

Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy

THESIS

Virva Torkko

2018

Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy

Dancer BA

IMPROVISATION AS MY TOOL FOR
DANCING

THESIS

Made by: Virva Torkko

Supervisor: Zsuzsa Rózsavölgyi

Budapest, 2018

TABLE OF CONTENT

IMPROVISATION AS MY TOOL FOR DANCING	1
1. INTRODUCTION: WHAT DANCE IMPROVISATION IS TO ME AND WHY I FIND IT MEANINGFUL	3
2. TRACING BACK MY PATHWAY IN IMPROVISATION	5
2.1. Improvisation practise with Finnish dance practitioners such as Anniina Aunola, Johanna Partio and Paula Salosaari.	5
2.1.1 Insight to improvisation with Anniina Aunola	5
2.1.2. Understanding the importance of imagery in the classes with Johanna Partio	6
2.1.3. Improvisation within the frame of ballet with Paula Salosaari and finding new approaches to ballet training	8
2.2 Contact improvisation with Sari Hannula and Tamás Bakó	9
2.2.1. Learning to listen to the other body in contact improvisation with Sari Hannula	10
2.2.2. Approaching myself differently in Tamás Bakó's contact improvisation classes	10
2.3. Gaga technique with Auri Ahola, Bosmat Nossan and Yaniv Avraham aiding to open up awareness and availability for movement	12
2.4. Improving the ability to picture the body through Forsythe improvisation with Tamás Moricz	13
2.5. Skinner releasing technique with Eszter Gál; finding playfulness through imagery	16
2.6. Finding a different kind of state of mind and body with Adrienn Hód	17
2.7. Learning to show the body as a musical instrument in "Melting Pot" with Marco Torrice	19
2.8. The artistic research work I have done during the Future Research programme	20
2.8.1. Learning about my physicality with tasks given by my fellow student Aiste Adomaityte	20
2.8.2. Finding out how the different outfits can change my dancing	22
2.8.3. Researching falling and experiencing the importance of strong imagery	23
2.8.4. Exploring movement from the different sources of energy in the body and realising how different movement and states of mind they can produce	24
3. EXAMPLES OF HOW I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO USE IMPROVISATION AS A TOOL FOR THE PROJECTS AIMED ON THE STAGE AS A DANCER AND AS A CREATOR	26
3.1. Improvisation utilising the different energies of the body	26
3.1.1. The Beatles Drafts	26
3.1.2. Èclipse	28

3.2. Improvisation based on emotional states	29
4. CONCLUSION	33
5. REFERENCES	34

ABSTRACT

I want to gather my experiences of improvisation to find clarity of how I can use the tools and methods it has given me for my benefit. However, in order to understand the world of improvisation better, how it has affected me and how I can use it, I believe it is beneficial to track down my pathway in the field of improvisation to understand how different techniques, teachers and projects have influenced me. I consider it to be useful to reflect how I have used my experiences of improvisation on stage in the pieces Beatles Drafts, Èclipse and Issue. In addition I want to add my reflection on how my understanding of improvisation has broadened the more varied works I have done. Throughout my studies at The Future Research Programme at BCDA I have collected improvisation based tools that have helped me to develop as a dancer and as a creator. In the process working on this thesis I wish to find more clarity in how to use these both as a dancer and as a creator.

Keywords: Dance practice, improvisation, tool

1. INTRODUCTION: WHAT DANCE IMPROVISATION IS TO ME AND WHY I FIND IT MEANINGFUL

“The improvising dancer tacks back and forth between the known and unknown, between the familiar/reliable and the unanticipated/unpredictable.” (Foster 2003, 3) ¹

I decided to write my thesis about improvisation as I find it a very meaningful topic to me. I enjoy the exploration that it offers. By exploring I mean the almost endless possibilities to research the movement, the being, the body and mind connection, the space ... It allows me to have a journey in myself and to find something new and undiscovered. This makes me curious to find more experiences. I am especially keen on discovering the unknown and finding new ways to move, to feel, to think and to be present. It is a fascinating yet a very vast field. Additionally I have been inspired by performances based on the material created through improvisational methods such as the works of Hodworks or The Forsythe Company. This also aspires me to improve my skills as an improviser.

“I think that’s improvisation. Not knowing what is my next move... It’s a state of being.” (Gál 2018) ²

To me, improvisation means free and spontaneous movements that arise without planning. To enable this, the mind needs to be free and adaptable. In the matter of the fact I could say improvisation is most of all a state of mind. It helps me to go beyond the rational thinking level to something instinctive. I find it addictive as it allows me to get the flow state where I exist simultaneously in the space connected to my inner-self and to the external world. When I am at the flow state I feel very much connected to myself; my physical body and my mind are in harmony. I feel as if I am moved by an inside energy. It allows me to loose the control yet I am aware of my body and I can live in the movement and in the moment without the fear of harming myself. In that moment I feel pure and surrendered in the present. Actually I have

¹ Albright Cooper, A. & Gere, D., (2003) *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univeristy Press pp. 3.

² Gál, E., Interviewed by: Torkko, V., (13/1/18)

gained access to that state through improvisation. I believe I have learnt to access parts of my personality that would have otherwise been inaccessible without the help of improvisation. I assume that the personal connection is one of the greatest reasons why it is so meaningful to me.

By nature, I am a perfectionist. Many times my problem has been my overanalysing brain that blocks me from thinking, dancing and learning. Later in the text I refer many times to blockages. By them I mean either mental restrictions that prohibit me to move or think freely, or physical blind spots of having parts of the body that the flow of movement cannot reach. The statement that Anniina Aunola, my first improvisation teacher, said that there is no right or wrong in improvisation, has stayed in my mind. My first experiences of improvisation was that I can find the freedom in my movement far better when improvising than in a set technique training class, probably because I can allow myself to move without judging my mistakes and trying to think too much.

Improvisation allows me to be a child in the playground exploring the movement, the states of mind and the presence. Many times, if I have a blockage of some sort in dancing, it helps me to get back to free movement and the state of curiosity without judgement to overcome the mental blockage. Then it is often easier to gain more freedom within set material as I have been able to “trick” my brain to learn new things with a different mindset.

Of course the more I have improvised, the more I have realised that it is a technique that can and should be developed since I want to use it in creations and on the stage, not just a self-therapy tool for myself. However, I want to underline that the self-therapy value of it is a very important one to me, which I should not forget when I wish to improve my skills as an improviser. I believe that the therapeutical research has improved my performance skills as it has helped me to get connected to my inner-self.

There are so many layers in improvisational practice and that makes it so exciting to me. Approaching it just from one angle, such as physicality, does not really attract me because I find it quite shallow; but adding more layers together, such as physicality and states of presence and characters, makes the improvisation interesting to me. As I have discovered the broad world of improvisation, I know I need to find more clarity in how to approach the

practice. I think tracking down my history in improvisational practise and seeing how I have used it as a performer could help me in the process.

