

Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy

Dancer BA

PERSONAL STORIES OF WOMEN  
ON STAGE

THESIS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b><u>2</u></b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 1</u></b>	<b><u>4</u></b>
PERSONAL STORIES AS A TOPIC OF TODAY’S CONTEMPORARY DANCE PERFORMANCES.....	4
PERSONAL RELATION TO THE CHOSEN DANCE PIECES.....	5
SHORT PRESENTATION OF ARTISTS.....	6
PERSONAL PERCEPTION OF PERFORMANCES .....	7
COMPARISON OF PERFORMANCES.....	10
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTION WORK.....	13
TO BE PERSONAL OR NOT TO BE PERSONAL? .....	14
CREATING PERFORMANCE INSPIRED BY PERSONAL STORIES .....	15
ABOUT THE PRESENCE OF THE FOUR CHOSEN PERFORMERS.....	16
COMMON TOPICS OF PERFORMANCES.....	17
<b><u>CHAPTER 2</u></b>	<b><u>19</u></b>
CREATING MY OWN PROJECT.....	19
<b><u>CONCLUSION</u></b>	<b><u>22</u></b>
<b><u>REFERENCES</u></b>	<b><u>23</u></b>
<b><u>ANNEXES</u></b>	<b><u>24</u></b>
PETRA PEČEK ‘TAKE A WALK IN MY SHOES’ .....	24
INTERVIEWS.....	24

## INTRODUCTION

I feel a special relation to dance since early childhood. It is still hard to explain or define this particular relation, but as years of dancing have passed, I am getting more aware of it. My taste and dancing itself is modulating the most at Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy.

I believe there is more than just movement, I believe in magic and power of movements; I believe in dance. I see and feel it rarely, but when it happens, this is the feeling which keeps me dancing. I am reaching for dance which makes me vulnerable, alive in the present moment. As well, I appreciate to see it in dance performances. I appreciate seeing devotion to dance, passion, enjoying and appreciating every move. Sometimes I can see dancer's personality, their story just by pure movements.

In Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy, beside technical training, I was introduced to the more performative and creative side of contemporary dance. During my schooling I have grown a special interest for performances with personal stories, where I could see the same special, devoting and personal relation to the work they are doing. Even if artists were not expressing themselves just by dance, they let me in their own, fictional, but somehow personal world.

I saw the first performance with a personal story in Ljubljana in 2013, which was made by my teacher in Ljubljana Contemporary Dance High School, Maja Delak. I was so impressed by it that I made my high school graduation solo inspired by my personal story which I felt I had to release in order to make a new chapter in my life.

While performing and making a piece I felt the same vulnerability in myself. It was a special experience for me, to open up and stand in front of the audience, prepared to give my inside and my outside. Of course I had a lot of questions and struggles with the process and I have always had a wish to come back to this topic again. And I have. After I moved to Budapest, where contemporary dance scene is a bit wider and international comparing to my home country, I have realized these topics are quite popular among artists. I saw, in my opinion, a remarkable performance by Zsuzsa Rózsavölgyi and many other artists, who chose the same kind of topic as an inspiration – their personal stories.

Beside dance and expressing personal stories, there is another topic I am interested in and it is really connected with all the performances I have seen. In my thesis I chose to write about performances made by female artists, dealing with their own personal stories, gender (in)equality, expectations, dancing bodies and many other chosen issues – I deal with women's personal stories.

Personal stories and experiences had always inspired me and helped me grow as a person. If these stories are put on stage and expressed with dance, the performer will definitely get my attention, although I am aware it may be just a fiction.

While researching and writing my thesis, I will also do a research work for my own performance with a personal story. That would be the goal of working on this thesis. I would like to use theoretical knowledge that I will get, about creating auto fictional dance pieces and use it in practice. Theoretical knowledge would come from written references and mostly interviews with artists whose performances I have chosen to treat in my thesis.

Questions that I am really looking forward to asking are how they manage to tell and share personal stories, but not be personal themselves. At Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy I heard from my teacher that on stage you should not be personal. It made quite a confusion in my head which is one of the reasons I want to research this topic. Is there space for being personal on stage?

Another question I ask myself according to knowledge I have gained at BCDA is why they speak about themselves on stage, if art is not supposed to be self-therapy? Where is the border? Also I am very interested in how much truth is there in these stories and how they manage to create such powerful and delicate art pieces.

## CHAPTER 1

### PERSONAL STORIES AS A TOPIC OF TODAY'S CONTEMPORARY DANCE PERFORMANCES

For me, it seems that personal stories are often appearing on contemporary dance stages. Artists and dancers in certain positions where they feel or had felt stigmatized or stereotyped, people who have been historically tied to the material conditions of their body; usually performances with personal stories are not created just by women, but also by people with disabilities, people of color, people that identify with LGBT movements, etc (Cooper Albright, 1997).

Contemporary dance has to somehow confront these stereotypes in order to articulate the complex reality (Cooper Albright, 1997). Usually personal stories on dance stage reflect life of Western cultural mentality or the life dancers are living after choosing this profession.

As I perceive it, performers are trying to show a bigger and wider picture of the whole situation by telling and expressing their own experiences. These kind of performances are criticizing the society, often with a lot of subjectivity.

But why are these topics becoming frequent in contemporary dance field? Already the expression "contemporary dance" itself tells us it must be something "up to date". In the times when the world is getting more and more globalized, fighting for equality, practicing tolerance, excepting the differences; however, we can always do better and improve more. When I see personal stories taking place in contemporary dance and arts field, it seems to me that it is a wonderful way of expressing the position of a particular individual, a performer in this case, in society. I think every story we have to tell can be spread to a bigger amount of people – we can learn something from every story.

