

EMBODIED TRACE

Anne H. Goldberg-Baldwin
VK Preston, Thinking Partner

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts, Dance

2021

University of the Arts

Contents

Improvisation one	9
Improvisation two	12
Context	16
Ephemera	38
Residue	51

Improvisation three

15

Embodied Trace

22

Trace

30

Pressure

42

Acknowledgements

To Dr. VK Preston, for the many beautiful hours spent thinking together about this work.

To Donna Faye Burchfield, for taking a chance on someone outside the regular mold.

To Dr. Thomas DeFrantz, for endlessly challenging my limits and ways of thinking about my orientation in this world.

To Sheila Barker, Beth Duxbury, Adrienne Hawkins, Alice Hayward, Brice Mousset, Luam Keflezgy, Carl Paris, Frances Patrella, Joan Peters, Gus Solomons, Manuel Vignuolle, and Mary Wanamaker for all your embodied knowledge transferred on to me.

To Peter Child, Donal Fox, Reiko Fueting, Marjorie Merryman and Nils Vigeland for the gift of sound in all its various forms.

To Jillian Peña, for helping me verbalize so many concepts I had never been able to put my finger on before.

To Ben Pranger for all of his patience and time as I put together this book and lent his creativity to what is possible in design layout.

To James McGinn and Esther Siddiquie, for leading me along administratively through the many hurdles of this journey.

To my beautiful classmates who inspire me endlessly.

To my parents for allowing me the space to create.

To my family and friends, whom I bring with me into all spaces great and small.

To Kevin, my rock through everything, period.

Mentally paint yourself with a specific color.
Immerse yourself entirely in that color.
Mindfully attend to your state.



Search

within

any space
with finite walls.

Break

through

to the other side
what might be beyond.

On the ice, I trace. And retrace. Diverge. And retrace. Slowly, carefully, assertively, aggressively. I carve my movement into the ice. My orientation is ever-changing through space. I press into the ice, leaning into each circular lobe I create, as a cyclist rounding a hairpin turn. Directionality and orientation inform the distribution of my weight over the gently rounded blade, rocking forward and backwards, reacting to my articulated foot and supple knee action. Each micro bend of the knee and ankle initiates pressure into the ice, tightening the lobes. Each release of the joints lessens the pressure, creating shallower arcs. As the curves become sharper, so does the definition of the trace left behind. The thin, double-edged blade melts the ice on contact, both reducing friction and cutting into the ice, leaving a gentle spray of snow in its wake. The patterns remain behind, a visual reminder of where and how I have come. It becomes a score.

Nothing is quite the same as an empty, quiet surface. From the blade, a rich variety of sonic landscapes emerge. The blade's downward pressure growls, the edge ripping into the ice as I glide through the space. The air whistles like a shell in my ear as I gain speed. Every turn, skid, stop, and slide creates a sonic inflection as I manipulate the blade over the ice surface, rocking from toe to ball to heel. As I shave the top layer of ice off to come to a stop, the friction shimmers like a suspended cymbal. The sound travels, reverberates against the glass, and returns to my ears once more. Then, silence.

I turn and look back at the movement that hangs in the air. In my body's most recent past. In my memory. In my subconscious. The movement, ephemeral and fleeting, remains locked in the tracings on the ice. It has permanently changed the chemistry of the surface, etched itself into the growing history of the ice which builds, layer by layer, with each resurfacing. A fresh layer of water coats the ice for new movement to inhabit the arena, while the trace that was previously captured lies fossilized underneath. As the new layer dries, its pores breathe, and subtle waves of water crash over one another before settling and freezing. The trace, the movement, is captured, petrified underneath.

Is a

blank

canvas

ever actually

blank?

Staring at the ceiling, I notice all points of contact between my body and the floor. From the back of my head through my heels, I feel the gentle support of the wood below me. I notice the supple spaces that remain suspended above. I sink deeper, those points of contact becoming heavier, growing roots into the floor below. I extend equally upward and outward like a bramble bush expanding in fractals, from one branch to many, many more. Through my branches, I sense what lies beyond, what roots me to my present space, what might break loose at any moment. Every micromovement activates the silence, the stillness. Each is a sign of ease, life, and volatility. Each is a microcosm of the delicate equilibrium so easily disrupted.

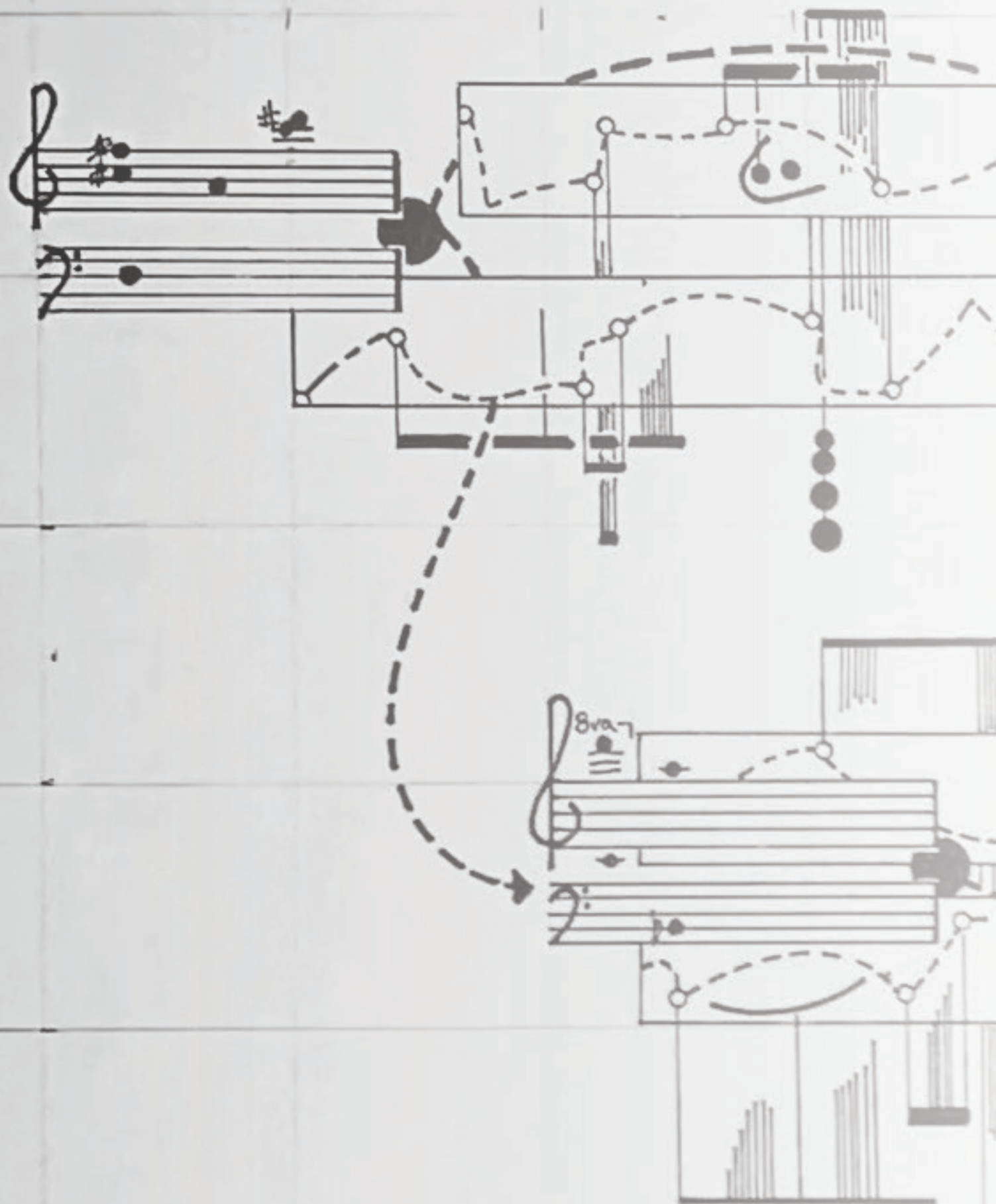
As I start to move, the branches and roots continue their spread. My points of contact shift, at times slowly, at times rapidly, fluidly, sharply, unexpectedly. The shapes of the branches extend and contort. The bramblewood transforms into majestic sycamores and flowing weeping willows. Each gesture is a kernel that generates enough information for an entire improvisation. That gesture is one utterance¹ of the myriad ways in which it could be expanded. What to repeat? What to discard? What to transform? What to massage? To pry into?

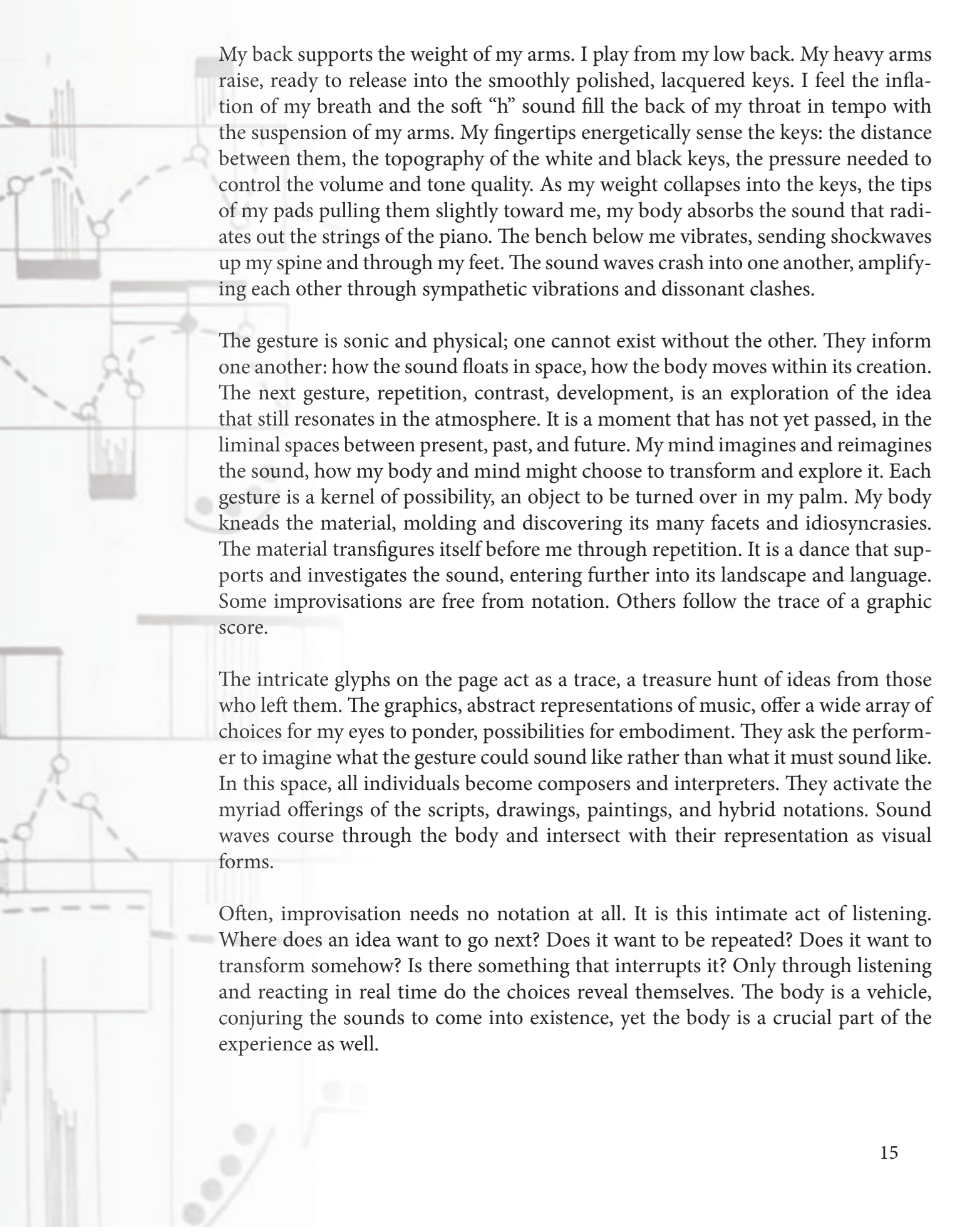
As I continue to move, I notice the past manifesting itself into the present, my mind conjuring the future from the present. The vocabulary of my past leaks into the present, informing, interrupting, fostering the gestures that emerge. I observe repetition of past reflexes and neural pathways. They continue to tangle with the present moment. These repetitions inform where the movement might develop next. The contact points disconnect, reconnect, transfer electric pulses from roots to branches and back again. The past, present, and future intermingle and commune with each other. The trace of what emerges remains in the mind's eye but vanishes from plain sight. The eclectic vocabulary I carry inside me continues to emerge and transform, boiling to the surface, then cooling and submerging again into the depths of my subconsciousness. What gets repeated? What transformed? What will be repeated tomorrow? Three years from now?