2. TRACING BACK MY PATHWAY IN IMPROVISATION

2.1. Improvisation practise with Finnish dance practitioners such as Anniina Aunola, Johanna Partio and Paula Salosaari.

2.1.1 Insight to improvisation with Anniina Aunola

My first experience of dance improvisation was with Anniina Aunola, a contemporary dance practitioner and a special education teacher based in Eastern Finland, when she was substituting our regular contemporary dance teacher when I was 17 years old. Aunola has been working a lot with making dance accessible to all. She has for instance carried out community dance projects within elderly people suffering from dementia in addition to projects related to youth work and child welfare.³

I had just a few classes with her but it opened up an undiscovered world of dance to me and it made me curious. We did some simple contact improvisation exercises with a partner, which was also the first time I was introduced to sharing my body weight. The practice included simple lifts, pushes and pulls. In addition to that we did tasks such as improvising with the voice: moving at the same time while telling a story and then trying to remember what we were doing movement and speaking wise.

At that moment I got very inspired about creating free movement and to learn about methods to do so. In the matter of the fact I discovered that improvisation helped me to understand my way of expression through movement. Therefore I started to have my own sessions of free movement in the dance studio. In a sense, this was a first step towards my own improvisational practise.

³ <https://www.savonsanomat.fi/kulttuuri/Yhteisötaiteilijan-ensimmäinen-kysymys-Kuka-sinä-olet/985043> (accessed: 11/5/2018)

I recall her explaining the importance of being able to remember the improvisation as it is one of the skills of the dancer of today when being part in the creation. As I was aiming for applying to vocational dance training, I got very inspired by her saying as it could be one of the requirements when working for my goal. I later recalled Aunola's methods of talking while moving when creating my project Issue which I will later explain more in the 3rd chapter. I adjusted her original task to my method. The talking helped me to create movement based on the emotion I wanted to express. In the creation process Aunola's advice of remembering the improvisation came handy as well.

2.1.2. Understanding the importance of imagery in the classes with Johanna Partio

My contemporary dance teacher at Savonia University of Applied Sciences Johanna Partio used a lot of improvisation in her classes as a part of getting to know the focus of the class. I also had improvisation workshops with her, which were allocated just for improvisational practise. Partio is a Finnish choreographer, a dancer and a teacher based in Kuopio, Finland.

The compulsory contemporary dance training studies at Savonia were split into three aims: the body, the space and the interaction. During the body period, Partio introduced some improvisational exercises for the body part which was studied in the class, such as the pelvis. Therefore we had the chance to discover the aim in a more free setting at the beginning of the class before moving onto the set exercises. She also used a lot of imagery in her work to understand the body.

Partio was many times referring to the exercises of Eric Franklin, a Swiss "movement educator", who is the creator of The Franklin method. Franklin uses a lot of imagery to re-teach the body to move dynamically and as effortlessly as possible. He has published many books about dynamic alignment and how to incorporate it to dance training. ⁴ I recognise exercises from Franklin's book *Dynamic Alignment* and *Dance Imagery for Technique and Performance (1996)*. One example of the used exercises is the "pelvic floor drum". In this improvisation exercise the task was to imagine the pelvic floor being the surface of the drum

⁴ <https://franklinmethod.com> (accessed: 18/3/2018)

and picture it vibrating and resonating. The main idea was to initiate motion through space from the drumming pelvic floor. ⁵



Pelvic floor drum (Franklin, E., (illus.) (1996)
Dynamic Alignment, By Franklin, E., USA, Human
Kinetics,142.)

Partio's approach of experiencing the body's structure through hands-on techniques, movement and imagery helped me to get a three dimensional understanding of my body. Additionally, I understood the importance of the ability to use imagery as I found it bringing more qualities and colours to my movement.

During the improvisation workshops we had the chance to have a live musician Marko Salmela to accompany the

classes. I recall doing many improvisational exercises using the music. Some were influenced by it: to move in the rhythm or the mood of it. We

also went against/off the music by making conscious decisions about it. Besides that improvisation we did a lot of exercises in pairs using impulses and also instructing and giving feedback the other person. I can remember an example: keep, drop, grow. Working in pairs, where one was improvising and the other giving instructions to either keep the movement, to drop it or to grow it. Additionally, we worked e.g. with the theme of nature by thinking of something of the nature that stayed in our minds from the summer holidays as a task for the improvisation.

Working with the music improved my ability to understand how I can use the music in varied ways. Especially to work against it was a challenge but I got to understand that if I was able to do so, it could be a useful choreographic tool. The improvisational work with a partner did not just improve the understanding of my own body but also the body of the other, how to be sensible and open to other person's movement. In addition to following the partner's instructions to exaggerate my movements taught me how the movement can be manipulated. This I have been able to use later in creations when making movement material.

⁵ Franklin, Eric. *Dynamic Alignment*, Human Kinetics, USA, 1996, 142.

The improvisation with the theme of nature had a great psychological meaning as I was just returning back to dancing after an injury of a broken metatarsal bone. I recalled the memory of the summer breeze and instead of thinking of technical execution I was able to focus on sincere sensations and emotions. The experience helped me to gain back the trust in my body and to have the joy of dancing which was a powerful reminder of the reasons why I dance. This is an example of the self-therapy value of improvisation that I refer to in the introduction.

2.1.3. Improvisation within the frame of ballet with Paula Salosaari and finding new approaches to ballet training

Improvisation was used by one of my ballet teachers Paula Salosaari at Savonia. Salosaari is a Finnish ballet teacher who wrote a doctoral thesis “Multiple Embodiment in Classical Ballet“, which is about finding new ways to teach ballet. According to her words after 20 years of studying and teaching ballet professionally, she felt frustrated by the continuous repetition in ballet training both as dancer and as a teacher therefore she sought new ways to pass on the knowledge. ⁶

She studied ballet at The Finnish Opera Ballet School. She had her own ballet school for a long time but she wanted to tear away from teaching as she felt frustration in the repetition and the obligation to follow the tradition without new influences. She found new ways to approach ballet at Laban School where she gained a Masters degree in Dance Science. She acknowledges that there must be more ways to teach ballet than just the old-schooled way. She says that by expanding the way of teaching ballet, the dancers can learn new ways to move in a class and they can enrich their movement vocabulary beyond the classical steps. ⁷

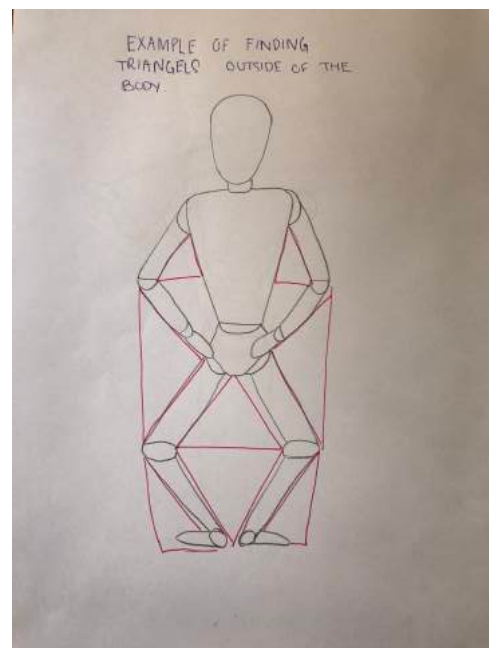
With her we started the ballet class with an improvisational task within the frame of ballet many times. For instance, we might have explored the suspension of *pas balance* in a free way before moving onto the *barre* exercises. On another day we were searching for the elongation of the spine by letting the spine fall upwards in a free setting and then keeping the sensation during the set ballet exercises. I later realised when taking Forsythe improvisation

⁶ Salosaari, P. (2001), *Multiple Embodiment in Classical Ballet. Educating the Dancer as an Agent of Change in the Cultural Evolution of Ballet*, Acta Scenica, 11.