We are used to live much more open lives than some decades ago. All the social media around us is in a way forcing us to share our every day life, our ideas, happenings, thoughts, pictures – our private life. It seems that all kinds of reality shows and youtube vlogs where spectators are literally brought into someone else's life are also popular and taking over the media. In reality shows and youtube vlogs people who are being watched trough TV or internet are basically living a normal, everyday life where camera is following them almost all the time; most of the time they are not trying to act, quite the opposite, they are being themselves and personal.

It seems that sharing personal stories and private life is somehow not new. At least not for Western culture influenced countries. I think there is no surprise these trends and patterns entered contemporary dance world. Surely, each individual dancer who decides to work on such topics has his/her own reasons to create and present it.

## PERSONAL RELATION TO THE CHOSEN DANCE PIECES

The four dance pieces I have chosen made me think more and brought my attention closer to the topic I am dealing with in this thesis. I will compare and study following pieces:

### **1. *Zsuzsa Rózsavölgy: 1.7 (2016)***

In this performance she investigates female body and its role in society. She is dealing with taboos about living in a female body in her lecture-performance piece.

Keywords: female, misogyny, modern rituals, initiation rites, abortion

### **2. *Valencia James: Between the World and Me (2017)***

Reflection piece on living in a pre-dominantly white Central European society as a woman of color, Afro-Caribbean origin, all the awkward encounters and her complex questions of identity.

Keywords: female, stereotypes, blackness, representation

### **3. *Maja Delak: What if? (2013)***

What if we would live differently? And what if not? Maja Delak is telling her personal stories about her life as a dancer and woman, her body and her limitations.

Keywords: female, dancer, time, body

### **4. *Vita Osojnik: Other people's children (2016)***

Piece about expectations society has towards women, and her conscious decisions to live her own life how she prefers. Decisions about motherhood and all her other people's children that she carried.

Keywords: female, expectations, motherhood, dance

## SHORT PRESENTATION OF ARTISTS

**Zsuzsa Rózsavölgyi** (Hungary) studied at Budapest Dance School, SEAD and P.A.R.T.S. She danced for five years in Rosas Dance Company. Beside working as a professional dancer, she finished School of Creative Coaching and she works as a teacher and a coach, regularly on Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy (BCDA) and Salzburg Experimental Academy of Dance (SEAD).

**Valencia James** (Barbados), professional dancer, studied Modern Dance at Hungarian Dance Academy. She is working as a freelance performer and cooperating with other dancers and artists.

**Maja Delak** (Slovenia), professional dancer, choreographer and teacher. Maja Delak studied dance at CNDC L'Esquisse in France. For years she danced in dance company called En-Knap. Beside that she is program leader of realization of contemporary dance high school program in Ljubljana, Slovenia. In 2006 she established institute Emanat for performance production, book and education program.

**Vita Osojnik** (Slovenia) finished ballet high school in Ljubljana and after continued her studies on SEAD. She works as a teacher on contemporary high school, SEAD, Tisch School of Arts, School of street theatre in Ljubljana and many more. She is interested in performance, choreography and street theatre.

## PERSONAL PERCEPTION OF PERFORMANCES

### **Zsuzsa Rózsavölgyi: 1.7**

She created a piece which was for me very educative. I learned a lot about performing and about myself. She moved me with her stage presence which was unbelievably casual and relaxing to see. I felt like being in her living room, while she is explaining some stories to me. I appreciate how she somehow generalized her stories so they become not only hers, but mine or others' also. In her performance she is educating, speaking about herself, constantly changing costumes, scenes...

In her performances I liked her presence and the context of her text: speaking about hair products, about abortion, expectations for women etc. The only thing I missed in her performance was more dancing and expressing herself with movements.



1. 'Rózsavölgyi Zsuzsanna: 1.7'



### **Maja Delak: What if?**

A remarkable piece which consists of good measure of humor, dance, minimalism, abstraction, personal relation and composition. She created a piece that makes me always wonder in which kind of state is she and whether is it a personal story at all. But suddenly, she has this urge of telling, of expressing and I had a feeling I understand it completely. In the next moment she is entertaining us. She shows herself in many different lights. While performing I felt she is like a ghost, I can not define anything. One moment I can understand, there is a clear information, and the next moment she destroys everything. I could relate a lot to the context of constantly building and rebuilding, asking and answering, searching, failing or succeeding, finding and losing. I could describe her performance with one sentence: change is the only constant in life.



2. 'Maja Delak: Kaj če / What if'

### **Valencia James: Between world and me**

Valencia James opened the cultural problematics about dance and being a female of color living abroad. I have never met closely with these topics. It made me realize I never saw a woman of color live on stage until Valencia. Is it possible that in the 21st century we are still dealing with racism and stereotypes? Even after the performance I was mad at myself, how is it possible I didn't question myself before? How can I live in such closed community where these problems hadn't touched me before? Surely, it is my personal problem also that I did not question it before. Valencia James created a well-structured piece where she could express herself clearly. Although she deals with delicate problematics which could feel offensive for spectators very easily, she deals with it very wisely.

### **Vita Osojnik: Others people's children**

This piece is somehow different from all the other three chosen performances. Firstly, it is a duet and personal story of Vita Osojnik. Of course what is personal for her can be related to a wider population as well. She is dealing with her position in society, her decision about motherhood, her own rules of life which are maybe “not usual” or expected from a woman. Second thing why this performance is different from the others is that Vita on stage is communicating with the audience just by movements and dance. She is using video and props, but she is constantly using her personal dance material.

Her performance is remarkable for me; it is courageous, brave and powerful although she is constantly asking us questions. Showing herself in different situations, I always had a feeling she has all of answers needed already in herself. That makes me feel she does not want anything from me as a spectator, just to enjoy her performance, maybe relate to some situation or feel compassion. After the performance she left me with more answers than questions, which was a nice feeling.



3. 'Vita Osojnik: Nosila sem tuje otroke'

## COMPARISON OF PERFORMANCES

Two of the performances I saw in Slovenia and two in Hungary. Performances are similar but at the same time different. They are different as every individual woman/creator/performer. All of the performances are solos except the piece “Other people’s children”, which is a duet, but a personal story of one woman.

