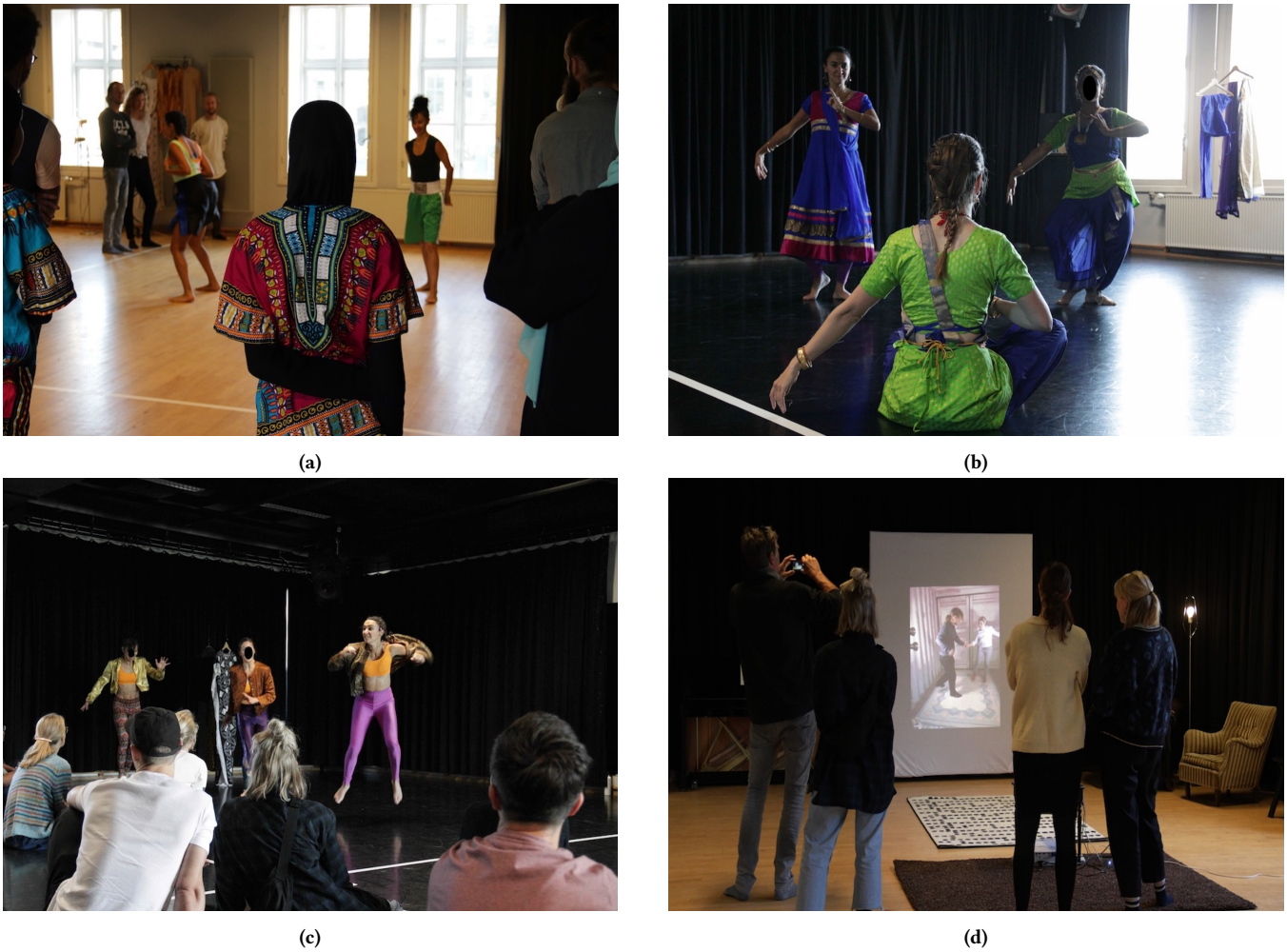
Edmonds et al. view the "studio as laboratory [...] the natural working environment where [artists/researchers] dream, explore, experiment and create ..." [12]. This paper shows that the laboratory is beyond the studio. It showed that in artistic work, the laboratory is life itself. As an artist, I was open to changes of direction, emergence, and surprises. My journey was an eventful creative process [37], layered, complex [38], non-linear [32] messy [58] and

non-deterministic [1]. It was also situated in the here and now [58]. I nurtured it through the opportunities that came my way during the residency and through encounters that crossed my path. This paper illustrates how artistic research creates what Manning calls "alter-economies of value" precisely by valuing situatedness, emergence, and unpredictability [44]

I contribute with insights from my auto-ethnographic study that produce "socio-material forms of research", quoting Kang and Jackson [38]. By describing the creative process that I undertook, I showed how artists, people, materials, technologies, and situations are entangled. I also illustrated the aesthetic and embodied transformations and the social interactions that went into creating a performance [38].