⁷ <https://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/art-2000003964599.html> (accessed 27/2/2018)

classes that Salosaari used many ideas of William Forsythe in our classes such as geometrical shapes and connecting parts of the body in the space. I could make the connection as she was mentioning Forsythe's name and method many times in classes.

Her way of teaching made it easier for me to approach ballet as I was very well aware of my limitations in the technique, which made a mental block in my mind. Ironically saying that instead of thinking where my little finger is pointing, it helped me loosen up my mind to focus on, for example, the space between the body parts, between the body and the space or to imagine the body with geometrical forms and spaces around the body, such as triangles in the outside space of the it (see the illustration).



Finding triangle shapes outside the body (Copette, J., (illus.) (2018))

Still to this date I have the tendency to get blocked by the thought of not being able to do something. Salosaari's way of approach has aided me to get help with the problem when I realise I get into a restricted way of thinking: I name the main problem such as the restriction of the hips or the transfer of weight. Then I explore the focus in a free setting and later put some frames e.g. the external rotation of the hips and/or the vertical spine, later trying to recall the experience in the dance class. This method sustains me to find the moments of success which I believe are helping me to move beyond the blockage.

2.2 Contact improvisation with Sari Hannula and Tamás Bakó

*"Contact improvisation is unchoreographed, growing in the moment... from a point of physical contact between two dancers. They work with mass, momentum, gravity; with themselves, each other and the floor. They explore balances, finding new ways to support each other, to free each other to fly. The ideal contacter can walk on hands as well as feet."*⁸

8

Cooper Albright, A., Dils, A., (2001), (cited in Tafferner-Gulyas, V. (2015)): <https://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/download/5912/5696> (accessed: 11/5/2018)

2.2.1. Learning to listen to the other body in contact improvisation with Sari Hannula

I had got an insight of contact improvisation with Aunola and Partio when doing improvisation practise with a partner. However, my first actual contact improvisation workshop was with Sari Hannula, a guest teacher from The Turku Conservatory in Finland, when I was a student at Savonia. Hannula is a Finnish contemporary dancer, choreographer and teacher.

The one-week course was a lot about basic weight-sharing and sensing the other body. It was very much about the understanding of the other bodies and how to communicate with my own to the others. We did simple weight-sharing e.g. back to back trying to find the shared point of balance with the least energy possible. We also did weight-sharing exercises where the other was on all-fours and the other searched for balance points on the other person's back.

I gained more awareness of the counter forces and the centre of gravity when working with a partner. Actually, we mostly worked on the gravity and how to share the weight with the other person. The valuable learning lesson was to become aware of the other body and to find ways to move ergonomically in contact. Although the exercises were relatively simple, they opened up my senses for listening the other. This is a good reminder still to this date when working with a partner; to start simple in order to be available for listening.

2.2.2. Approaching myself differently in Tamás Bakó's contact improvisation classes

As a student at Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy, I started taking contact improvisation classes with Tamás Bakó. Bakó is a Hungarian contemporary dancer and teacher, who also studied at BCDA. He has worked with Ester Gál, Ismael Ivo, Marco Santí, Adrienn Hód and Gábor Goda, among other names. He is a regular teacher at BDCA where he teaches contemporary dance and contact improvisation. He also creates his own works.⁹

⁹ https://www.tanckritika.hu/images/stories/pdf/ttt_bp2010.pdf (accessed 11/5/2018)

Personally, Bakó's contact improvisation classes have a somatic approach to dancing. By that I mean the strong body-mind connection and the sensitivity to the sensations of the body. On the other hand the classes were sometimes more playful and faster in building up the class, but the listening and sensing was always there.

We discovered different ways to share the weight and to use the body surfaces. One of the instructions I recall him saying often was "to feel the floor and the space through another body". In the classes we practised how to move in an A-shape shoulder to shoulder also with or without arms, or to move in a C-shape pelvis to pelvis and how to travel with this. We many times experimented with solo exercises and later adding a partner to them. One example is the crawling on all-fours focusing on the spiral that the action created. Then we added partner work to the task: The other one stayed on all-fours keeping the gaze on the partner who was standing and moving around the crawling one. The crawling one should have kept her eyes on the standing one the whole time, no matter to which direction and how fast she went.

In the classes we experimented a lot with mapping of the body, both of the own body and of the body of the other. I believe that is one of the most important discoveries that I could bring to my dancing in general. By the mapping I mean the perception and awareness of the body, its size and the shape and the understanding of how it functions. Through classes with Bakó my comprehension of the surfaces of the body has improved a lot since the practice has included the focus on it a lot. Another remarkable discovery was the understanding of the bridging of the body: how to sense and use the body parts in relation to the partner and the floor ready to catch myself while sensing the other person.

His classes opened up a more thorough understanding of what contact improvisation is and can be since I have been able to learn from him over a longer period of time. In his classes I have come to the understanding how contact improvisation is a different way of thinking about dance. It is not just how I can find ways to meet the other person but also how I can approach myself differently, and in a more holistic way when dancing.

2.3. Gaga technique with Auri Ahola, Bosmat Nossan and Yaniv Avraham aiding to open up awareness and availability for movement

My first encounter with Gaga technique, “a movement language” developed by Ohad Naharin, was during the Kuopio Dance Festival in Finland in 2012. The one-week course was taught by an Israeli ex-Batsheva Dance Company dancer Bosmat Nossan. The intensity of the course over a short period of time allowed me get a closer idea of the method compared to the random classes that I later took part in with Auri Ahola in Helsinki and Yaniv Avraham in Budapest.