My practice becomes a sacred time, a meditation on what emerges from all that has entered my body to this point. How do I confront it and understand the present moment? What traces of the past create such a throughline through to the future? The trace of learned movement patterns are evidence. They are the embodiment of the cultures I am entangled with, the ideas that stir my curiosity. They are the learned behaviors that have ingrained themselves into my most integral neural pathways. I cannot help but watch all these movements burgeoning to the surface and wonder how they came to be and how they will transform next. They hang in the space, drifting off into ephemera but never quite leaving my embodied memory.

Notice the spaces that are free.
Notice the spaces in contact
with something else.

First, notice.
Then dialogue with it.





My back supports the weight of my arms. I play from my low back. My heavy arms raise, ready to release into the smoothly polished, lacquered keys. I feel the inflation of my breath and the soft “h” sound fill the back of my throat in tempo with the suspension of my arms. My fingertips energetically sense the keys: the distance between them, the topography of the white and black keys, the pressure needed to control the volume and tone quality. As my weight collapses into the keys, the tips of my pads pulling them slightly toward me, my body absorbs the sound that radiates out the strings of the piano. The bench below me vibrates, sending shockwaves up my spine and through my feet. The sound waves crash into one another, amplifying each other through sympathetic vibrations and dissonant clashes.

The gesture is sonic and physical; one cannot exist without the other. They inform one another: how the sound floats in space, how the body moves within its creation. The next gesture, repetition, contrast, development, is an exploration of the idea that still resonates in the atmosphere. It is a moment that has not yet passed, in the liminal spaces between present, past, and future. My mind imagines and reimagines the sound, how my body and mind might choose to transform and explore it. Each gesture is a kernel of possibility, an object to be turned over in my palm. My body kneads the material, molding and discovering its many facets and idiosyncrasies. The material transfigures itself before me through repetition. It is a dance that supports and investigates the sound, entering further into its landscape and language. Some improvisations are free from notation. Others follow the trace of a graphic score.

The intricate glyphs on the page act as a trace, a treasure hunt of ideas from those who left them. The graphics, abstract representations of music, offer a wide array of choices for my eyes to ponder, possibilities for embodiment. They ask the performer to imagine what the gesture could sound like rather than what it must sound like. In this space, all individuals become composers and interpreters. They activate the myriad offerings of the scripts, drawings, paintings, and hybrid notations. Sound waves course through the body and intersect with their representation as visual forms.

Often, improvisation needs no notation at all. It is this intimate act of listening. Where does an idea want to go next? Does it want to be repeated? Does it want to transform somehow? Is there something that interrupts it? Only through listening and reacting in real time do the choices reveal themselves. The body is a vehicle, conjuring the sounds to come into existence, yet the body is a crucial part of the experience as well.



Context.

I live in many spaces as an artist, ranging from experimental to commercial and much in between. I find myself in all these spaces between genres. They at once seem to contradict and speak to one another, yet I find throughlines of process and revelation through repetitive practice that becomes my own meditation and self study. My practice is the continual journey of carving out this space in between to allow the various facets of my work to communicate a unified embodiment.

I am an avant garde composer and dance maker in most of the work that reaches a concert hall, stage, or screen. Often, a composer is asked about their “family tree,” and this usually refers to influences, historical traditions, and connections from the past that the composer brings into the present with them. For me, this family tree and history is very much a mix of traditions. I grew up in a musical world of western influences, in a multicultural yet Eurocentric space of in between and blurred lines of interdisciplinary work. I have long admired the philosophy and perspective of John Cage, as he perceived all sound around him as music and embraced aleatoric composition as a means of producing music. I am also a branch that grows from that of Kaaija Saariaho, who uses subtle intricacies of timbre and instrumentation to create unique sonic landscapes that shimmer and fade from one moment to the next. I am also endlessly fascinated by Georges Aperghis’s whimsy and theatricality in his otherwise tightly interwoven, complex textures. His tongue-and-cheek sense of humor surfaces in the ways patterns morph and change without

directly repeating, which has bled into much of my own work. Finally, I would be remiss not to mention my dear teacher and mentor, Reiko Fütting, who relishes the numerology, repetition, and fine gradations in detailed changes. His attention to detail is so fine that it might surpass most listeners' perceptions: what is easily noticeable and what evolves over time in the material. This slow, repetitive, massaging of all possibilities from a single kernel has become a cornerstone of my work across disciplines as I seek understanding through playful repetition and perpetual digging deeper into what already exists.

As a composer-pianist, I have specialized in performing works by living composers. Some pieces are technically demanding and precise in their notation, while others invite the performer to engage with improvisation and interpretation of glyphs and graphics that elude specificity. In these works, I revel in the trace left on the page that invites interpretation, emotion, gesture, embodiment, and indirect communication. Coming from the tradition of classical and romantic period music as a child all the way through my undergraduate years, I felt an immense pressure to live up to unrealistic standards of recordings, spliced hundreds of times to achieve inhuman perfection. I felt I had little to offer the repertoire, knowing how many great pianists had come before me and left behind definitive interpretations of these pieces. In the mountainous recordings of the "canon," I felt increasingly insignificant. I actively wanted to avoid adding to the already overcrowded shrines to the few "great" composers who are held up in western European history books while others are cast aside as secondary or forgotten.

It was from this place that I found myself as a performer. It gives me endless joy and excitement to bring a piece to life for the first time, to give its world or U.S. premiere. Often, this process fosters collaboration





and relationship with the composer who is hearing their work for the first time. Whether I am interpreting graphic scores or traditional notation, the act of bringing a piece into the world for the first time is an endlessly fulfilling, humbling experience. It allows me a degree of freedom in how I interpret and express that is not weighed down by prior iterations deemed to be the “correct” interpretations. In this process, I become an archeologist, uncovering layer upon layer of abstract interpretations, finding artifacts of possibility and ambiguity. I discover, polishing and refining what emerges, the traces left behind by the composer’s words and notations. I discover and rediscover the material, meet it anew, reimagine it, and interpret how it speaks to me in the present moment.

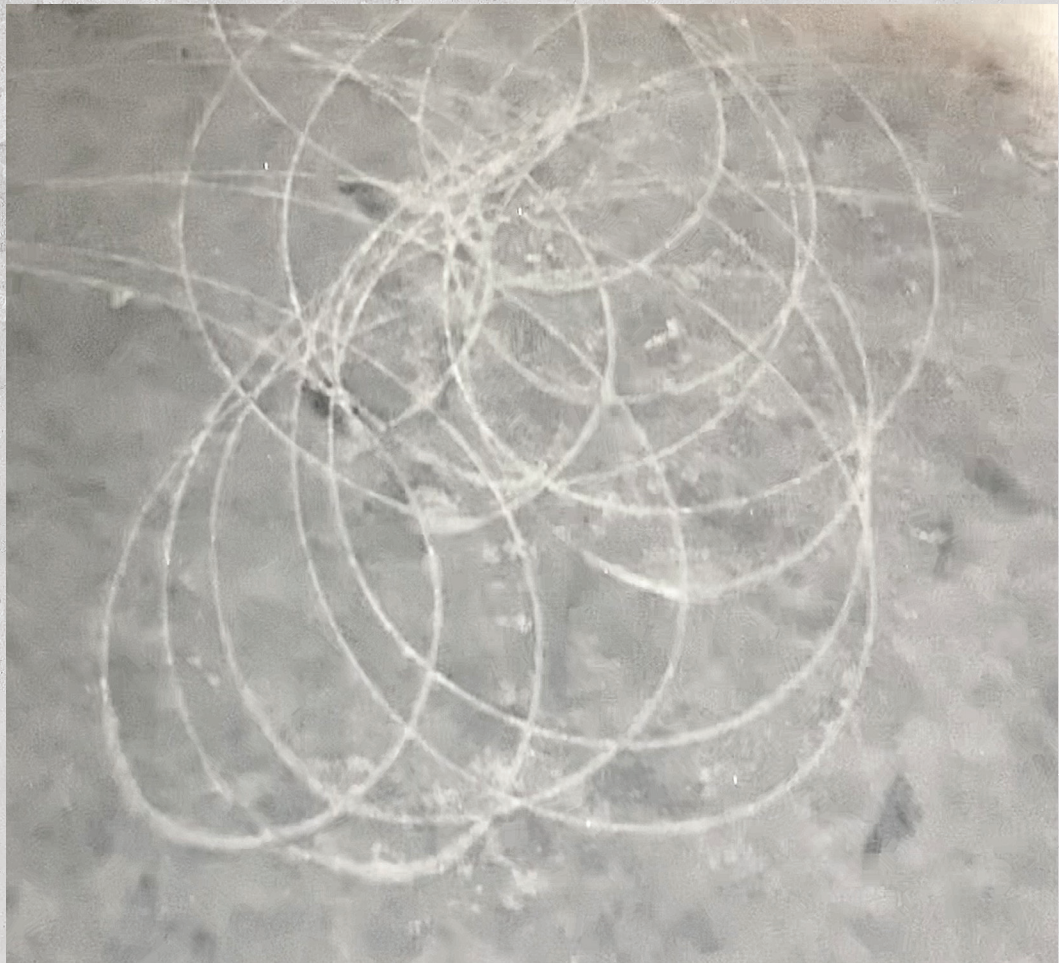
Only a few short months after taking my first piano lessons, my mother also enrolled me in sports, fearing I would not get enough exercise if I sat on the piano bench practicing for hours every day. After only a few short laps around the frozen pond in our yard and mimicking the 1992 Olympics on my living room carpet, I knew that I wanted to pursue figure skating. Soon, I dove into the world of skating as a competitive athlete, which eventually led me into the world of dance. Simultaneously, avant garde music invited me into experimental dance. Before this transformation could happen, I spent fifteen years competing in the subjective spaces of artistic and athletic judgement. There, I felt the power of judges’ ordinal placements and the narrow visions of how a body should look and move. As much as I strove to fit within those guidelines, there always seemed to be something missing, something too one way or another, something else too much or overwhelming. My love for the sport became tangled with the

pain of judgement, of feeling confined within a system I could not fully satisfy. After a series of injuries, I found myself taking the blades off my feet and dancing on the floor in a space full of friction and new possibilities.