In all chosen performances female artists are dealing with their bodies, thoughts, gender and their relation to others. Their personal experiences are expressed through dance and as well with visual and symbolic meanings of it. These dances foreground the social markings of identity on the body rather than pure, physical or kinetic dance. Each woman, with her specific interest, urges to share her thoughts, happenings and ideas with the spectators. But still, do spectators perceive it as a fiction? Or is it really simply a fiction?

Watching performances from Maja Delak and Vita Osojnik was really interesting because I know both of these artists, quite well. When I first watched these two performances, it was like seeing their autobiography. For me it was very confusing and emotionally strong to see performances containing personal stories. Perhaps because it does not seem to be a fiction for me, but something true and real. This feeling moved me. And it still does.

Different situation was while watching performances of Zsuzsa Rózsavölgyi and Valencia James, because I do not or did not know them at the time. I felt a less personal relation to these two artist comparing to the artists I have mentioned before. Still I appreciate their honest performances, courage to share personal stories with me – a total stranger sitting in the audience. As a spectator I can decide how to understand and perceive information, to choose in what to believe and in what not to believe. Without having a close opinion whether it was truly a real story or just a fiction, I could decide how to understand and perceive information. I could choose in what to believe and in what not to believe.

Comparing these two (and more) different feelings I had while watching those four performances, I came to the realization that a spectator can perceive it differently depending on the personal relation with the artist, personal experience which maybe matches with theirs – or not, or simply being in a specific state in that particular moment it may seem more as a reality or as a fiction. Now I understand, this types of pieces can also be perceived as a fiction, autobiographical fiction work, what I did not know back than, maybe what I saw and what I think about it is very far from original artist’s idea and original meaning – or not.

When I read the following quote, I could understand why I feel chosen performances honest and why I have not thought about them as a fiction:

*“I don’t differ between what I am and what I do. No limits exist except the limits which exist within me. There are no new forms. There is nothing new, definitely not us. No illusions (it is funny that we choose to work with art). We will try to meet our audience with sincerity on equal level. Which is almost impossible since we know what is going to happen, and you don’t. We have to pretend since we are performing. I still mean it is important to work on equality, sincerity and being direct. We all have our selfish reasons, so do I.” (Sharifi, 2003)*

Although all four pieces are quite similar regarding the topics and the way of treating the issues, my perception was different. Quite like spectators in general see and experience dances differently.

Dancing in front of an audience has itself a divided moment between objectivity and subjectivity (Cooper Albright, 1997). Negotiations between moving and being moved, seeing and being seen, experiencing and being experienced; whatever dance we see, it can be both very abstract or literal and exact; dance can represent body’s identity differently - dance is not always about the body but can also be about subjectivity (Cooper Albright, 1997). For example, relation of the body to other individuals, as well as expressing personal stories.

What I appreciate in all four pieces and what triggered me to research and create my own piece, is the particular presence that the personal relation to the topic brings to performer. I witnessed very calm and “everyday” behavior on stage with Maja Delak and Zsuzsa Rózsavölgyi. There was almost no border between spectators and the performer except the usual spatial situation (performer on the stage and spectators sitting in the audience). With Valencia James and Vita Osojnik, I could see very self-confident presence and performance, I could sense how happenings in the past touched them, how they process it and how they are passing that information to me. It seemed they are irreplaceable, nobody can tell this exact story like they did.

There is no coincidence all chosen pieces are made by female dancers. I have seen other performances of this kind, but somehow I can relate the most to female stories. Somehow growing up as a female has not always been easy. As a young girl growing up in a society which gives me freedom but also takes it away at the same time, I always felt some unexplainable pressure.

I can say I spent my teenage years dancing and being in an artistic environment, which has opened my eyes a lot. Not at the beginning of my dancing path, but quite the opposite, because watching yourself in the mirror, wearing tight clothes and correcting your body for years while dancing is quite a special way of growing up. I felt uncomfortable many times, trying to be something I am not, fitting in some frames where I did not feel good and where I didn't belong. Somehow, I thought this is how it should be. I got used to it. Later, as I enrolled in Contemporary Dance High School, I have learned a lot from professional contemporary dancers and teachers about woman's body in dance and women in our society. I got familiar with feminism for the first time and, the most important, I got to know myself better. With this knowledge, which is more about personal interest or preposition, I could start to notice more things.

I am more aware and even more interested in how to improve my life, myself and potentially other people's lives as well. A teacher once said to me: "Your life will not get easier but it will grow in sense of quality."

I think this explains my interest in personal stories of women on stage and creating performance on my own. Watching performances of that kind somehow challenges my conflicts from when I was younger and gives me solutions. And there are as many solutions as women on this earth.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTION WORK

About autobiographical work: *“Although it is self-referential, autobiography nonetheless assumes an audience, engaging in a reciprocal dialogue in which a story about my life helps you to think about your life.”* (Cooper Albright, 1997, page 119)

Autobiographical in its literal meaning means “to write one’s life”. It deals with translation from individual’s life into text, act or in case of this thesis: dance. Autobiographical fiction means merging between fictive and autobiographical elements; usually fiction is used when certain details are not important and could be changed for the sake of narrative (Cooper Albright, 1997). I think it gives space and freedom to the artist who is creating from personal experiences. Fiction also gives space for spectator’s own interpretation and abstraction. When we talk about autobiography it is always connected to a community, culture as well. One’s experience can serve as an act of community. Rethinking or recounting ones story can map into wider picture of community and raise awareness of individual belonging to community (Cooper Albright, 1997).

With the pieces I choose I can see that there are different proportion of fiction and autobiography. During the pieces autobiography and fiction are shifting, sometimes appearing together, sometimes completely disappearing.