Gaga technique was developed by an Israeli dancer and choreographer Ohad Naharin. He was in the junior ranks of Batsheva Dance Company and then later moved to New York to study and perform with Martha Graham. There he also attended the School of American Ballet and the Julliard School. He made his choreographic debut in New York where he was working with his first dances between 1980 and 1990. He has been the Artistic Director of The Batsheva Dance Company since 1990. In addition, he has developed The Gaga movement language which explores sensations and availability for movement. ¹⁰

Naharin started to develop the Gaga method as a tool box for dancers after sustaining a back injury. According to Naharin an important concept of Gaga is the letting go/the yielding. However he states that the purpose is not to collapse or relax but to find where one blocks the energy by holding himself without allowing joints to be available for movement. He also says that by learning to use vertical forces, the gravity, the dancer can find more texture, substance and beauty in the movements. ¹¹

To my experience the Gaga class is constructed the way that there are no breaks in the class structure but instead it is a constant flow of moving. One of the instructions in the workshops I attended was to keep all senses open during the whole ninety-minute-long class. We explored the motion possibilities in different joints keeping the awareness and availability for

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/03/arts/dance/03joy.html> (accessed 11/5/2018)

¹¹ <http://tanzraumberlin.de/A-Toolbox-for-Dancers--435-0.html?id=705> (accessed 18/3/2018)

movement present the whole time. During a part of the class, classical dance steps such as *plié* and *battement tendu* were practised but in a way that we were searching for different possibilities and sensations. The classes had a lot of imagery in them such as being water that gradually starts to boil and consequently moving.

The continuity of the class enabled me to have a trip throughout the body and mind. It felt like a long meditation to me. I became aware of the blockages in my body and the energy I was using. It was especially interesting to monitor the flow of energy. I could find the way to release and get the flow. To explore how to drive myself to the extreme level of physicality yet enjoying it. When tired to reduce the level of energy but not to stop moving and staying present in the moment.

I had a vivid experience in the class with Nossan. It has stayed in my memory how remarkable it was to be present not just in the body but the environment around me. To live in the movement but also to be aware of the temperature, the taste, the touch and the vision in addition to the people around. I recall those moments when I was honestly present as myself in the instant, ready to do anything.

There were a lot of imagery used in the classes which helped me to discover my body and different movement qualities in a curious way. I think the curiosity was the thing that made me motivated to dig in deeper in the journey of the class. It was also the first time I was introduced to try classical dance movement such as *plié* and *battement tendu* in a completely new way, being able to research the possibilities it gave me.

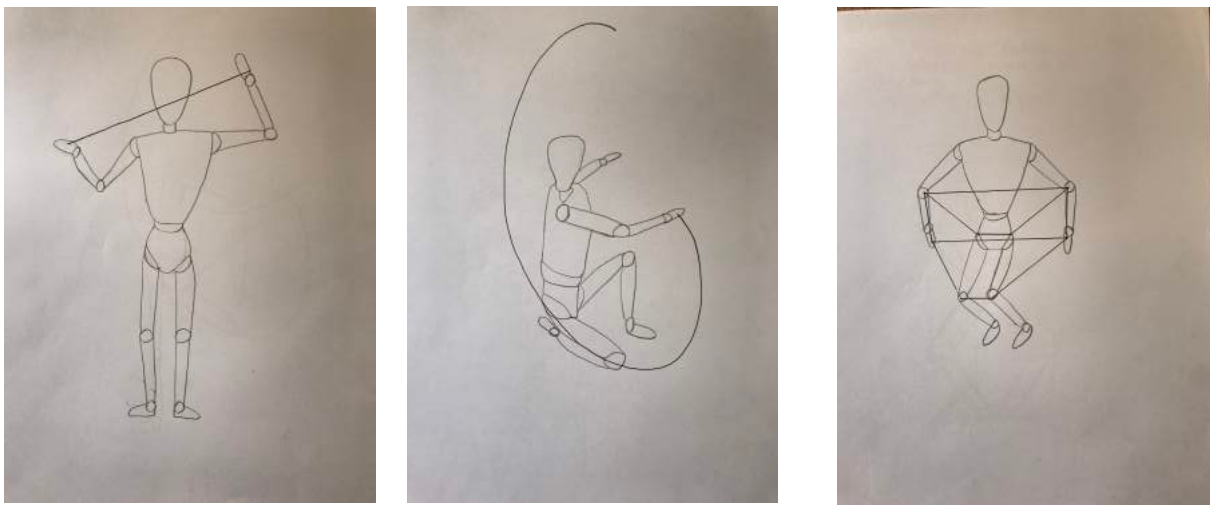
The feeling I had after the classes, was that my body had worked out but I did not feel exhausted but more like ready to move more. I also felt coordinated. The class drove me to a cat-like state: agile and ready to go from 0 to 100 in an instant.

2.4. Improving the ability to picture the body through Forsythe improvisation with Tamás Moricz

I took part in a one-week-long Forsythe improvisation method workshop with Tamás Moricz during Kuopio Dance Festival in Finland in 2015. During the same week I attended his

movement research workshop. Moricz is a Hungarian born dancer. He graduated from The Hungarian Dance Academy after which he danced with the Kibbutz Dance Company in Israel. He was a dancer of Ballet Frankfurt for eight years under the direction of William Forsythe therefore he has a thorough insight of Forsythe's working method. Moricz says that with Forsythe he learnt how to improvise and got a new understanding of dance and creation. Additionally he was able to let go of rigid ballet training and he started to enjoy the creative process as much as performing. One of his pedagogic goals is to share the sense of creative freedom.¹²

The improvisation workshop was about Forsythe's improvisation technologies which is based on geometric shapes and how they can be put in different parts of the body. For instance, creating connections of curves, straight lines, triangles or parallel lines of body parts (see illustrations). The task could be traveling in the space only with straight lines from A to B with a certain body part. A simple task like this became challenging when trying to find more complex ways to move but to keep the instruction.



Finding connections through lines (Copette, J., (illus.) (2018))

I remember how the workshop helped me to discover new movement patterns by following relatively precise movement tasks such as leading the movement with the heel of the hand and also executing geometrical shapes with the leading point. The teacher required to stay strictly on the task which was at times frustrating but later rewarding. The specific work broadened

¹² <http://www.tamasmoricz.com> (accessed: 19/2/2018)

my understanding of how to recognise and move my body around a certain point of the it. For instance, if the task was as previously mentioned leading the movement with the heel of the hand, the body had to fold around itself in order to stay on the task. This really improved the understanding of my body's structure.

During the same week I attended the same teacher's movement research workshop where we discovered a lot of these foldings of the body such as the natural ways of pivoting around the skeletal structure. The two workshops complemented each other and also directed my way of thinking.

In the movement research workshop we looked into the details of the body. In order to perceive the whole structure moving it is important to understand the small details along the line of the movement chain. For instance, we explored with tasks such observing the body following the movement when rotating the shoulder joint in or outwards. Another exercise was to be aware of the body's reaction when pushing the hand away from the heart or when pulling it towards it. At all times it was important not to restrict the body.

It was an important learning lesson that I became aware of the restrictions of my body as in the blind spot it was difficult to understand the movement possibilities. Accessing the blind spots enhanced the movement opportunities as that allowed the energy to flow through them.