What once was a supplement to my work as a skater became a focal point. My family tree grew roots and branches as I found my passion for dance. My world expanded as I studied with my mentors, trying on their movement and absorbing their pedagogical approaches. I see the eclectic blend of them radiate out through my movement quality and pedagogy. They are ever-present in works I have performed, curated, and facilitated. The tectonic plates under my feet shifted after seeing works by greats such as Pina Bausch and Ohad Naharin. Their wild intuition and abandon rubbed up against the strict mathematical constellations I had clung to in music composition, and I plunged into the sensorial world of Gaga and improvisation while in New York. I took back-to-back Broadway jazz and contemporary classes, stumbling out of the studio bruised and shaking, but hungry for more. I went religiously to Dunham class, both craving and fearing the teacher's hand-crafted teaching staff, as it pounded on the ground in time with the drum circle she had assembled. This family tree twists its gnarled roots in and around my work as a somatic practitioner and as a creative making work.

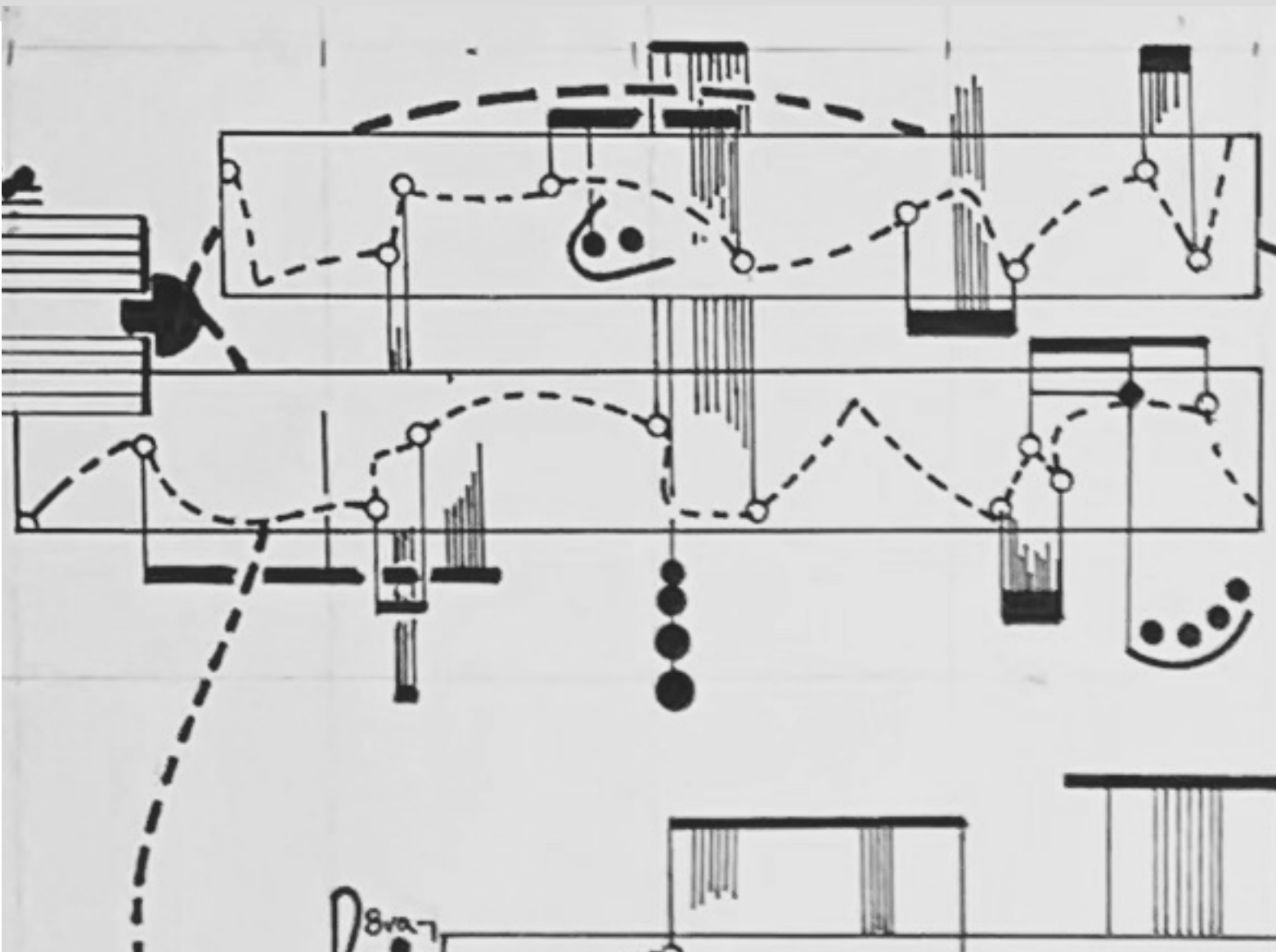
It is here that I find myself truly confronting what it is to be immersed in American culture as a movement artist. I found myself in a hip hop crew, modern companies, improvising, gigging as a freelancer. I found myself performing in a hazmat suit in a sculpture garden in Queens. Presenting my own work in Soho lofts, in Brooklyn basement ravehouses, and finally in residencies and mainstages. Opportunities ranged drastically in character, style, and purpose, but all were opportunities that brought me to where I am now. Much of my work has stemmed from improvisation and my cumulative memory, my family tree intertwined with my identity. My roots and branches grow and tangle with the past, the rich cultural history that surrounds me, the present, the movement that emerges, the understanding of my identity, and the context of my quotidian life that allows these different strands to become knotted together.

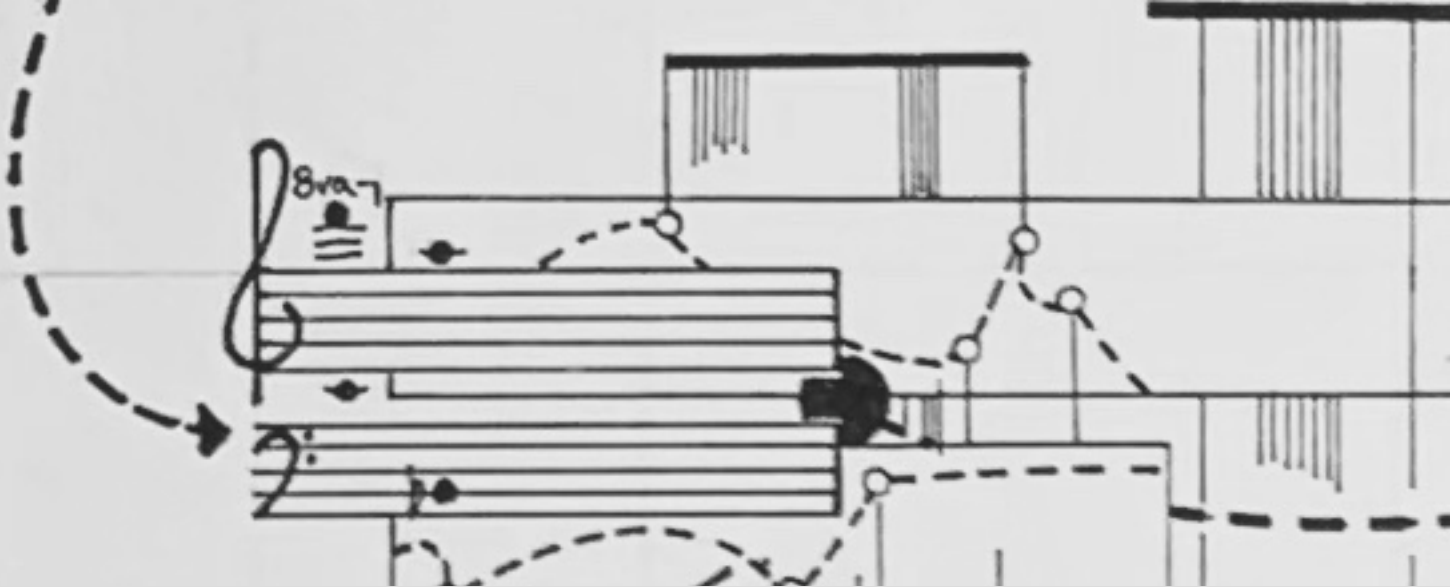
When confronted with influences and family trees, it is essential to consider my cultural background contextualized by living in the U.S. I have absorbed popular culture, Euro-



American traditions, Black traditions, and grappled with my own ethnic roots subconsciously from a distance. That distance can be encapsulated in my very name. I know shockingly little about my name. I hardly know anything about my great-aunt Anne, except that she was one of eleven, that her sister Mary married my Papap, Vince, one of ten, and that their mothers came from Croatia. Neither could read or write; neither spoke English. My grandparents had middle school educations and my grandfather was a coal miner in Pittsburgh. Neither of my grandparents spoke Croatian to my mother. Our culture stopped at lamb on Easter and poppy seed roll for Christmas.

My middle name, Helene, is from my paternal grandmother, who passed away when I was five years old. I hardly have any memories of her when she was healthy. My surname, Goldberg, comes from my father's side. My great-grandfather came from Russia to escape the Pogroms and assimilated into American culture, blending into New York City, shedding his native tongue and Jewish identity. That side of the family became "buffet-style Jews," participating in superficial customs, but remaining agnostic throughout. Pork? No. But ham? Sure. Oftentimes, I introduce myself as half Israeli instead of half Jewish because I perceive Judaism as a religion that I have never practiced. Israeli is not right either, but there is an ambivalence of location with regard to belonging to this complex, uprooted lineage. The question of how to describe myself transforms to become devoid of location: where I am not, what I do not know, whom I do not know, what I have lost and long to reclaim somehow.





What I do know is that I have been formed by the multiple cultures that comprise the United States. In many ways I find myself in the liminalities of cultural identities, caught between the not-knowing and the broader context of what it means to be American, to have roots elsewhere but to also have absorbed the diverse culture all around me. It tangles with the idea of the American dream, the ugliness of living on stolen land, the undeniable reality that we live in the wake of chattel slavery. I watch my body improvise, and I recognize my movement and musical instincts to be informed by all these identities and realities.

Who is my family tree? Whom do I bring into the room with me? I recognize Shi-Shi's and Adrienne's power and syncopation. Luam's control, Uncle Frankie's joie de vivre and his kick in the "tuch-ass" when I needed it. I see Reiko and Nils in my choices of form and space, Donal and Carl in my intuition. As a movement and sound artist, they are my lineage. Some of the teachers I have most identified with are black. I am proud to cite their creativity and vocabulary in my body. I bring them into the room with me. I honor them deeply. A piece of them lives in the container of my body and manifests every time I improvise. This container holds fast to its mentors, understanding these roots more intimately than my bloodline. I see their movement, their sonic patterns ingrained, enculturated, natural. Embedded. They have left behind layers of traces etched deep within my being, crystalized in my ever accumulating embodied memory.