Personal inspired and autobiographical stories as an inspiration: *“Those who deplore the presence of clearly personal material maintain that the highest form of artistic creation comes from the imagination. On the other hand, those who condone the use of autobiography ask what is a better place for an artist to look for material than in his own life? There is a third view: Whose business is it other than the artist's how he or she creates—and what he or she creates with.”* (Smith, 1985)

I asked the four performers about their opinion if this term, autobiographical fiction work, describes well enough the performances they have created. Zsuzsa Rózsavölgyi told me about her piece “1.7” that there is just one story in her performance which is a fiction. It is a fiction because reality is too hard to put on stage. She says reality is much more cruel than fiction. She changed one story into fiction, everything else is honest reality. Osojnik and James agreed abstraction gives space for other interpretations. Delak says for herself and her piece performance “What if” that it is autobiographical, not a fiction. She also question whether a spectator perceive it as a fiction and left a possibility to decide how we see it. Their answers confirmed me the term and its definition describes and suits the four chosen performances well.

## TO BE PERSONAL OR NOT TO BE PERSONAL?

One of the main topics, questions and interests for writing this thesis was a question of being personal on stage. I have experienced that artists and dancers have different approaches, knowledge or preferences when it comes to this question. Sometimes it is not a question; it can be a statement or a decision. In my introduction I wrote a question - how to be personal on stage, must your body be a tool, an object? After some time working on this thesis I got to know that there is no rule. Rather having an ability of leaving your ego behind and embody something or someone else.

Tijen Lawton (professional dancer, my teacher and consultant for this thesis) had an interesting question or idea about not being personal on stage. As she says, for her it is always personal when you are on stage; how is it actually possible not to be? How is it possible to fully adopt or embody movements if you decide not to give yourself in it; if you decide not to be personal. I found these questions very interesting, as I personally enjoy moving, performing or observing when I can connect or feel personal relation while performing, moving. Lawton also commented that the body is never a tool, rather an expressive body and mind working together.

While researching the topic I realized there is no rule. There is no wrong or right. It is a matter of taste and the situation you want to stage. While talking with the artists I write about in my thesis I got to the point where I realized that maybe taking a different approach than being and allowing to be personal on stage, where you can choose how much personality you want to involve, would not bring them to the same result. Maybe taking a distance from yourself and from your own process is just one view of creating. But as an artist you have to find your own balance and preferences. The goal of all four artists was not having a distance from themselves.

It is important to be aware is whether artist or performer is conscious about the decision of being personal or not. Being inspired by your own experiences can be very strong and powerful both for the performer and the spectator and additionally just one of many ways to be inspired.



## CREATING PERFORMANCE INSPIRED BY PERSONAL STORIES

I asked four performers about the topics and processes they have been through while creating their performances. All of them started with different triggers from their lives which they used for their creations. I found their answers very helpful for the process of creating my piece.

Valencia James had started reflecting on the types of roles that had been and were being offered to her and realized how they tended to cast her as a stereotype or emphasized her as 'other', and not in a critical way either. This made her quite angry and suspicious of the intentions of people who approached her with work. Then in March 2016, James found the book *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, from which she later took the title of the piece. James says it was a liberating experience to find her innermost feelings so eloquently expressed in words. This was the last drop that propelled James to finally make a piece about her experiences as a black woman in Hungary. Later she started creating with improvisation tasks followed by writing. James found this method very effective in unlocking her subconscious.

Zsuzsa Rózsavölgyi had strong emotional reactions to the stories she is dealing with. She deals with social and cultural representation and castration of the female body, misogyny, modern rituals and initiation rites in western society, freedom of choice... Towards these topics she feels anger, shame and sadness. These feelings triggered her to speak up. The movement material is changing with the topic of the show, sometimes it is just representation, sometimes made with the starting idea of multitasking, and sometimes this is created to contradict the sadness of the story that she is saying while moving. She uses text, poem, songs, video and choreography. They are all serving the purpose of storytelling.

Maja Delak wanted to stage her personal story about her dancing body - her main instrument. Her story does not necessarily narrow her piece. She also uses inspiration from other sources such as visual material, poems, text, etc. One of her interests is translation from other sources of inspiration to movement language. In piece "What if" she mostly dealt with translation of personal experiences to choreography. That is why her creation process is very methodological. She uses kinesthetical approaches as well as more abstract ones to create her piece(s).

Vita Osojnik created a piece inspired by her personal stories, experiences and opinions which triggered her to create a performance. In her duet, which is a solo, she uses movements she discovered not connected to the personal topics, but she connects these two aspects. She combines personal experiences with her own movements in order to create something new and abstract. On top she adds videos, music, voice, lights in order to get much information which can be noticed by spectator.



## ABOUT THE PRESENCE OF THE FOUR CHOSEN PERFORMERS

I was interested on particular case of Osojnik, James, Rózsavölgyi and Delak and their performances and presence. I asked them about their presence and way of passing personal inspired stories to spectators.

Zsuzsa Rózsavölgyi is all the time an aspect of herself, she is a dancer, a woman with a secret painful story; she is a warrior, a teacher, a nun, a rabbit... Even when she talks about herself it is an act. She is playing a person who tells her painful story, or she is doing Brazilian jiu-jitsu. It all serves to deliver the message.

Valencia James thinks that as performers we are our most authentic when there is a connection to our character or role through personal experience. Even though she seems to switch characters throughout the piece, she is still very much herself. James had wanted to do something with her experiences, to give herself a voice where others had spoken on her behalf. She was tired being kept silent so that someone else could use her body to make a statement that mostly did not serve her best interests.

Osojnik doesn't switch characters during a piece but she is very much coming from personal experiences and using it for creating dance material as well it is helping her to build the presence, which remains calm almost meditative through the whole piece. In her piece she is partly personal, but the piece has an intention to be reflection of society. It is not just about her stories but also stories of each individual through her eyes.