What stayed as another significant learning moment was the understanding of the body in the backspace of it. By the backspace I mean the space behind the vertical midline. The front space is more prominent as it is guided by the vision but usually at the back the eyes are not guiding the understanding. The strict movement tasks improved my understanding of picturing my body when I could not see a particular body part. After seven days of workshops I really felt as if I had created a great deal of new connections in my brain and I could really imagine my body three-dimensionally from all angles. I actually had the feeling that new nerve routes were wired in my brain.

2.5. Skinner releasing technique with Eszter Gál; finding playfulness through imagery

I was introduced to Skinner Releasing Technique when I participated in a course taught by Eszter Gál in Budapest in 2016. Gál is a Hungarian choreographer, dancer and a teacher who has worked a lot with improvisation and contact improvisation. She also works with a mix-ability company called Company Tánceánia.¹³

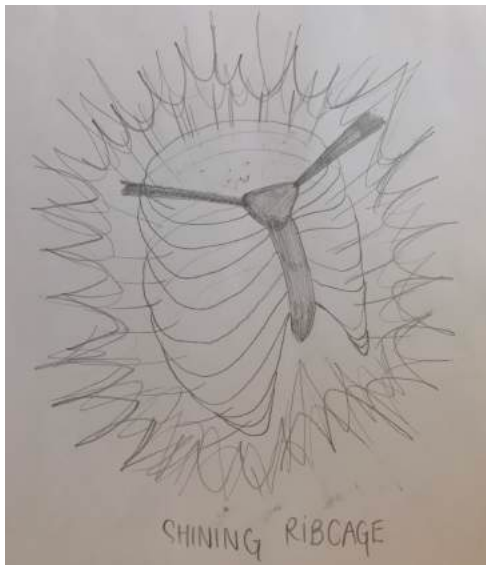
Skinner Releasing Technique helps people to practise letting go of unnecessary tension and holding patterns in the body and mind being able move with less energy. The classes include a lot of usage of imagery as a tool to re-pattern old habits. The images are not “anatomical truths“ but rather poetic expressing metaphorically the kinaesthetic experience of releasing body. The class also includes hands-on exercises with other participants which also helps to feel and let go of the old holding patterns.¹⁴

I recall practising a lot of hands-on exercises. In pairs or trios we practised topics such finding the release of the arms by directing them into a correct anatomical alignment. The partner guided the scapula to slide down the ribcage by brushing with the hand and directed the front and back sides of the back to be long and open. In addition the partner took the weight of the hand and moved it to release any excess tension. We explored moving exercises, too. One of them was “tipping” where the partner was tipped from the ribcage to different directions, taking the body to an off-balance state at ease while it being exciting and surprising. The partner who was tipping the upper body was in charge while the “tipped one” just followed the impulse of the other. To my recalling there was always a moment in the class when we had a moment of stillness lying on the floor. Towards the end of the class there was the time to dance, when we had freedom to improvise with the focus of the class.

After every class we wrote or drew our reflections of the class. I have saved some of my notes from the classes. Some words that pop out in the papers are being authentic, process, possibility, loose body, less energy and letting go. During the course I really had the chance to

¹³ Gál, E., Interviewed by: Torkko, V., (13/1/18)

¹⁴ <http://www.skinnerreleasingnetwork.org/sites/skinnerreleasingnetwork.localhost/files/alexanderconnectivities.pdf> (accessed 11.5.2018)



Shining ribcage (Copette, J. (illus.) (2018))

discover moving with less energy and exploring the effortless moving with imagery. I was also introduced to movement qualities I had not consciously thought about before such as “sponginess” and “buoyancy”. I also remember going through very vivid imageries such as seeing the light shining through my ribs (see the illustration), having white mist opening the body and moving it or being in the scene in the movie Kill Bill. Definitely my skills of imagining improved with SRT classes.

I enjoyed the classes’ playfulness. In fact I felt like a child in the playground playing and having fun but yet learning at the same time. Again I was drawn to the exploration of moving without trying to rigorously achieve something. Furthermore I felt the excitement to feel free in the movement. Personally I feel that it is important to have these moments to find more freedom and open mindset in the other practise I do and not to let myself get restricted. The valuable learning lesson for myself was that I could learn new skills and discover new movement qualities through having fun.

2.6. Finding a different kind of state of mind and body with Adrienn Hód

I took my first improvisation class with Adrienn Hód when auditioning for BCDA. Since then I have been able to attend a couple of intensive workshops with her at BCDA. Hód is a Hungarian choreographer and the leader of the dance company Hodworks. Additionally she has worked with e.g. theater and commercials.

In the classes with Hód we experienced different improvisation tasks. What I recall from those times is that she gave a lot of time to explore each task. Many times we started slowly getting aware of the body and then building up the energy gradually. Usually we started as a whole group then splitting into two groups and maybe smaller groups eventually ending with solos. She also used the method of work with a partner to give feedback or instructions.

To give two examples of her classes: In one class we worked with full or partial circles of body parts also including the face. On the speed scale of 0-10 we were instructed to use the minimum speed of 5 or faster. The next step was to have two or more circles at the same time or to have a circle travelling from one part of the body to another. Additional instructions were to change the movement quality and to add the use of facial muscles. Then we split into two groups observing each other. After we worked in pairs giving feedback to the other. We paid attention to circles, spacial levels, speed, the use of facial muscles and the movement quality.

During another class we worked with the voice. The first step was to use the voice in different ways such as different emotions, pitch, rhythm and loudness. In the other words to use it in a varied way. Simultaneously we moved as we wished when producing the sound, also finding held positions where to make the voice. We were told to use talking, too and to add rhythm to it. Then we added voice to the tasks we had explored in her class: the distance between body parts, circular motion, distance from the floor, one direction in the body or two directions of the body. The instruction was to have one task at the time and when entering the situation to have 1/3 of the time without a voice, 1/3 with talking without a rhythm and 1/3 talking with the rhythm of the movement and music.

I recall that in Hód's classes I got into a totally different kind of state of mind and body. I felt very aware of the situation I was in both in my body and my surroundings. Through the process in the class I many times got to the state where my body was able to produce movement that I did not know I was capable of. In addition, I could find new patterns to move. The movement arising felt very sincere and honest. Often after the class I had the feeling I was very exhausted physically but emotionally I felt somehow purer as if I was able to express my emotional state in the dancing.

Hód's classes taught me that it is worth investigating time on one particular task as something unexpected might arise from that. When improvising alone and feeling restricted I have come back to her way of starting from listening to building up the energy. Her classes were an example to me where the state of mind was driven from the physicality.

2.7. Learning to show the body as a musical instrument in “Melting Pot” with Marco Torrice

I was introduced to the “Melting Pot” concept of Marco Torrice in my second year at BCDA. Torrice is an Italian dancer, a choreographer and a teacher, who teaches at BCDA as a guest teacher in addition to working internationally.