It is impossible to live in the United States and escape the complicated, tangled history of this country, how each person's being is somehow in relationship with these histories. There is not a way to not be caught in the historical web of extraction and oppression that is baked into the country's identity. I recognize that I am implicated in this, and that it is part of the nervous system of who I am as an artist as I work in the spaces of dance, music, and sport. The movement vocabulary that manifests itself in my body, the modalities of musicality that I draw upon, the ideas that circulate in popular culture and philosophy alike all influence my approach to improvisation and later, to pedagogical practice.

My improvisation bears witness to my mixed identity. It is through improvisation that I see strands of cultures that circulate within me and drive my sense of identity. It shows the conglomeration of spaces I have inhabited and the people whom I carry with me. This imperfect belonging and accumulation has led me to where I am now in my work.



Embodied Trace.

It is impossible to escape one's own state of being. One's own memories. One's own trauma. One's own sweat. One's own ability to give and receive love.

The virtuosity of one's practice is already embedded in all these things.

trace

explicit memory

implicit

play within

draw



color

shade

Schadenfreude

Allow sensation to permeate, to become entangled, to overwhelm

One's own state of mind.

One's own sensory input. One's cognitive appraisal.

One's emotions.

DNA

creating layer upon layer

curves overlapping one another

rippling through the torso

Ancestry

curves overwhelming one another

Without the obligation to peaking and crasheding

Amplifieding and shuttereding

Infinite points of beginnings

walking
awaken

tread/ing
procedural memory

*Virtuosity is embodied in the walk. The ownership. The gait and glide. The continual transitioning,
off-weighting, rolling from one to...*

roll

trickle

rustle

ball

*Virtuosity is embedded in the mundane. The germane. The bucolic.
Virtuosity lies in the crinkled corners of the eye.*

the object
the casual observer



causal

and observedinger
scrutinizeringed

scrutinizedinger
one's gaze.

the object is meaning projected
the gaze of the observed reflected
trace

Virtuosity is projecting one's own fantasies. One's own pain. One's own chagrin. One's own insight.

Hisherstory

theirs

implicit memory

findingfound

found objects

roots

self

body percussion

fluidity

Virtuosity lies in one's own self/discovery. One's own practice as research. One's own actions as research. One's behavior as research.

Virtuosity is unapologetic.

Virtuosity is finding paradoxes.

Virtuosity is process.

Virtuosity is ojalá.

Virtuosity is mining.

Virtuosity is accessingedable.

Virtuosity is finding.

Virtuosity is primal.

Virtuosity is raw.

Virtuosity is self.

Virtuosity is endless.

Virtuosity is...



Retrace.

Let things overlap.

Trace.

Get messy.

The score asks for it.

Trace.

The trace is what is left behind. An artifact, visible, or invisible. It may be etched into the ice, committed to paper, or seen through embodiment as a distribution of weight or way of listening. The trace contains symbolic meaning that can be read with a multiplicity of interpretations which stem from one's collective knowledge and lived experience. The trace is only one representation of the greater idea it seeks to transmit as well. One music note, grapheme, or print on the ice, is a representation of its greater concept, which manifests iterations of itself through a repetition and accumulation over time.² The understanding of the trace transcends any manifestation of marking itself.

In the world of graphic scores and hypernotation, the score communicates a reaching toward, where there are many possibilities of articulating and interpreting what is set forth on the page. Graphic scores use a variety of shapes, symbols, and variations of traditional notation to create visually evocative compositions to be interpreted by performers. While traditional notation exists in various forms across cultures, there are many components of music that are not adequately expressed through the conventions that exist in what is referred to as “common practice” notation in the western world. Therefore, alternative ways of communication offer what preexisting notation cannot. Graphics and glyphs exist in abstraction, offering a greater interpretative license to the person engaging with the score. For instance, how a person interprets what a circle is supposed to represent can take many forms, all of which are equally valid and valuable. Each of these offerings will sound markedly distinct from one another and are likely not repeatable, as the improvisatory act leaves a high degree of variability amongst iterations of the same task.

A graphic score is a shared compositional experience between the artist who created the score itself and the artist who interprets it. The graphic score acts as a trace, connecting the artists together in conversation. That conversation then points to an abstraction of the trace that only partially reveals itself through the various realizations of different performers and performances.

Hypernotation, while it functions differently from purely graphic scores, still points towards a multiplicity of interpretation. Often associated with the New Complexity movement, hypernotation refers to music that is purposely notated to such a degree that it becomes impossible for the performer to perform all that is asked of them on the page. This may come in the form of writing extraordinarily complex rhythmic patterns nested one inside another, conflicting expressive instructions, notes clustered together so densely that it is impossible to discern which notes they are, and a variety of other markings that clutter the page. It is through this noise that a performer has the ability to choose what to focus on, what to play, what to leave out, and what they struggle to capture but cannot.

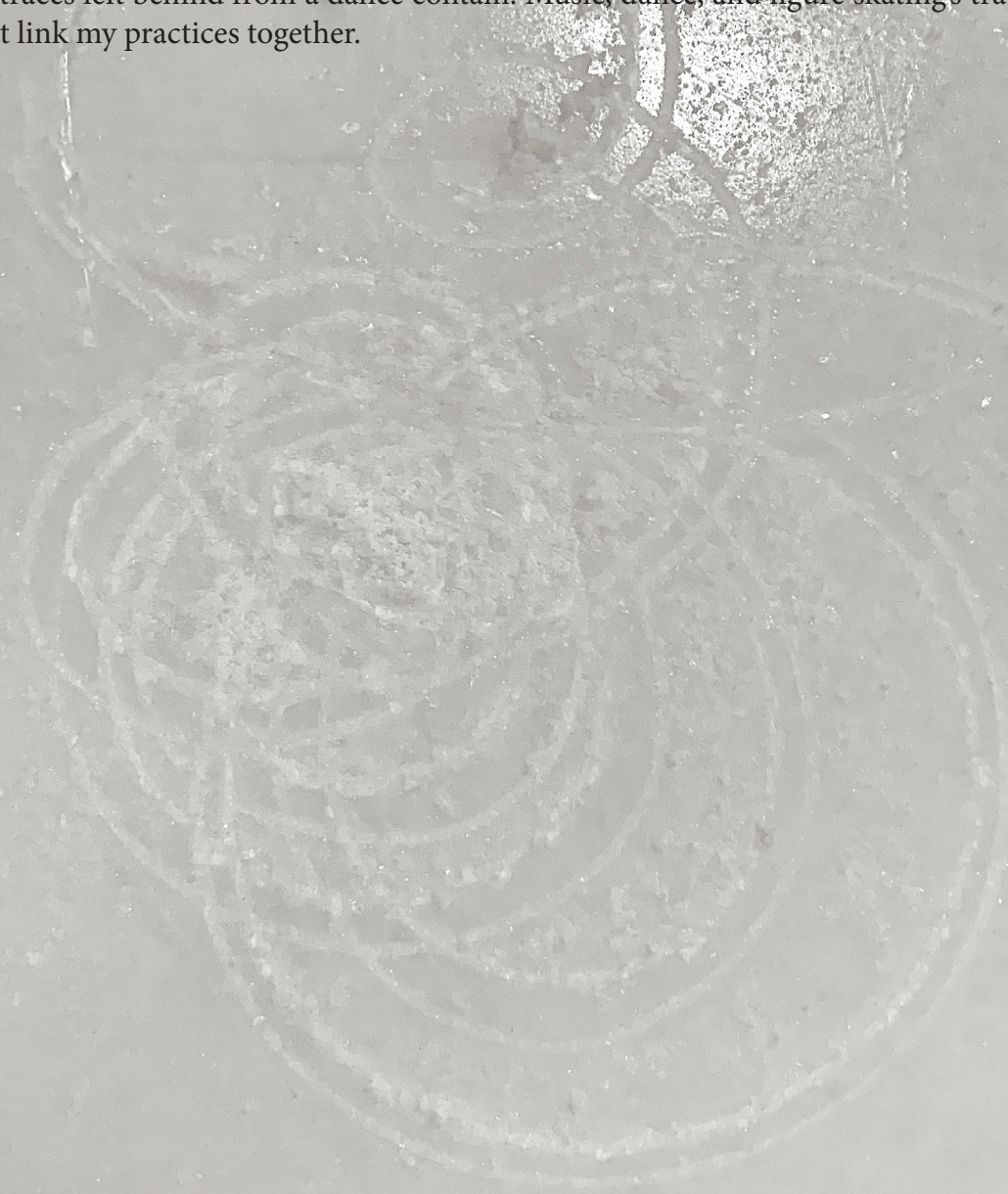
As an interdisciplinary artist/practitioner, I find the idea of what is left out, that trace that never comes into existence, to be the art that emerges. The inefficiency of what the trace communicates promotes a multiplicity of interpretation.³ What does it communicate? What is not transmitted? What is inef-