It is similar in piece of Delak, where she uses personal stories just as an inspiration. In her case she dealt with changes of the main instrument she needs for her dancing career and how to go on with these changes. Delak makes a difference between being personal and being intimate. It depends on topic which you are staging, and way of passing the message. "If your goal is to be intimate on stage, than you have to be", she says. As long as you are in control of what are you doing, as long as you have a decision it is fine with her. She makes a conclusion that things/topics we bring to stage will also define language of passing the message.

After the talk with artists I realized they all feel special and strong relation to the topic they are performing. Although they are aware of their presence, they mostly take a distance from it and consciously choose way of delivering the message or sharing their story. Even if its a personal story on stage it is an act.

## COMMON TOPICS OF PERFORMANCES

After observing and studying the four performances I found four common topics and similarities concerning the contents, which are:

- Personal relation
- Position of women in society
- Dancing body
- Expectations

**Personal relation** – maybe already obvious, but all of the four performers have personal relation to the topic and performance they are doing. James and Rozsavolgy created personal inspired performances because of strong emotions they had towards their own personal happenings or stories. Even if triggers for creating personal inspired performances are similar, presence and pieces themselves are different. As Tijen Lawton said in one of our first conversation about the thesis; even if it is not a specific personal topic on stage, for her it is always personal when you are on stage. She said if you decide, if you choose to talk about personal topic than you maybe choose a different approach. And I feel this different approach that Tijen Lawton mentioned is common in all the four performances. Every artist, dancer, has of course different way of dealing with it.

**Position of women in society** – Different women, different ages, different cultures - same problem to deal with. It is nice to see how they use different levels, different situations and ways of expressing it. I see Vita Osojnik, for example, showing herself in a very vulnerable state on a video, while she is dancing a very exhausting dance material for one hour on stage. I perceive it as a constant fight between reality, her feelings and her will and energy to change.

Performance “1.7” deals exactly with that. She puts herself in different positions, different characters, different times and different roles. I see how her society role is changing while she is transforming. But there is always a wall. Either she goes back in time where it was a huge problem when women did not want to have sex, or she place herself in the present, where we think we are free but we face a lot of expectations. She transforms herself into a movie character, into a warrior, no matter what she transforms herself into, she always remains a woman.

Maja Delak clearly asks herself, how it would be if she would be of the opposite sex? And she knows the answers. She accepts it, but keeps reminding how her life would be different if she would be male.

I like Valencia's point of view, because she kind of deals with it from another perspective. She describes it the best by herself: "Nine years ago I moved to Hungary and suddenly I went from being Valencia, a passionate dancer and proud Barbadian to a Negro girl, a walking chocolate bar, a black Jezebel."

**Dancing body** – For artists that chose dance as a part of their identity. In all of the four pieces I see there are statements and questions about their "dancing body". In the following quote I agree on this short presentation of expectations dancer has towards his or her body:

*"Typically, a dancer spends anywhere from two to six hours per day, six to seven days per week for eight to ten years creating a dancing body ... Dancers constantly apprehend the discrepancy between what they want to do and what they can do."*  
(Foster, 1997, page 237)

Dance has definitely shaped their lives. Moving abroad because of the career, dedicating years for practice and much more. Delak is dealing with a question of what her dance body is capable of and of what not any more. Her body is a complex one but she knows how to deal with it and what it requires. Osojnik is pushing her body to its limits, exploring borders. Zsuzsa Rózsavölgyi is very aware of her body and she keeps transforming it in her piece. Dancing body is for her just one of the images. While researching history of black body in theatre James was brought back in 1920's and Josephine Baker.

**Expectations** – connected to the body, behavior, personality, career, life path. Individual expectations on one side, on the other, society towards individuals. Fighting against or living with dominant prepositions about idealized female body, "perfect body" and meanwhile acknowledging the diversity of shape and decisions. Simone de Beauvoir talks about how women's perspective on her own body changes over the years and how society influences this perspective and attitude towards her body. Women do not tend to think badly about their bodies but it is rather a result of living in a hostile society. It is important how women see themselves as a free subject rather than an object of society's gaze. As the last one is hard to ignore, I feel it is also a reason for the four dancers having created these pieces.

## CHAPTER 2

### CREATING MY OWN PROJECT

Beside researching and studying before mentioned pieces, I have decided to research and create a project on my own.

I started creating by collecting feelings, events, happenings, images; memories which I consider important or interesting. Each of the previously mentioned triggers has different sources. It can be a sound, person, emotion, energy, etc. These key words, for example: feeling of rejection, physical memory of sickness or recognitions of particular situations through my body led me to movement. Movement led me to improvisation. I let movements settle and when everything was becoming clearer and clearer I wrote down the patterns which were repeating, which were clear for me and I could develop.

I did improvisation with advanced prepared improvisation proposals (expanding walking vocabulary with connection to the music, improvising with set material, etc.) and also I have worked with images such as: taking my memory and trying to recreate situation, emotions with movements and physicality or express it verbally.

Every situation led me to a different movement quality, different dynamics, different feelings. At first I had a hard time creating by myself for myself and asking myself a lot about what am I doing and how to reach an honest state for myself. After rehearsing and developing it more, I started to feel it. Not all of the scenes, but some.

The piece consists of short etudes. Each etude is a different story, or a feeling, experience, etc. Every situation requests a specific state. There is always one thing in common. Walking. Walking connects all the images, happenings, stories. That is why the working title is: "Take a walk in my shoes".



#### 4. 'Take a walk in my shoes'

In the piece I deal with memories and my opinions, reactions. I see this piece like an on-going work. Something which I can keep developing. I see my path as a constant journey, where every happening or a thought has a consequence which helps to shape the following ones. I deal with dancing body, expectations, realizations, disappointments, different faces and finding my own truth.

The piece is twelve minutes long and consists of five different happenings, personal stories. While creating I had realized how important it is to have a possibility of fiction while creating a personal inspired/autobiographical piece. Sometimes it is hard to tell the truth, or I did not want to go there as a performer. With the possibility of using fiction, you can change, adopt, anything. Also, it can add more abstraction to the piece. Personally, I wanted to be true and I was insisting with pure reality for a while. When the piece started to have a shape, I added fiction or change the details. Yet, I would say my piece is not a fiction, although it can be perceived like that.