To my experience and what Torrice told us in the classes, “Melting Pot” is a dance practise in between a party, a pedagogical approach and a performance. The class practise includes exploration of the connection between the floor and the body through pushes and pulls, the movement possibilities of the torso, rhythm, the group connections and the space. The performance concept is about improvisation but at the same time it has a “score”. One of the main points are “loop rhythm” (a repeated rhythm performed by the group), “personal phrasing” by an individual and travelling “group formations”. In between these there are many varied possibilities for the actions to happen.

In the classes we looked over tasks such as exploring the push and pull with the floor with free rhythmical phrasing, making rhythms with different parts of the torso and head, creating “loop rhythms” in a group and practising “group formations”. As an example we did “personal phrasing” with the spine where there was no repeated “loop rhythm” but still the rhythmical choices should have fitted to the music. We also explored “personal phrasing” with pushes and pulls with the legs with simple walking and running patterns. “Loop rhythms” were first introduced in a group situation in a circle where one by one we created a rhythm for the whole group and then interpreted it with different body parts. Later “loop rhythms” were taking place in different "group formations" such as circles, lines and triangles.

In this improvisation practice my ability to show my body as a musical instrument got challenged. In the classes we practiced how to be clear with the rhythm when showing it with the body and especially when challenging it with different body parts. What I realised when starting the practice was that I often used the rhythm as an impulse to initiate the movement instead of making every beat clear and making distinctions between staccato movements, suspensions and pauses. The practice helped me to get more aware of my body. To make the

rhythm clear, unnecessary involuntary movements should be avoided. This is one of my pitfalls as many times the body wants to echo to the music.

During the classes I learnt a valuable skill to be aware of my approach I take to the practice. Sometimes to find clarity and to isolate the body parts I needed to be more analytical. However depending on the day I could not take it for granted that the same approach would work. On another day a more relaxed approach would work better. This listening of myself is something I could take into all of my practice.

2.8. The artistic research work I have done during the Future Research programme

2.8.1. Learning about my physicality with tasks given by my fellow student Aiste Adomaityte

My first project at BCDA was to work with Aiste Adomaityte, who was a final year Bachelor student when I started at the Academy. The plan was that she was to give me improvisation tasks. The method was that she should spend 5 minutes on explaining the tasks and then I should continue working alone with it for half an hour. After I should show the results to her.

The first task was to stand eyes closed and to imagine a group of people around me giving me push and pull impulses yet maintaining a personal space. By personal space I mean not to use the whole space, but to keep it limited. We had three sessions to work with the task. At the beginning the task was to move with one impulse at the time but varying the dynamics. Later simultaneous impulses should be added. Additional instructions were to use less or more space, to use levels and shorter pulls and pushes that should be direct.

As I read my notes of the process I first had difficulties with trying to be honest with the impulses without the touch. Meaning I have done similar tasks before where other person uses touch, but this time I had to use my imagination. Working with another person giving me impulses is somehow easier because then I do not have to be in charge of what is going to happen next. Now the challenge was to create a similar kind of mindset on my own. The task worked when I started slowly with eyes closed and then accelerated the rhythm. Especially

when my brain was trying to overanalyse the task, it helped to speed up in order to get to a more instinctive level of doing.

I find it interesting how much different movement one task could produce. At first I started with simpler pushes and pulls having a drop in between to a zero state while staying on the spot and on one level. Later I connected the movements to each other without dropping to the zero state. I also used the space and levels more. This made the movement a lot more “dancy”. At this stage it was a challenge to stay within the task as the body would like to start moving as it wishes. It was a good practise to have the sense of freedom and to live in the movement yet having the clarity of the task having the balance between the two and additionally to let go of the excess thinking when I want to.

In addition to the previous task Adomaityte gave me tasks to focus on feeling the pelvis and/or the spine from the inside. The first one was to work with the pelvis. The instructions were to focus on the shape of it and to have a clear image of that in mind, to feel the pelvis against the floor or with hands and then to bring it moving in the space in different planes and with different dynamics. The instructions for the spine were to understand the movement of it by rolling down and up vertebra by vertebra, to imagine a point of the spine where the movement starts from, to use spirals of the spine and different levels and to think about using the spine from two points.

After spending sessions on both the pelvis and the spine separately, Adomaityte instructed me to focus on both parts of the body at the same time. She guided me to think about the weight of the pelvis dropping down and the spine growing up. After to move them by initiating the movement with other part of the body and the other one responding with a little bit of a delay. Additionally the responding movement should go to the most unnatural direction. As the research continued she gave extra instructions to avoid standing but to stay in *plié*, to stay on the floor and to use more drops in the movements.

Researching the moment from the pelvis made me feel very free. I experienced that by imagining the three dimensional form of it was helpful since understanding it made it easier to find moments to use the momentum. I also experienced how central part of the body the pelvis really is. By challenging the dynamics I found vibratory and shaking qualities which

made the movement research interesting and helped to gain additional freedom. The spine was a bit more challenging to research as during the sessions I felt it quite stiff in the muscles and thus I had some blind spots along the vertebral chain. What I experienced was that by thinking space and imagining light in between the vertebrae I could reduce the tension. According to my personal notes from the session, I found this as a fruitful research and the outcome was a shaking kind of quality as a consequence of the freeing body. By the release of the neck I was able to let go of the excess rational thinking and this enabled many exciting moments in the improvisation allowing me to surrender in the movement. This was the case especially when working with the pelvis and spine together going into unnatural directions.

As I showed my research to Iván Angelus, the director of the Academy, he gave feedback that my movement phrases were many times the same length. As silly as it sounds, it was something I had not thought about earlier and I realised it can be a good tool to make the improvisation interesting. He also made me to dance with a cigarette in my hand which to my understanding was to “trick” my brain and prevent some habitual patterns of mine.

2.8.2. Finding out how the different outfits can change my dancing

The next task at the Academy given by Angelus was to explore dancing with five different outfits and to see how it can give me different sensations and characters. First outfit was a silky and elegant dress with long sleeves, second was a miniskirt with high heels and a tight shirt, third was a loose summer dress, fourth was one I called “Isadora Duncan-like dress” and fifth was a boy-like outfit wearing men’s shorts and a loose t-shirt.

I experienced that an outfit gave me a character to move with. Being in the character triggered different kind of movements and also qualities. The feeling of the outfit also gave me sensations to be more aware of the touch. Different outfits gave different kind of touch to the skin which influenced the movement in different ways.

The outfit made me aware of the character I was in. I became aware of how blocked I felt in some. For example, when I was wearing the very feminine dress with heels, I felt an obstruction in my personality as I found it difficult to let my personality through although I

had an urge to it. Reading my notes from that time I was questioning myself why I narrow down my personality at a school situation instead of allowing myself to be how I am outside of it.