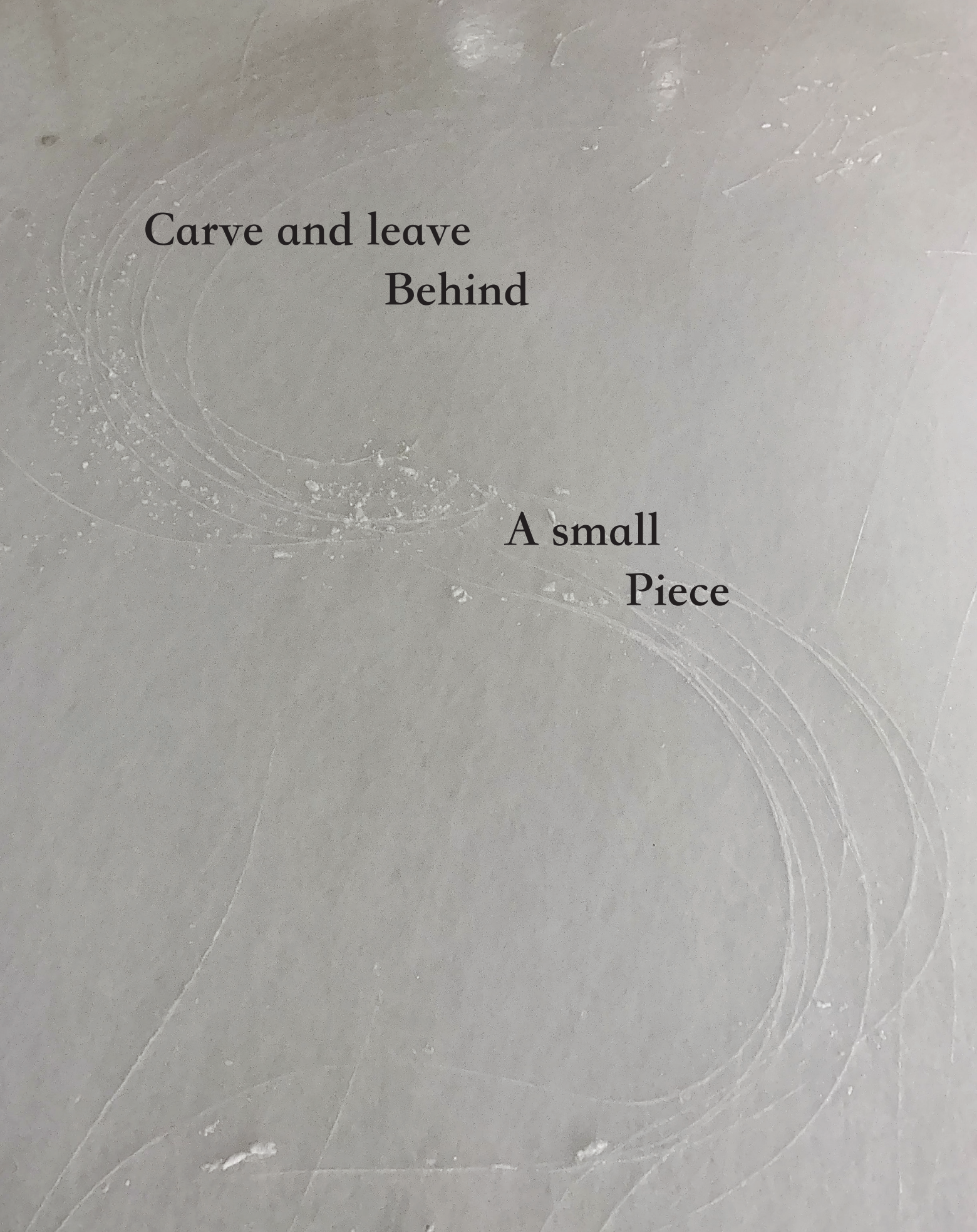




ficient? What is cast off into the ephemera or left untouched? What creates discomfort or struggle that turns into something that escapes conventional methods of notation? What result might seem like an error which opens the possibility of something else in performance? What may seem like an information overload is rather an offering of choices to the performer. What directives do they choose to engage with, and how do they engage with them? Navigating such information becomes the journey, and what emerges from this process is the art to be experienced by the participant who embodies the task.

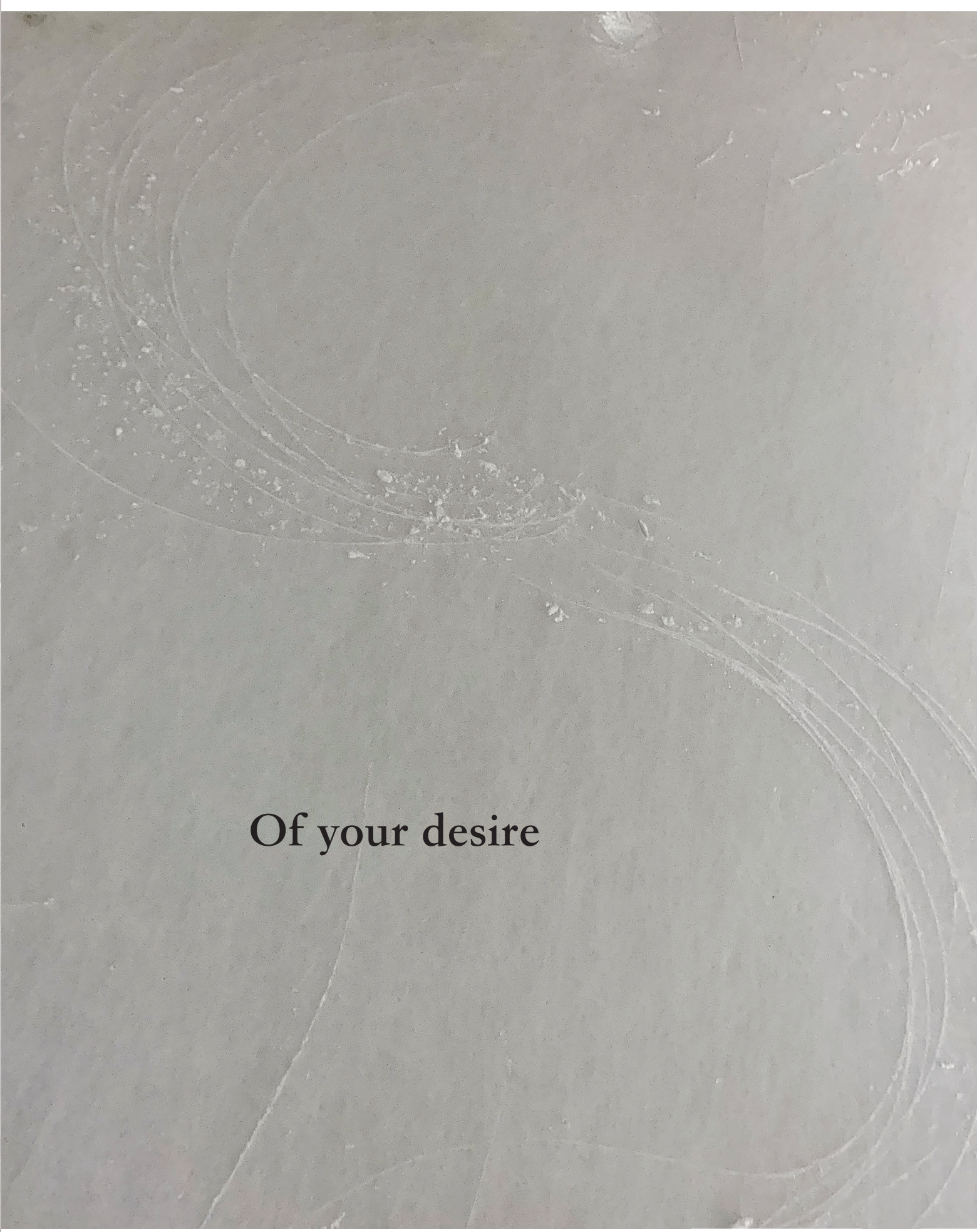
The act of embodying an inherently underlying concept is an act of art making that manifests itself through practice and performance. The performance is also a form of practice that engages the entire person. Confronting and re-confronting the material deepens and expands what graphic notation can be and what the traces left behind from a dance contain. Music, dance, and figure skating's tracings are access points that link my practices together.





Carve and leave
Behind

A small
Piece



Of your desire



Draw a regular shape.

Draw another.

And another.



Until complexity

overtakes simplicity.

Ephemera.

The ephemerality found in dance, on a durable floor, does not escape the lessons of the ice surface. When a dance takes place, the footprint of the dance is largely invisible when the practitioner moves fluidly from one motion or step to another. One shape morphs itself into another and another, transforming the body's configuration and orientation through space in real time. Where and how did the body travel on stage? Where did it start? How did it get from one place to another and leave no visible mark behind? Like a carbon footprint, it still exists. It exists in memory, in thought, in the embodied knowledge that exists within the practitioner.

On the ice, these tracings accumulate. Strokes overlap and intersect with one another; lighter strokes blend in while the more aggressive strokes slice deeply into the ice, indicating the assertion of power and force. The points and lobes left behind by the blade's turns become a cursive script left behind in exquisite, detailed patterns. Spins, as well, leave behind overlapping circles that resemble a flower dusted with the spray of snow in all directions. Some marks reveal this acceleration while others show the edge pressure needed to take off for a jump. Divits in the ice are remnants of toe picks, usually from explosive jumps. As the pock marks accumulate throughout a session, those portions of the ice become filled with tiny craters. If they are not filled in with snow, these holes remain visible, only partially filled in, after the zamboni does its best to wipe clean the surface.



Each of these marks is a trace of information. These scriptive curves provide legibility to the practitioner on many levels. They remain and accumulate for all those who inhabit and move through the shared space. These marks provide feedback and information about how skaters leave the ice for jumps, how they are using the toe picks to launch into the air, where their weight distribution is on a curve, and more. A straighter but deeper cut into the ice suggests moving across the ice backwards with the weight distributed towards the front of the blade, since only the toe-pick would make such a mark. As a skater launches into the air in a jump, the moment of the toe leaving the ice shows itself like a check mark or serpent's tongue. Changes in curves, shapes of craters, pressure points in the ice, all of these lend themselves to a deeper understanding of how a practitioner embodies their knowledge and how to continue to refine their technique. Where a pick mark lies in relation to an edge is a clue to a jumper's take-off position and orientation through the air. A successive line of looping ovals reveals an unbalanced spin that traveled across the ice. The orientation of the lines informs partners' orientation to one another, how they track each other on the various lobes and curves they create together.

The sounds these lines create linger in the air, a byproduct of movement that just happened. The music of these movements is part of the icy ephemera of the moment, fleeting wisps of work that dissipate as quickly as they emerge, yet they embed themselves into the collective consciousness of my work. The inverse occurs in how I produce the music. The gestures become the byproduct of the sound created, lending themselves to the overlapping sound and gesture worlds that accumulate across disciplines. The sounds of the floor and the ice appear in my production of sound as a musician, and the gestures of music creation lay nestled into the creation of movement. While all visible traces are subject to erasure, these are not erased. They are fleeting, ephemeral to the naked eye, but the lived experience is not erased. These experiences continue to build up, creating a delicate film of residue that is never wiped clean.



Search

to/ward/ing
through/thorough/ly

Space

space

space...

fu/tile

finite.

Break

other side.

tr/ans/scend/gress/ing

to/ward/ing

tr/ac/ack/ing

tan/gent/le/ial/ile

Beyond.

Pressure.

The pressure into the floor. The load. The rip. Pressure is exertion, the energy behind the push. In music, exertion creates vibration. Sound waves ripple and disturb the air. Pressure in a metaphoric sense becomes increasingly tangled with how the body itself becomes the trace. It too is a physical object that becomes a signifier, which points to other implications of a greater social context,⁴ just as the trace of notation reaches towards the many connotations that exist between the lines of language and markings. Pressure is the weight of the body into the ground, but also the weighted gaze of others on the body. It is seen in its stature, proportions, skin color, gender, perceived virtuosity, maturity.

The gaze on a body is never without projection. What is projected depends on the person perceiving. What a person perceives is colored by experience and psychological understanding and world viewpoint. Namely, how one sees and interprets the world is based on interpersonal interactions, socialization, cultural values, belief systems, and environmental factors, and the gaze on a body cannot escape any of these confines. The sociological theory of symbolic interactionism posits that individuals see objects as having value and significance in the context of other visual objects.⁵ Since the body itself is a visual object fraught with projected meaning, it becomes a signifier of a multifaceted discussion of gender identity, performance, class, race, and economics.⁶ How can the body, a semiotic sign, escape the weight of such signifiers that lead to the signified meanings?

The gaze creates pressure on the body in an aesthetic artform or sport, which magnifies the intensity in which Western societies have sexualized the female body in particular.⁷ The visual identifiers of practice attire, costuming, hair, makeup, thinness, and muscle tone accentuate the significance of the body itself.⁸ These identifiers of adultification and maturity not only apply to the body itself but are also projected on the athlete's intellect, though many of these athletes are still minors. The lines between child and adult become blurred because of athletic expectations and expectations of responsibility, accountability, and emotional maturity.