While creating the piece, I analyzed my presence and my persona on stage. I realized that when I arrived to the physical state, where I feel honesty in my body, where movements are matching memories; this is the state where I do not have to worry about my presence, because it is already there. Even if I am personal on stage it is an act and consequence of clear decision.



5. 'Take a walk in my shoes'

## CONCLUSION

After collecting references, speaking with artists, watching performances with personal stories, creating my own piece; my knowledge about autobiographical fiction works got wider and clearer.

I clarified with myself that there is space and possibility to be personal on stage. The term personal has a wide meaning. There is a difference between being myself on stage, playing or acting myself on stage. There is a difference between being inspired by a personal story or being personal on stage. Somehow, you are always personal on stage. Discovering that, I can say it opened many possibilities and new questions about performing. Maybe there can be a very little difference between all the possibilities of being personal on stage, but what I discovered and what I think is very important is a clear decision and a clear way of passing the story, message to spectators. It is important to have a clear approach to the work you are doing. I would say it is an artistic freedom of choosing that approach and having many options and possibilities of playing with mixture of autobiography and fiction, or just one of these terms. As well as the artist has this choice of creating, the spectator has same choice of perceiving.

The same I can answer to the question I had at the beginning of my thesis, whether the stage can be a place of self-therapy. It can be, if you make a conscious decision about it, if this is your approach and message you want to deliver. But not every personal story you are telling on stage can have a therapeutic effect or purpose.

By coming to the end of my thesis, I have a feeling I came to the point where I can start exploring my interest even wider. By researching I got to know my interest in this performing topic exists and there are endless possibilities for creating and dealing with personal stories on stage. The piece "Take a walk in my shoes" is just a base I have created and my wish is to take it with me, walk in my shoes a bit more, continue and develop it through the upcoming years.



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## PICTURES:

1. ‘Rózsavölgyi Zsuzsanna 1.7’ (2016), *jegy.hu*, Available at: <https://www.jegy.hu/program/rozsavolgyi-zsuzsa-17-73429#gallery>, (accessed: 12.5.2018)
2. Žgank, Nada (2013) ‘Maja Delak: Kaj če / What if’, *cityofwomen.org*, Available at: [http://www.cityofwomen.org/en/content/2013/photo\\_gallery/maja-delak-what-if](http://www.cityofwomen.org/en/content/2013/photo_gallery/maja-delak-what-if), (accessed: 12.5.2018)
3. Žgank, Nada (2016) ‘Vita Osojnik: Nosila sem tuje otroke’, *ptl.si*, Available at: <https://plesniteaterljubljana.squarespace.com/december-2016/2016/11/24/9-in-10-12-%202000-vita-osojnik-nosila-sem-tuje-otroke-other-peoples-children> (accessed:12.5.2018)
4. ‘Take a walk in my shoes’, photo taken at the rehearsal of the piece, 14.4.2018, Budapest
5. ‘Take a walk in my shoes’, photo taken at the rehearsal of the piece, 15.3.2018, Budapest



## ANNEXES

### PETRA PEČEK 'TAKE A WALK IN MY SHOES'

1.DVD

2.Online links:

- Documentation: <https://youtu.be/74uztGckLjI>
- Trailer: <https://youtu.be/N7835AmYMWg>

### INTERVIEWS

Attached interviews of artists who agreed on publishing their whole interviews:

1. Maja Delak 12.4.2018. in Ljubljana, written interview
2. Rozsavolgyi Zsuzsa, 13.4.2018. in Budapest, written interview
3. Valencia James 20.2.2018. in Budapest, written interview

## 1. MAJA DELAK INTERVIEW

*-Kako in zakaj si se odločila obravnavati osebne zgodbe ali dogodke ?*

Res je, da v svojih predstavah uporabljam osebno zgodbo, dogodek ali pa zgolj neke vrste inspiracijo, ki izhaja iz tega. Mislim, da je pri mojem avtorskem delu, ki je lahko na eni strani koreografsko ali pa interpretativno (kot plesalka) pomembno, kaj je "zgodba" zadaj. Ta zgodba ni nujno tudi ista zgodba, ki je naracija predstave. Na eni strani bi bilo delo v smislu - pripovedujem neko zgodbo z gibom in ta zgodba je skladna in ista kot je zgodba performerja, ki jo podaja. Vendar to skorajda nikoli n primer v moji praksi. Vzgibi, ki jih uporabljam, ali pa stimuliram izvajalce k uporabljanju tega, je da najdejo neke asociacije, substitucije, dražljaje, ki velikokrat izhajajo iz njihovega izkustva (lahko je dogodek, občutek...) in ga prenesejo v akcijo, gib, plesni material, besedilo, pač neko uprizoritveno aktivnost. Zdi se mi, da postane nato njihova uprizoritvena aktivnost veliko bolj točna v trajanju, izvedbi, naravnosti, verjetnosti, pozornosti (pač v seh komponentah, ki delujejo pozitivno na izvedbo akcije). Hkrati so to materiali, ki so veliko bolj zanimivi in nenazadnje ob ponovitvah predstav imajo drugačen spomin in obuditev - zdi se mi, da jih veliko bolj hitro in zanesljivo potegnejo iz spomina in jih udejanijo takšne kot so bili ob stvativu. Morda še bolj intenzivno ali še bolj poudarjeno je bilo delo na solu Kaj če. Tu je bila predvsem osebna zgodba tista, ki sem jo želela uprizoriti. Torej, je bila ideja vpisovanja neke osebne zgodovine v plesno predstavo povezana prav s temo same predstave. V predstavi kaj če je torej šlo za razmislek o tem, kako delati, živeti in biti v plesu, ko se glavno orodje za delo prične občutno spreminjati. To vsekakor ne gre drugače kot z osebno zgodbo.