On the other hand the “Isadora Duncan dress” made me feel as Isadora. Actually this was the image that popped in my mind when dancing. I felt total freedom and enjoyment of dance without trying to focus on technicality. The only thing I was focusing on was the sensation of the dress and dancing with minimal energy. Having open hair helped, too as I was used to wearing my hair up and quite tight so having it loose aided to gain the sense of freedom. I believe it was an important experience to just enjoy the dancing. In the dance studio situation I was trying to achieve something many times in a wrong way by blocking myself and not allowing to be truly in the moment. This experience certainly helped me.

The feedback from Angelus was that the dress did not change my movement so much but it changed the quality how I moved and also the face when dancing was different. He gave me additional instructions to play with the volume of the movement to make it big or small and to play with the travelling and internal movement which then led to more versatile possibilities.

2.8.3. Researching falling and experiencing the importance of strong imagery

My next task given by Angelus was to discover falling with imagery. I collected 10 different strong videos of fallings and crashes to get a visual experience which to apply in movement. I had videos of for example crashing planes and exploding buildings. As an example I used a clip of Tacoma Narrows Bridge Collapse. ¹⁵

I first explored different kind of falls in the studio. I was especially keen on finding a sincere way of falling without pretending. I explored with slides from standing to the ground, direct falls and drops down and off balances.

During the middle of the process I showed my explorations to Angelus. He gave me technical instructions to think about the fall as a chain of keys in order for the body to cushion the fall ergonomically. He also gave me advice to think about different falls, not just the ones directly

¹⁵ <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=nFzu6CNtqec> (accessed: 28/4/2018)

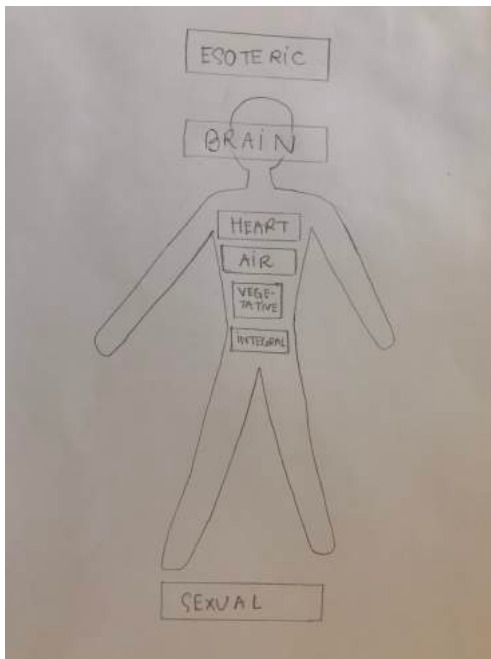
going down but also the mechanisms allowing me to fall or the ones that go down bit by bit. Follow up tasks were to explore physics with the body such as swings and throws. For these I also chose real images or experiences such as swings with a heavy bag in hand or throwing something heavy.

I learnt how the body needs to have a certain muscle tone for the fallings. It cannot be completely loose but the fall needs to be allowed to happen. The energy needs to be able to flow without restrictions so the movement stays soft and my body is able to react to the off-balance state. To me the same living in the movement happens in swings. This actual physical memory of the actions that I gained has later helped me a lot and it has stayed in my mind as something valuable in addition to the control of the energy flow.

To my mind my skills to imagine improved a lot during the process. During the research I noticed that if I explored the tasks without a clear image, the body's reaction was neither as sincere nor strong as with the image. Later I have learnt to understand the variety and the layers the imagery can have. I explain more about it the 3rd chapter.

2.8.4. Exploring movement from the different sources of energy in the body and realising how different movement and states of mind they can produce

My third project of the first year was given by Angelus to research different kinds of energies, similar to the thinking of chakras, in the body. They were split into seven categories: esoteric (the energy coming from the outside), brain/cognitive (structure, understanding, order), heart (emotions and time), air/soul (breathing and time), vegetative (the centre to the self), integral (balance and the centre of balance) and sexual (energy coming from the down, dark, gravitation). Esoteric and sexual energies were the ones coming from the outside of the body while brain/cognitive, heart, air/soul, vegetative and integral energies were coming from inside the body (see the illustration). The task was to make an improvisational etude of each. At the beginning I gave myself some instructions how to approach each energy. For instance when researching the energy of the heart I wanted to find a memory with a strong emotional state. One was when I had a strong feeling of falling in love. I could feel the energy as light inside of my ribcage. In contrast connecting to the integral energy I started with slow *qi gong*



Energies of the body (Copette, J., (illus.) (2018))

exercises of which I had experience of getting myself centred or otherwise moving first slower and then fastening up rounding the energy around the pelvis.

The task taught me how different kind of physical experiences I can have from different sources of the body and how they get connected to different states of mind. Connecting myself to the breathing produced wavy energy and movement inside the body. At the same time exhaling gave me sensations of emptiness, anguish and inhaling of opening, purity and calmness. During the research of air/soul I felt genuine in the present moment. In comparison connecting to the sexual energy gave me a feeling of being somewhat self-conscious yet cunning like a fox.

I found this research a very important one as it taught me how I can use consciously my different energies for producing different states, feelings and movement. In addition it provided me with tools to sustain my energies: for example if I feel stressed and I notice my brain is overworking, it is worth recognising which energy feels blocked or underused. By accessing the block from the underused energies might resolve the problem of an overactive brain. In this sense the task had self-therapeutical value.

3. EXAMPLES OF HOW I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO USE IMPROVISATION AS A TOOL FOR THE PROJECTS AIMED ON THE STAGE AS A DANCER AND AS A CREATOR

3.1. Improvisation utilising the different energies of the body

3.1.1. The Beatles Drafts

At the end of my first year at The Academy I performed in The Beatles Drafts production directed by Angelus in Trafó theater in May 2017. The working title of the scene I was dancing in was called “dresses”. “Dresses” was based on four energies of the body (brain, heart, air and sexual) and four characters of different dresses. Eventually I had just one dress but the four characters were there. There were four dancers, who had unison parts together also based on the four characters while my task was to improvise at the same time.

I started building up the characters alone in the studio. I was able to utilise the research I had done for the energies of the body and the research on how the different dresses/outfits made me feel. I picked four dresses from the wardrobe of the school that I thought to present the style of the 60’s as for the time of The Beatles. They were all very different allowing the four characters to be different. I did not decide which dress represents which energy until I tried them on and experimented which kind of a feeling and sensation they gave to me. An airy dress immediately felt like a dress for breathing, a “square” and boxlike dress represented brain for me, a loose and silky dress gave me a feeling of a hippy connected with the heart and a black dress gave me a sensual feeling linked to the sexuality.

As I had recognised the energies, I could give them more characteristics that were coming naturally. The brainy persona was determined, aware and ordered. When in the character I was especially conscious of the directions of the body and the space, and the relation of my body parts to each other. The gaze was clear and open. The heart character was joyful and happy as I was relating to happy memories that were radiating outwards from the chest. The movement that the state produced was explosive and energetic. The airy person was “gone by the wind” and a little bit lost. The movement was initiated by inner waves of the body and the

movement of the diaphragm. The sexual character was self-assertive and powerful. The power and the movement initiation was mainly coming from the pelvis yet the upper body remained soft and movable.