5.2 Reflections from the use of the application as a scaffold for creativity

My auto-ethnography showed that dance artists care more about dancing than about contributing to testing technologies [17]. In HCI, the appeal of innovation is too strong [56]. This appeal can become extractivist, leading to design cycles and technologies that are not aligned with artists' crafts and needs. According to Li et al., this tendency can be harmful when researchers don't consider its costs for their collaborators. While knowledge production can benefit people indirectly at best, the costs may range from people having spent time on a technology that doesn't help them to having their craft disrupted by non-functional systems[40]. An example is the attempt to introduce extended reality in the dance studio [61]. While these experiments are highly innovative, they proved disruptive to dancers who would not use the technology in the studio because the headsets are cumbersome, the interaction is complicated, and



(a) (b) (c) (d)

Figure 8: Photos of various dances displayed during Vintage : (a) Dhaanto with the Somali dancers, (b) Bharatanatyam with the Indian dancers, (c) The transformed dances from the donation booth performed by Annika, Aline, and I, and (d) Projection of the videos of the dances donated in the booths ©Performing Arts Platform

Figure 9: Sharing the Nelken line with the dancers and the audience members ©Performing Arts Platform

the systems are not robust enough [61]. Sometimes, designing uninnovating systems or even “undesigning", which refers to a line of research in HCI that refrains from designing systems at all, is the key to supporting a creative journey [48].

For Vintage, I aimed to use a simple and robust web application. My goal was not to create novel interactions, but rather to design a simple and robust web application based on familiar mobile phone interactions. I used technology as a scaffold for creativity, letting the artists (not the technology) do the embodied and creative work. My autoethnography showed that the dancers did not focus on the technology. The web application remained in the background of our creative process. The Somali dancers even rejected the technology. This generated conflicting feelings for me. I initially thought their rejection would harm the project. Retrospectively, I believe it enriched it, as their decision went against my assumption that they needed to record their dances in the first place. In their felt ethics framework, Garrett et al. highlight that attending to moments of discomfort like the one I experienced when the Somali dancers rejected the technology enhances our capacity for ethical sensemaking and action-taking [25]. In their follow-up work, Garrett et al. exemplified how attending to glitches can expose researchers’ underlying ethical assumptions [24]. My findings echo the work of Garrett et al., as I illustrated how the glitch in the collaboration with the Somali dancers led to a distinct and memorable embodied response from me and required me to re-examine my positionality, attune to my ethical sensibility, and balance my expectations with theirs. These insights allowed me to redefine my artistic research methodology as a site for relationality and creativity to emerge first and foremost, while refraining from extractivist tendencies in user-driven technological assessment.

Thus, the second contribution of this paper is critical. I argue for the relevance of considering technology in the background of the embodied and creative process. My findings illustrated how, in certain creative contexts, it is best to design uninnovative technological interventions or to refrain from them altogether.

5.3 Reflections from artistic research and autoethnography

Desjardins and Ball reported that first-person methods blur the distinction between work and personal life [11]. Similarly, artistic research benefits from the artist/researcher’s personal artistic development. However, it extends the artistic practice further by seeking through the production of art to contribute to what we understand of the phenomena at stake [6].

One limitation of the first-person methods used in this paper is their partiality, as the narrative is shaped primarily by my own experiences rather than those of the other dancers [64]. This inevitably leaves aspects of participants’ perspectives underrepresented [11]. However, this limitation is partly mitigated by the inclusion of participants’ voices through the account of the collaboration, which was central to the creative process described. For example, although the dancers were not interrogated about their experiences, their engagement with and use of the technology emerged through my observations and reflections within the autoethnography. Therefore, while remaining attentive to the limits of representation, the autoethnography indirectly conveyed elements of the participants’ actions, interactions, and experiences.

One epistemological commitment of this paper is to present the autoethnography in an unusual format in HCI, more commonly found in the humanities: a creative narrative text. Autoethnography entails writing about the self in social and cultural contexts to elucidate the various contours of the phenomena that shape them. Poulos describes how autoethnographers use writing about the self in contact with others to illuminate the “many layers of human social, emotional, theoretical, political, and cultural praxis" [49]. In the humanities and social sciences, autoethnographers rely on rigorous methods of data gathering to craft compelling narratives of their experiences within the contexts they investigate. In line with Bardzell and Bardzell, who argues that HCI research and practice should turn to humanistic practices, theories, and methods [3], my autoethnography is a creative text that describes my artistic research and technological intervention [13], aligning closely with humanities scholarship. By doing so, I use writing as a research practice that drives my inquiry rather than as a "mopping-up" activity after research is conducted [50].

Performing the auto-explicitation three years after the residency was challenging because the memories that I could evoke were fragmented and captured mainly the five most vivid moments of the residency. In order to stitch these fragments together into a comprehensive account of what happened in Aarhus, I had to revisit my journal entries, dance scores, pictures, and videos. Once I wrote the ethnography, an additional challenge was to bridge the outcomes to higher-level HCI discussion points. This was due to the fact that most of the moments that I described in the autoethnography were related to emotional states and not to interactions with the technology. This was, in part, because the interaction with the technology did not present any memorable issues, glitches, or unexpected behaviors. The main glitch was the Somali dancers’ refusal to engage with the application. This emerged as a central finding that reoriented my discussion to focus on the social interactions (rather than technological ones) that framed the creative process.

Therefore, the third contribution of the paper is to illustrate how methodologies such as artistic research and autoethnography can produce qualitative research based on narrative descriptions that evoke one's rich and textured lived experience.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, I offer an autoethnography of choreographing the dance performance Vintage, in which my collaborators and I explored the idea of recycling dance by collecting and reusing dances shared among us and donated by participants. During the creation, I used a web application that allowed me to record dances as short audio-visual clips. I contributed first-person reflections on my choreographic practice, in which creative ideas emerge from entangled relationships with people, situations, and technology. I also reflected on the use of a technology that (only) served its purpose by being in the background of the creative process. I finally illustrated how I used artistic research and autoethnography as qualitative methods to produce narrative descriptions of rich and layered experiences.

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