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## Between Us

Online Score by Motion Bank at the Mainz University of Applied Sciences,  
online <https://betweenus.motionbank.org/>, 2019

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*Between Us* Online Score by Motion Bank at the Mainz University of Applied Sciences, online <https://betweenus.motionbank.org/>, 2019

The project *Between Us* brought together dance, fine arts, and digital dance research to explore questions arising from the exchange of knowledge between disciplines. The interdisciplinary collaboration between three institutions, Staatstheater Mainz, Kunsthalle Mainz, and Motion Bank hosted at the Mainz University of Applied Sciences, was based on a newly created dance piece named *Effect* by choreographer Taneli Törmä. The research project Motion Bank develops software and methods for the documentation and annotation of contemporary dance practices. As part of the collaboration, the piece's creative process at tanzmainz (the dance company of Staatstheater Mainz) was digitally documented via video and Motion Bank's annotation systems, enabling a close study of the recordings. The finished piece was recorded using motion capture, multi-channel sound and video, forming a uniquely complete digital data package. The piece *Effect* and its data then served as the starting point for new works by international contemporary artists invited by Kunsthalle Mainz.

*Between Us* offers an interdisciplinary perspective on the underlying processes of choreographic practices. It draws significant bridges between choreography, contemporary dance, traditional artistic contexts, data, and creative coding while translating aspects of the *Effect* choreography into digital form. It does so by having as a clear point of departure the question; "what concepts can be transferred from one discipline into another and what is reflected back into the original discipline after such a shift?" (*Between Us* exhibition catalogue)

The Motion Bank team responds to this by creating a valuable 'Online Score' for the *Between Us* project, which includes extensive video documentation of the *Effect* choreography and its choreographic development, interviews with all partners, a 3D visualisation of the piece, computer-based visualisations, and the recorded data. With this impressive 'Online Score', Motion Bank creates a welcoming digital space for an in-depth exploration of a choreography and its development processes.

A key contribution of the project is that it follows and documents the choreography's creative development and not only the finished piece. By observing and live-annotating the creative development of *Effect*, Motion Bank demonstrates the potential benefits of an informed annotation process. The development of movement material is customarily an intimate and private creative process taking place between the makers in the studio. However, with this Online Score, Motion Bank shares with the visitors the creative processes of developing choreographic structures and patterns. For example, in the "Creation process" section of the website, visitors can experience significant creative moments that occurred during rehearsals and are guided through this material by David Rittershaus's annotations that provide context on the choreographer and dancers' creative decision-making processes. One of the most exciting contributions for the analysis of creative processes is the "Development of the choreographic structure", a graphic arrangement of how elements of the choreography evolved from the beginning of rehearsals until the final version of *Effect*.

One of the project highlights is the 3D video visualisation of the motion capture data from *Effect*, presented next to a synchronised recording of the choreography. In the "Introduction" section of the 'Online Score', Motion Bank renders the traces the dancers shaped in space into "graphic paths" and makes it possible to observe interrelations between the performers and spatial aspects of the choreography. Next to this, the paths are translated into graphic visualisations providing alternative visions of the invisible tracks the dancers created and how they moved between choreographic constructions. With these views, Motion Bank demonstrates

the complexity of choreographic thinking and the abundance of movement information, even in minimalistic performances such as *Effect* in which dancers perform “ordinary” pedestrian-like movements.

“Choreographic concepts” is a particularly informative section on how annotating can be seen as a useful methodology to discover the internal structures of a choreography and display the underlying processes for the formation of a choreographic language. On this page, the choreographer and the dancers provide context around their creative practice and explain some of the choreographic rules they built the piece upon. Next to this, there are annotations explaining how the rules were created, what they mean for the piece, revealing the interplays happening between the performers.

This project also generated a uniquely informative recording of a dance performance – the full-body skeleton of each dancer was recorded with a marker-less motion capture system for 60 minutes. The recorded data is packaged into a freely available application, which can be particularly useful for artists interested in movement material. Although this unique digital dataset fosters compelling exchanges between the field of contemporary dance and the communities of creative coding and digital arts and design, it also invites a set of questions. The project raises critical issues about the ownership of datasets that include movement material and the ethical implications concerning the free distribution and use of such data. Though the team seems to be aware of such complications, these are not explicitly addressed and reflection on this, alongside further elaboration on how the overall project fits with the future goals and aspirations of Motion Bank would have provided useful clarifications.

With this Online Score, Motion Bank have created a valuable digital space for research that allows for multiple layers of interaction with the material. It is worth noting that the project highlights aspects of the choreography and its structure but does not offer specific takeaways. It does not provide clear-cut conclusions on what choreographic thinking and knowledge is. Instead, it welcomes different interpretations and opens up the space to discover usually unavailable information about dance-making.

The project asks other disciplines to engage with choreographic thinking and movement material to discover possible junctions of intelligence. It represents a beneficial contribution for artists and researchers working at the intersections of media, big data, contemporary dance, and creative design practices and provides useful insights for a general and expert audience. The documentation of the creative process will also benefit students from the fields of arts and humanities, and more especially, educators and students involved in professional and vocational dance education.

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