In some styles of concert dance, this trope has been challenged to a certain extent by the use of looser, unisex clothing, though the aesthetic art-sport of figure skating remains largely in this gendered, conformist trope through mandatory requirements of proper sport attire. A rule that women must wear skirts was mandated after German champion Katerina Witt wore a scandalous fringed costume and French champion Surya Bonaly preferred unitards.⁹ It was only in 2006 that women were allowed to wear leggings again. Men still must wear full-length trousers. The U.S. Figure Skating Rulebook states that costuming "must be modest, dignified, and appropriate for athletic competition... [costuming] must not give the effect of excessive nudity inappropriate for the discipline."¹⁰ The reason for such restrictions cannot only have come from necessity of sport, but rather from larger pressures of sociological norms and constructs. Further, why must this be explicitly stated?

Usually, figure skating costumes are adorned with crystals, airbrushing, and mesh which accentuate and enhance the shape and presence of the body, only adding to how the body itself is placed on visual


display. These costumes are considered “high performance wear,”¹¹ calling upon fabrics that are pliable enough to stretch with the body’s every movement and durable enough to endure the demanding elements required in sport. However, these idealized, significant costumes are exorbitantly expensive, precluding most participants from accessing such adornment. Before an athlete has even begun to move, the costume has communicated so much to those who gaze upon it. The costume performs.

If one even has access to such costuming, it also often is revealing and sexualizes the body wearing it, validating the outward perception of maturity. Never in sport, at least, does a performer wear costuming that is not fitted, and most female costumes are entirely form-fitting, exposing them to the gaze of others from both critical and sexual standpoints. Beyond the mere fit of the costume, plunging necklines, revealing skirts, and see-through mesh further sexualize those who wear these costumes, making them appear as adult and alluring as possible, regardless of actual age. While young girls undergo adultification in many facets of socialization and Western constructs, this is an extreme example that largely seems to go unexamined. Why does this practice continue?

To return to the example of Surya Bonaly and her preference for leggings, this calls into the discussion race, bluntly and blatantly. As a black woman, Bonaly was unable to find tights that matched her skin color, and therefore leggings offered an alternative. To bring this discussion specifically to figure skating, there are very few participants of color, and fewer still make it to levels of national and international competition. The sport has perpetuated the aesthetic values of the “ice princess,” the small, thin girl, likely blonde and identified as white, who, according to societal tropes and expectations, is also thin and well developed, yet not too bulky or strong looking. Such ideas directly contradict one another in the pursuit of developing muscle for increasingly difficult elements. Especially in women’s singles skating, technical demands have never been greater with the advent of multiple women attempting triple axels and quadruple jumps in competition to remain in medal contention at the elite levels. These patriarchal notions remain pervasive in the subjective part of the scoring, and it will likely not change unless there is fundamental work to expose unconscious bias in judging.

Who does this exclude? Does this also exclude athletes of a certain age? A certain body type? Socioeconomic status? There has been a tidal wave of young athletes, particularly from Russia, who are attempting quadruple jumps as preteens and adolescents. Most of these young women are prepubescent and their dominance is short lived once puberty changes their bodies’ proportions. Similarly, only a select few who are able to pay for coaching, ice time, equipment, costumes, and accessories have the chance to successfully compete and participate in this world of sport. Most socioeconomic statuses do not allow for the amount of disposable income necessary to participate in elite levels of competition, much less even find moderate levels of success at the sport. Who are the few who do make it in the realm of sport?





Press.
Release.
What remains?

Repeat until finished.

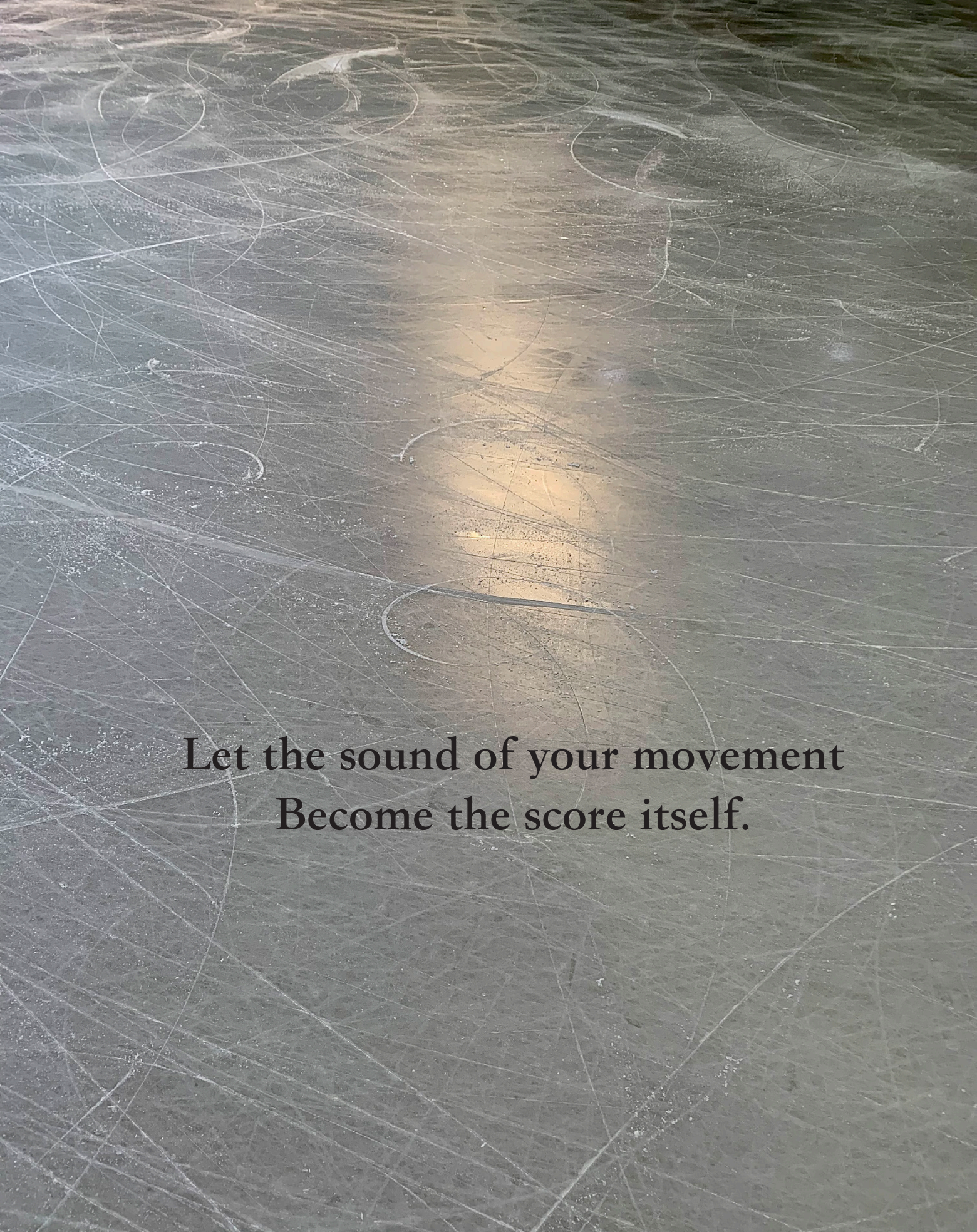
Present.

A large portion of my daily work is to develop young figure skating athletes who compete under the framework of the International Judging System (IJS). IJS was set forth by the International Skating Union and upheld by the United States's national governing body, U.S. Figure Skating. This system came about after the 2002 olympics in Salt Lake City, when Canadian pair team Jamie Salé & David Pelletier lost the gold medal to Russian team Yelena Berezhnaya and Anton Sikharulidze amid claims of bribery and subjective scoring.¹² While this was not an isolated event of subjectivity within the sport, it was the catalyst that initiated the change from the 6.0 system to the IJS system. In the old system, 6.0 was considered perfect, and every value below that was an estimation of how close to perfect a skater's technical and artistic abilities were. The International Judging System is imperfect as well, but it instead assigns numeric values to each element along with a grade of execution score that amplifies or diminishes the base value of the element. Similarly, artistry is rewarded separately with scores from 0-10 for categories of skating skills, transitions, performance, composition, and interpretation, all of which are highly subjective.

As a coach, I strive to subvert the system. To reject the aspects of it that do not serve my work and values. To promote exploration and freedom from the confines of the system. This system, though problematic in many ways, is a space in which I am charged to create work, to highlight a competitor's strengths, minimize weaknesses, and protect them from the harsh pressures of the outside gaze to the best of my ability. The challenge of finding creativity within these confines while packaging a winning program for an athlete is something on which I thrive. Yet, I am acutely aware of the commerciality that comes with how the package "markets" itself to the audience and judges in particular. How does the skater move? This will inform musical style choices, movement vocabulary, and maturity of the piece. Which elements are most risky? Where should they be placed and how? Are there any technical considerations that need to be camouflaged or highlighted from a judging perspective?

In moving between the systems of art and sport, I see opportunity to escape the pressure and help create space outside this pressure for my athletes. There must exist an alternative to the ways this work has been valued and marketed. How can choreography be both valued and marketed under such constraints? How has my work in this realm been professionalized and institutionalized, and how can I elude such snares? The balance of art and sport comes with the freedom of choice, what I choose to engage in, and what I choose to subvert.

These choices I make are an improvisation,¹³ a movement within a set of constraints that inform what must be included and what can be included. The choices that come from within these spaces create the repetition, the accumulation, the trace of what I hope will become a transformation of how my young athletes interface with the sport. It is how they might learn to improvise and work through the constraints of everyday challenges they will encounter in the future. The trace I leave behind, the residue of my work, reaches far beyond technicalities.

The background of the image is a dark, textured surface, possibly ice or a polished metal plate, covered in a dense network of fine, light-colored scratches and scuffs. In the center of the image, there is a bright, circular reflection of light, creating a glowing effect that contrasts with the dark surroundings. The text is centered in the lower half of the image.

Let the sound of your movement
Become the score itself.