*-S katerimi temami se ukvarjaš v predstavi?*

Teme so različne: zagotovo je ena močnejših tem, ki so prisotne v različnih redstavah tema poezije in prevajanja med različnimi besedili v jezik giba in koreografije. V različnih oblikah je bilo to prisotno v predstavi Manifestacija introverta (prisotno popolnoma nezavedno - iz osene zgodbe, ki je bila uprizorjena je nastal zapis, ki je spominjal na poezijo, zato sem začela raziskovati jezik poezije v naslednjih predstavah), Gina & Miovanni in Mezzanino (temeljili na poeziji Mine Loy), 6AGON (osnova je bila Sofoklejeva Antigona), Blondinka na mestu (roman J. Eugenidesa Deviški samomori), Rondinella (temeljila na istrski poeziji, predvsem na pesmi Rondinella), Hi-res (kljub temu, da je razvila tematsko drugačen okvir, je metodološko še vedno uporabljala zapise - poezijo, sanje... kot tekst, ki je il prenešen v druge medije - video, gib, scensko opremo), Galerija mrtvih žensk (pa predvsem drugem dejanju H. Mueller: Hamletmachine), Rodeo (tematsko je bil vezan na temo ljubezni, je bil hkrati učna ura sodobnega plesa, ki je govorila o metodah plesa in o

načinu gledanja in branja plesa), *Drage drage* (o poziciji sodobne plesalke v Sloveniji); *Serata artistica giovanile* (slovenska avantgarda in ples - Kogoj, Černigoj, F. Delak...), serija sodelovanj z Lukom Prinčičem, ki je posegla na polje preizpraševanja telesa, medijev in zvoka (*Poti ljubezni*, *Wanda & Nova deViator*, serija *Transmittance*, *Sublimation Revision...*), *Sramota* (predstava, ki se je ukvarjala s temo sramu in performativnostjo sramu ter situacije za sram); *Kaj če* (sem že omenila zgoraj), *Tatovi podob* (zelo različno, vendar so reference na druga dela izjemno pomembne).

Seznam predstav boš najbolje našla tu: <http://ski.emanat.si/maja-delak/>

in pa na emantovi strani, vendar boš morala iskati po projektih:

<http://www.emanat.si/si/>

*-Kako si ustvarjala plesni material v svoji predstavi v povezavi z osebno zgodbo?*

Večinoma pristopam k razvijanju materiala zelo metodološko. Imam kar nekaj sistemov za ustvarjanje materiala: od postopkov prevajanja (poezije, slike, dramskega teksta... - torej jemanja vzgiba v drugih senzornih poljih, ne samo telesnem; aluzij in parodij, do dela s čistim gibom - torej kako nek gibalni dogodek nastane iz kinetično-kinestetičnega samo-občutja, ali pa razvijanje materiala, ki sledi zgolj zakonitostim plesalčevega telesa, včasih me zanima neka forma, ki je "položena na telo" in raziskujem zgolj to). Vsekakor so to zame postopki, ki jih uporabljam, če se mi zdi smiselno za idejo, ki jo razvijam v zvezi s predstavo.

*- Kako si se opredelila glede prezence? Ali si bila na odru zavestno osebna ali si se od tega distancirala?*

Prezenca je bivanje na odru. Ko rečemo, da je nekdo prezenten, pomeni, da se giblje in počuti naravno, enostavno, prosto in ponavadi nas (kot gledalce) takšn o bivanje na odru pritegne, lepo jo je opazovati in rečemo nekdo ima močno prezenco. Zame je to aksiom za uprizarjanje - obladovanje prezence odru.

Do vprašanja osebnega imam neko razlikovanje, ki bi ga želela poudariti. Bistveno se mi zdi, kaj je tema dela, o čem govori delo, kaj razmišljam ko delam in ko gledam predstavo. Zdi se mi pomembno, da predstava nekaj sproča - komunicira, lahko je abstraktno.

Naslednje kar se mi zdi pomembno, je razlikovanje med osebnim in intimnim. Biti nekontrolirano intimen na odru velikokrat nastane, ko ne "kontroliramo" prezenco, ko je prostor uprizarjanja uporabljen za intimno razreševanje, ki več ni povezano s temo predstave. Če tema predstave izpostavlja, preigrava, polemizira... teme, ki se jih lahko uprizori zgolj z uporabo zelo intimnih akcij, potem tako mora biti. Potem je tudi za to razlog.

Torej če bi povzela, je nekako tisto kar predelujemo in vrisujemo v uprizoritveni prostor tisto, ker bo določilo tudi jezik uprizarjanja.

*- Med iskanjem izraza za tovrstno predstavo sem naletela na izraz avtobiografsko fiksijsko delo. Koliko fikcije je v tvoji predstavi? Zame je tvoja predstava zelo iskrena, zato me zanima je bil to tvoj namen, ali si namenoma ustvarila fikcijo?*

Torej za predstavo Kaj če lahko rečem, da je avtobiografska. Je iskrena, se strinjam. Ali je fikcija - hmmm, težko rečem, zame ne, morda pa od zunaj deluje tako.

Morda o tem še malo razmislim, ne vem točno ali lahko še kaj več napišem.