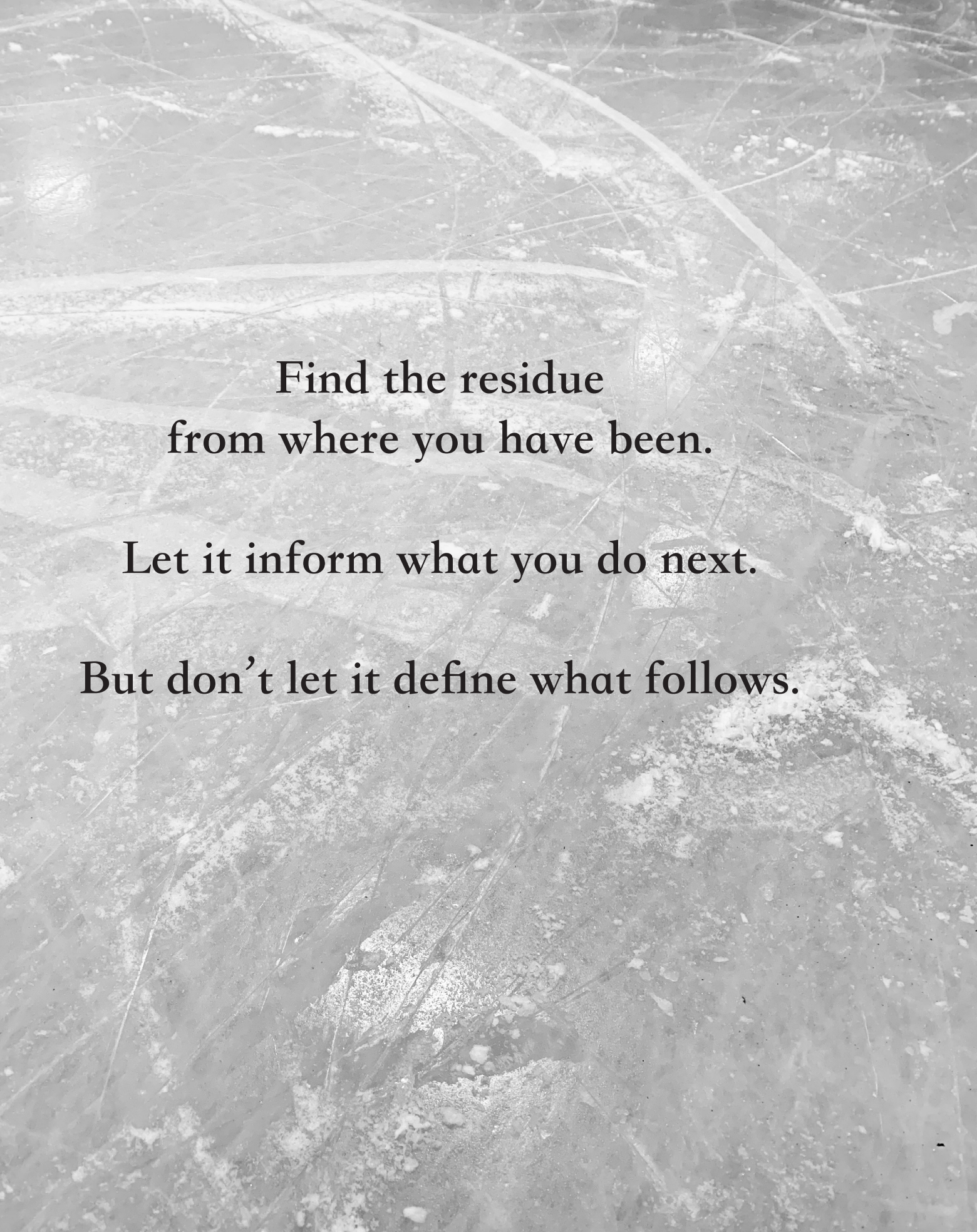
The background of the image is a dark, textured surface, possibly leather or a similar material, covered in numerous fine, light-colored scratches and scuffs. In the upper right corner, there is a distinct area of lighter, yellowish-brown discoloration, suggesting wear or damage to the surface. The overall appearance is aged and worn.

What is there that escapes the gaze?



Choose to listen.

Deeply.



Find the residue
from where you have been.

Let it inform what you do next.

But don't let it define what follows.

Residue.

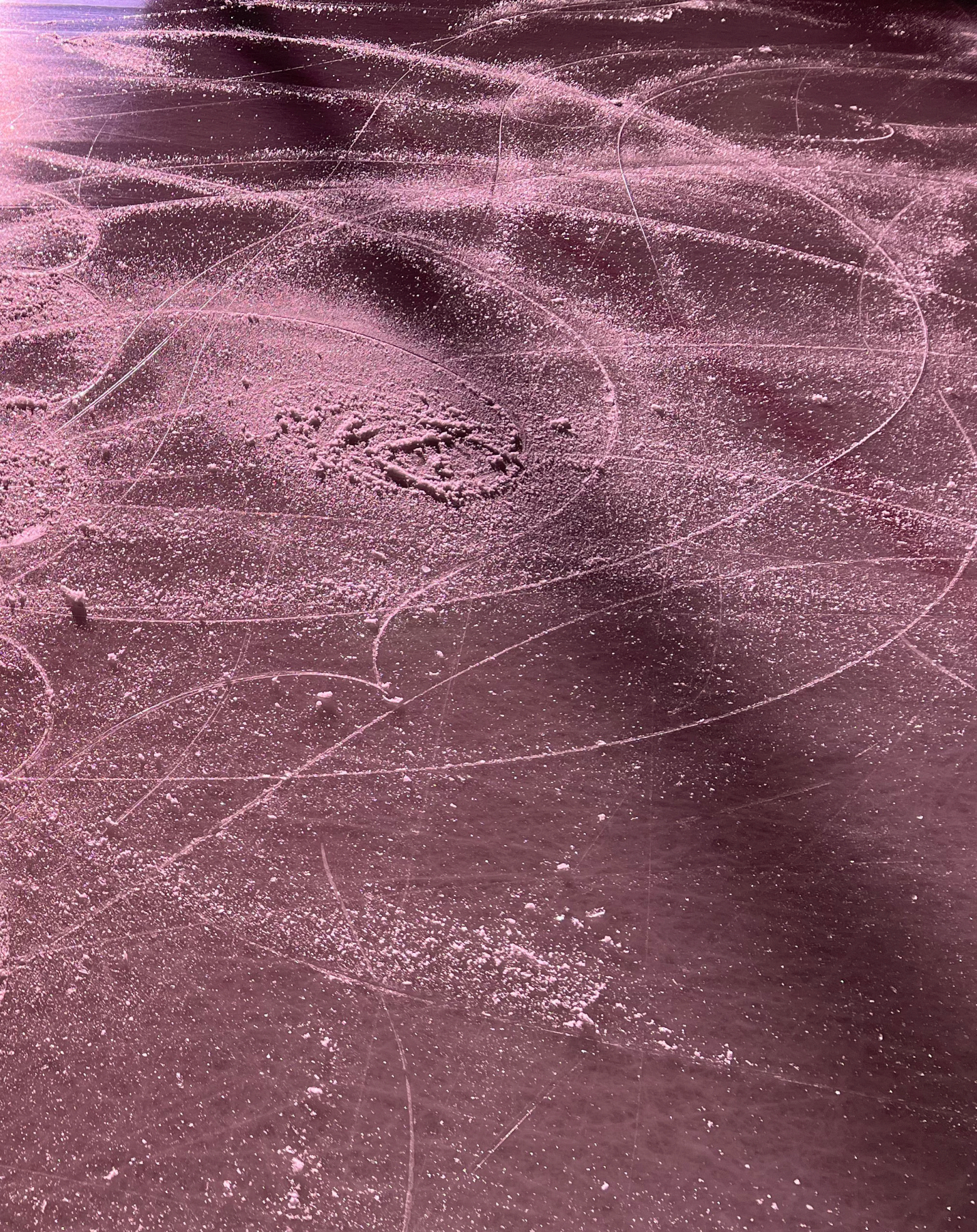
So what truly is left behind? The residue of this movement carved into the ice is physical. However, it exists regardless of the physical markings left on the ice in my practice. There is a vibration that remains after a body has activated the space just as a sonic vibration remains in the air after a note has been played. Its envelope carries through the room and embeds itself in the memories of the listener and the performer, who is also a listener. Vibrations of sound echo through the body and manifest through movement. After that sound has dissipated, where has it gone? Does that have a different residue because of the intensity of sound and movement? Dance remains etched into the embodied memory of the mover's psyche. In bruises that remain on elbows and knees. In the embodied knowledge that continues to accumulate and becomes the practice itself. Loops upon loops upon loops.

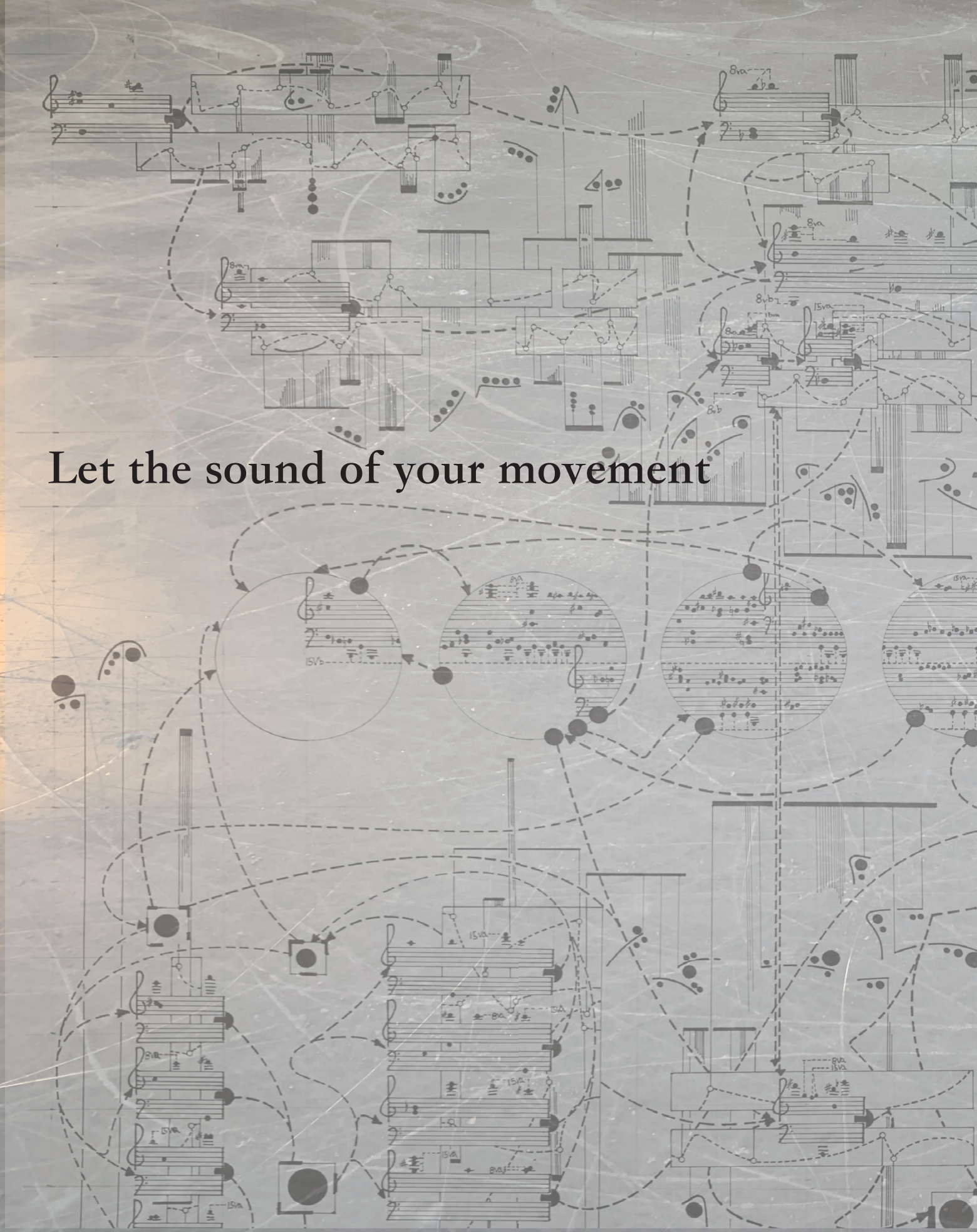
Regardless of medium, my work in improvisation is that of repetition, accumulation, memory, and time. It overwhelms my senses and escapes the passing of time. In this world, time stands still and accelerates all at once, disorienting my understanding of where the past, present, and future intersect. The accumulation loops upon itself, encircling and entangling with it an improvisatory practice of freedom.

My notation, my tracing, becomes a way of engaging in the multiple worlds I shift between. The language of these etchings may change, but their meaning is a meeting point of engagement. While the trace may seem inaccessible except for someone who is inside the language, there is a common thread, a way of knowing beneath the surface. In these different communities, the interpretations, the genealogies, the languages of these spaces run deep. Yet, notation becomes a way that I find myself tying my work together. The roots and branches of my family trees, not just biological but of practice, reach outward in nonlinear tendrils, all facilitating my work across mediums, even if indirectly. I cannot be in one community without the other entering into the room with me as well. I cannot be a dancer without also being a musician and figure skater. I cannot be a coach without also being an educator and creative.

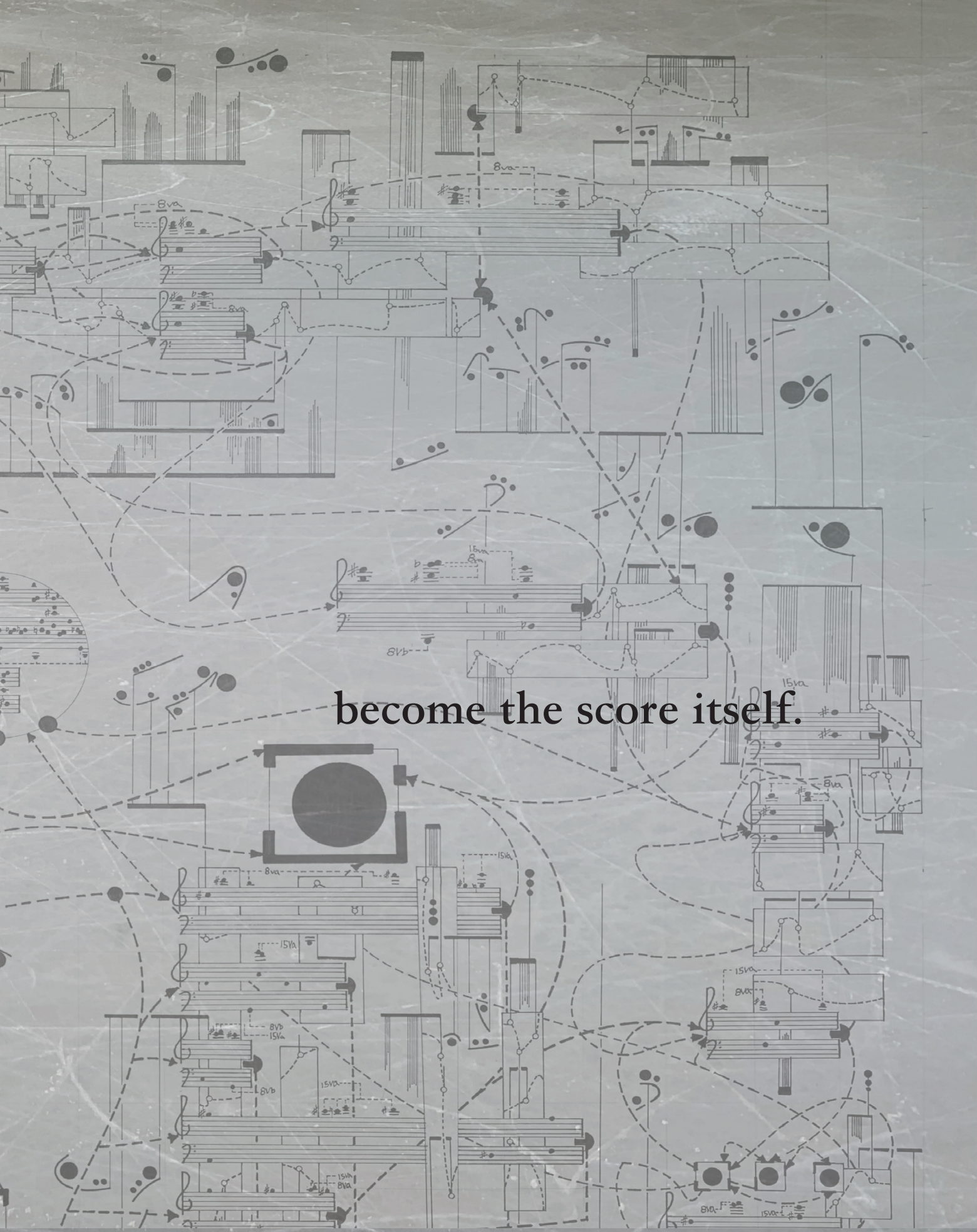
Through graphics and glyphs, I see different access points for different communities. I live between worlds, one of sonic space, an open trace of graphic scores, colors, and open notations. The floor and the ice are different access points to different communities as well. Yet, is there a place that escapes getting stuck in each of the different places, but rather a compelling link amongst them? Instead of code shifting between worlds, notation may be a collective way of engaging in all these worlds. A path towards freedom. To improvise in the various languages of sport and art. To navigate time as an embodied practitioner. To understand space, sound, form, and the accumulation of all these things. All can be found in what was left behind in the past. What is present in our consciousness. And what we choose to do next with the residue that lingers.







Let the sound of your movement



become the score itself.

Endnotes.

- 1 Charles Rosen, "Concealed Structures: Heinrich Schenker, Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson." *Romantic Poets, Critics, and Other Madmen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 10-12.
- 2 Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 3, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931-35) 456-552.
- 3 Martin Heidegger, "On the Origin of the Work of Art" in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 2008) 148-152.
- 4 Iris Marion Young "Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality." *Human Studies* 3, no. 2 (1980): 137-56.
- 5 George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934) 7-8.
- 6 Joel Savary, *Why Black and Brown Kids Don't Skate: a Discourse on the Disparities of Race in Figure Skating* (Independent Publishing, 2020).
- 7 Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body* (New York: Palgrave MacMillon, 2003) 144-45.
- 8 Michelle Liu Carriger, "Cheering Ain't for Show, Y'all," in *Sport Plays*, ed. Eero Laine & Broderick Chow (London and New York: Routledge, 2020) 190-197.
- 9 Abigail M. Feder, "'A Radiant Smile from the Lovely Lady': Overdetermined Femininity in 'Ladies' Figure Skating." *TDR* (1988-) 38, no. 1 (1994): 62-78.
- 10 United States Figure Skating, *The 2006-2007 Official U.S. Figure Skating Rulebook*, (Colorado Springs, CO: U.S. Figure Skating) 289.
- 11 Kaitlyn Frey, "Vera Wang Reflects on More Than 20 Years of Designing Olympic Figure Skating Costumes," (New York: People Magazine, 2018).
- 12 Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber, "Years After Salt Lake City Scandal, French Judge Finds Peace" ed. John O'Brien (online: Reuters, 2018).
- 13 Danielle Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010) 12-28.

List of Images.

p. 23: etching I by Keving Baldwin. Mixed media.

p. 25: etching II by Kevin Baldwin. Mixed media.

p. 27: etching III by Kevin Baldwin. Mixed media.

p. 14-15, 21-21, 55-56: graphic score by Kevin Baldwin.

All photos of the ice were taken and edited by Goldberg-Baldwin.

Bibliography.

- Albright, Ann Cooper. *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011.
- Albright, Ann Cooper. *Engaging Bodies: The Politics and Poetics of Corporeality*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013.
- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Campbell, Edward. *Music After Deleuze. Deleuze Encounters*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Feder, Abigail M. "'A Radiant Smile from the Lovely Lady': Overdetermined Femininity in 'Ladies' Figure Skating.'" *TDR* 38, no. 1 (1994): 62–78.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. New York: Continuum Books, 1975.
- Goldman, Danielle. *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. *The Black Dancing Body*. New York: Palgrave MacMillon, 2003.
- Heidegger, Martin. "On the Origin of the Work of Art," *Basic Writings*. 1st Harper Perennial Modern Thought Edition., ed. David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper Collins, 2008.
- Hooks, Bell. *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*. New York: The New Press, 1995.
- Johnson, Evan. "On Waste and Superfluity: Recent Works." Cambridge, MA: Self, 2009.
- Jones, Amelia, & Adrian Heathfield. *Perform Repeat Record*. Chicago, USA & Bristol, UK: Intellect Ltd., 2012.
- Katan-Schmid, Einav. *Embodied Philosophy in Dance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016.
- Kestnbaum, Ellen. *Culture on Ice: Figure Skating & Cultural Meaning*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003.
- Laine, Eero and Broderick Chow, ed. *Sports Plays*. London & New York: Taylor & Francis, 2021.

- Lewis, George and Benjamin Piekut, eds. "Introduction: On Critical Improvisation Studies," *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies, Volume 2*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Lyndon C. S. Way, and Simon McKerrrell. *Music As Multimodal Discourse: Semiotics, Power and Protest. Bloomsbury Advances in Semiotics*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.
- Manning, Erin. *Always More than One*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012.
- McNeill, David. *Gesture and Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Mead, George Herbert. *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Colin Smith. London and New York: Routledge, 1945.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Sense and Nonsense*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965.
- Phelan, Peggy. "Feminist Theory, Poststructuralism, and Performance." *TDR* 32, no. 1 (Spring, 1988): 107–27.
- Peirce, Charles Sanders. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 3, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931-35.
- Pope, Stephen Travis. "Music Notations and the Representation of Musical Structure and Knowledge." *Perspectives of New Music*, 24/2 (Spring – Summer, 1986) 156-189.
- Rosen, Charles. "Concealed Structures: Heinrich Schenker, Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson." *Romantic Poets, Critics, and Other Madmen*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Sack, Daniel. "Footprints: *Dance on Paper* by Trisha Brown." *PAJ*, 129 (2021) 19-30.
- Savary, Joel. *Why Black and Brown Kids Don't Skate: a Discourse on the Disparities of Race in Figure Skating*. Independent Publishing, 2020.
- Schneider, Rebecca. "Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment." *Performance Research* 6 (2001) 100-108.
- Sheriff, John. *The Fate of Meaning: Charles Peirce, Structuralism, and Literature*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Siddal, Gillian and Ellen Waterman, eds. *Negotiated Moments: Improvisation, Sound, and Subjectivity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016

Tarasti, Eero. *Existential Semiotics*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001.

Tétrault-Farber, Gabrielle. "Years After Salt Lake City Scandal, French Judge Finds Peace" ed. John O'Brien. Online: Reuters, 2018.

United States Figure Skating, *The 2006-2007 Official U.S. Figure Skating Rulebook*. Colorado Springs, CO: U.S. Figure Skating.

Woodward, Karen and J. F. "For a Semiotics of the Theater." *SubStance* 6/7, no. 18/19 (1977): 135-38.

Young, Iris Marion. "Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality." *Human Studies* 3, no. 2 (1980): 137-56.