Lahko te napotim na nekaj virov, kjer govorim o svojem delu:

<http://grzinic-smid.si/?p=879> (o predstavi Drage drage)

[http://www.emanat.si/media/094b628f6b/DD%20GList%20420x297\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.emanat.si/media/094b628f6b/DD%20GList%20420x297_FINAL.pdf)  
(gledališki list Drage drage z intervjujem)

[http://www.emanat.si/media/868e8208a0/050401\\_hires\\_Maska\\_MGrzinic.pdf](http://www.emanat.si/media/868e8208a0/050401_hires_Maska_MGrzinic.pdf) (o Hires, Marina Gržinič)

[http://www.maska.si/index.php?id=19&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=1135&cHash=4b9d5512aad39d1fdf6d0a2830c95c41](http://www.maska.si/index.php?id=19&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1135&cHash=4b9d5512aad39d1fdf6d0a2830c95c41) (en celoten del je posvečen delu, ki sva ga izvedla z Lukom od Poti ljubezni do Transmittance projektov in se navezuje tudi na predhodna dela..., je analitičen članek).

povezava na Metodologije beleženja, kjer sva z Majo Šorli govorili o nekaterih delih iz mojega opusa:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwYoJAK6E7U&index=6&list=PL\\_TV6ZQvRHA\\_cR2Ak09YOUd2CyoI\\_Yfdl&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwYoJAK6E7U&index=6&list=PL_TV6ZQvRHA_cR2Ak09YOUd2CyoI_Yfdl&t=0s)

## 2. ZSUZSA RÓZSAVÖLGYI INTERVIEW

*-How and why did you choose this particularly personal stories or events?*

Because I have strong emotional reactions to these stories, anger, shame, sadness. Nobody is talking about abortions openly, not even couples or families, like this the blame is directed only to the women and the man who actually assisted in the abortion is never held responsible.

*-Which are the topics you deal in your performance?*

social and cultural representation and castration of the female body, misogyny, modern rituals and initiation rites in western society, freedom of choice.

*-How you created a dance material (if any) for your performance? Did you use other tools such as: verbalization, video... and why?*

The movement material is changing with the topic of the show, sometimes it is just representation, sometimes made with the starting idea of multitasking, and sometimes it is created to contradict the sadness of the story that I am saying while moving. I use text, poem, songs, video, choreography. They are all serving the purpose of storytelling.

*-Telling your personal story on stage, my question is, how you deal with your presence, your being on stage? Did you take a distance from it or where you consciously personal on stage?*

I am all the time an aspect of myself, I am a dancer, a woman with a secret painful story, I am warrior, I am a teacher, I am a nun, I am a rabbit... Even when I talk about myself it is an act. I am playing a person who tells her painful story, or I am playing myself doing brasilian jiu-jitsu. It all serves to deliver the message.

*- While searching for a good term for such a performance I came across "autobiographical fiction work". How much fiction did you involve in your performance? As I felt your performance was very honest, my question is: was this your purpose, or were you consciously creating something fictional?*

There is only one story that is a fiction, but it is a fiction because the true story is too hard to put out on stage. Reality it is much more cruel than fiction. In this show. So I changed only one story, everything else is honestly the reality. The same way as my hairy body, my body is put on stage without any cosmetics, the stories are also without cosmetics. Except one. On that story I hide the truth because it is too hard to hear. The show is already very heavy, with that story it would be too much honest.

### 3. VALENCIA JAMES INTERVIEW

*-How and why did you choose this particularly personal stories or events?*

I had started reflecting on the types of roles that had been and were being offered to me and realized how they tended to cast me as a stereotype or emphasized me as 'other', and not in a critical way either. This made me quite angry and suspicious of the intentions of people who approached me with work. Then in March 2016 I found the book, *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, from which I later took the title of the piece. It was a liberating experience to find my innermost feelings so eloquently expressed in words. This was the last drop that propelled me to finally make a piece about my experiences as a black woman in Hungary.

*-Which are the topics you deal in your performance?*

I deal with black female stereotypes and how they impact the body with a dehumanizing violence. I approach the body as having been hollowed out or objectified by the white gaze and its consequent movements as non-human.

I reflected a lot about the ways in which I was being represented in the Hungarian productions in which I had been casted. So I researched historic representations of the black female body in theatre. And this took me to the vaudeville revues of the 1920's with names such as Josephine Baker.

The piece features actual lived experiences and situations both in and out of the theatre, from many instances of people reaching out and grabbing my hair, to being asked to do the gorilla scene in *Cabaret* as myself, to verbatim from a review that used racist language to praise my performance.

I also investigate my own relationship to my blackness. I look at the image and physicality of dancehall queens from Jamaican culture as an enquiry into the white male gaze as well as my own relationship to black female sexuality, as informed by my Christian upbringing in the Caribbean.

*-How you created a dance material for your performance?*

I started with improvisation tasks followed by writing. I found this method very effective in unlocking my subconscious. My improvisation tasks focused first on investigating the embodiment of several black female stereotypes such as the Jezebel

(hyper-sexualised black female body), the Mammy figure (full-figured and subservient), Sapphire (also known as angry black woman) and the wild animal.

A lot of the movement research stemmed from my ongoing parallel work, AI\_am, where our team developed a software with a virtual dancer that generates original movement based on a dataset recorded from my own improvisation. I had been intrigued by what I termed as "(humanly) impossible poses", or the extreme disjointed movement that I would observe when the software's parameters were set to high levels of novelty.

The piece gained its structure through a method proposed by Ivo Dimchev, with whom I had taken a solo-making workshop during the process. His method consisted of automatic writing and devising short scenes based on the written material. It was in his workshop that I started to incorporate voice and text into the work as well as the prop.

*-Telling your personal story on stage, how you deal with your presence, your being on stage? Did you take a distance from it or where you consciously personal on stage?*

I think that as a performer we are our most authentic when we connect to our character or role through personal experience. Ivo Dimchev also spoke about the need to take distance. I don't think that approach would have served me in what I wanted to achieve with this piece. Even though I seem to switch characters throughout the piece, I am still very much myself.

I had wanted to do something with my experiences, to give myself a voice where others had spoken on my behalf. I was tired being kept silent so that someone else could use my body to make a statement that mostly did not serve my best interests.

*- While searching for a good term for such a performance I came across "autobiographical fiction work". How much fiction did you involve in your performance? As I felt your performance was very honest, my question is: was this your purpose, or you were consciously creating something fictional?*

My lived experiences informed the work mostly. But I think the abstraction that took place in the process might have helped to give some space for other interpretations.