The process was nothing but simple to me and I faced many difficulties during it. It was the first time I was going to improvise on the stage with something else than a pure physical task (e.g. with lines). There were many things I had no experience of so there were many things I did not realise to consider. One problem was to relate to the unison group while having a solo. One was to get influenced by them too much at times when dancing drifting away from the original idea. One was to share the idea and my experience of the whole process I had gone through for them to create material. One was to change from one character to another immediately without a build-up. One was a confusion of how to always improvise something new yet keeping the quality of each character and one how to make the dance interesting but not just to move. Additionally as the process went on it drifted quite a bit from the original idea and I noticed by body reacting more with just “dancy” material instead of what was coming from within.

Although the process left me confused, it also taught me a great deal. Now looking back I understand what I should have done differently. One thing is to be clear of what I want to say with my dancing. I also learnt a lot how to connect to the group directly and indirectly. For example how influential my position in relation to them can be or how I can relate to them by adding to their spacial formations. I realise now that I should have made each character stronger so that there are points that I can get back to if I drift away from the original one. For instance I got connected to the movement patterns which ended up producing similar movements. Instead I could have been more connected to sensations in the body such as the muscle tone, the feelings that each character was giving me and the imagery related to the energies and characters.

The advice that Angelus gave was actually to use a lot of imageries. For each source of energy that the each character was based on should have many images that could be used in varied ways. As an example the images for the air could be waves, caring, sensations of dark/light, desperation/hope, a balloon and a horde of fish. This was a suggestion that has then later helped me with finding layers to other materials. To build more the characters and recognising

them better I could have played with exaggerating and minimalizing the characters as we did in the classes of Angelus in my last year at the Academy in order to make them stronger and more easily recognisable for myself.

Personally it was a great learning experience to understand how different kind of movement the different characters produce and how different characters the different energies give. This is something I believe to be able to use with my work as a dancer later on.

3.1.2. Èclipse

Another piece where I was able to consciously exploit the research of the energies was Èclipse by Csaba Molnár performed in Trafó theater in December 2017. The piece was constructed of two parts: the first one included a set structure with improvised movements to techno music. The score included e.g. formations and improvisation with body parts with directions. The second part was a very different as it included songs such as “Roxanne” from Moulin Rouge, Beyoncé’s “Single Ladies” and Celine Dion’s “Tell him” with lip singing of soloist and the group. In my mind it was more theatrical compared to the first part because of the characters the songs gave. The structure included set material, though it had improvisation, too.

I felt encouraged to find my own approach to the piece that was already existing. In rehearsals I noticed that I could relate to the energies of the body and the sensations they gave to me. I decided to be aware of them and use them if I had the chance. For instance, in the first part I felt the techno beat in my centre bringing me to a very instinctive state. I was not trying actively find additional images to this but I could enhance the energy around the centre and strengthen “the state I cannot put words to” it gave me. I would say that it was the energy that drove me to a certain state and so the two are very connected. Additionally the techno music was driving me to the trans-like mindset therefore I could collect the energy from the music to the centre giving me extra drive for dancing.

I knew some energies of the body would produce a certain kind of movement. I could take the advantage of the work I had done for “dresses” in The Beatles Drafts to produce improvised footwork required in the first part of the piece. I knew from experience that a “happy state felt

around the heart” could make my body move fast and with upbeat footwork. By connecting to the chest and having happy memories I could make my feet move fast and relatively effortless. This time I did not have so many of visual images but more of a sensations of light, electricity and bubbles.

In the second part the different characters were more obvious as the different songs determined the nature of the character. There I could find the energies easier as the songs made me feel a certain state. For example during the last scene to the song of Celine Dion, however cheesy and corny it was, I related myself to the melody and the lyrics of the hesitation of the love confession. I could easily connect the feeling to the energy inside the chest maybe because I had problems in my personal life and the feeling around the heart was very strong. I believe the awareness of the energies that I had gained through the research and The Beatles Drafts helped me to turn this energy to the direction I needed on the stage; whether it was the happy state that I mentioned earlier or the feeling of pouring out the heart for love.

I felt the research I had done for the energies was something I could use for my benefit in Èclipse. Although I did not use the energies as directly as in The Beatles Drafts, which was based on the them, still I could relate and connect myself to the piece through the energies and build my line throughout the piece in a more abstract way.

3.2. Improvisation based on emotional states

My first project during the second year of the studies was making a piece about my experiences of my close relative’s mental illness. It was the first project choreographed by me at the Academy that ended up being a performance performed to public. However, the project started more as a research and the decision to perform it publicly came only later. The process started in August 2017 during the Creative Garden, an intensive week before the actual start of the school year, and the outcome Issue was performed at Trafó theater in December. I worked with my fellow school friend Justine Copette, who danced in the piece me being the creator and the other part of the duet.

My wish was to produce something authentic free of “classical aesthetic standards” of performative dance. Not to think at the beginning what the piece should look like but really to go from within and then to refine the material. Throughout the process I was questioning my approach to aesthetics. I come from the background of set material and I believe it to be the reason why “classical aesthetic preferences” are implanted in my mind. What I came across later relating to the topic was interesting to me: Kirsi Monni writes in her doctoral thesis about interpretations of new art philosophical paradigms in dance through the thinking of Heidegger. It is interesting to me how she is thinking of the understanding of the art through his philosophy. The art has a meaning and a role of the opening of the reality and existence and not just to imitate and perform it having only an aesthetic experience for the viewer. She writes how the question of being aesthetic is not wrong but through the thinking of existing, the dancer can find a mindset for her actions that does not cover but supports the experience of existence and being. ¹⁶ For me this process was the first one when I felt confident to try a new approach for dance: Not thinking of the movement from the aesthetic point of view trying to create something pleasing for the eye but to create something interesting coming from within. However, I noticed my tendency of wanting to show something “beautiful” as the process went on. It was helpful to have guidance throughout the process to keep on the original track.

I ended up working mainly with emotions, although the piece also included some material that I call “neutral”. I wanted to make something to exploit the strong feelings and memories I had about the topic. In order to produce something that I consider honest, I decided to go the memories I had about my relative and go on from there. I looked for strong memories that I had multi-sensible experiences of, such as the visual image, smell and the most of all the emotional state. Through the memories I found the strong emotions I decided to work with. I narrowed them down to the following: happiness, care, respect, shame, anxiety and disgust.

It was a trial and error to find the working method to access the feelings on my own. Somehow I recalled an exercise I had done a long time ago with Anniinna Aunola (I explained about it in the second chapter); to talk while improvising. I decided to modify the task and use it when going to the memories. By talking out loud the memory I could build up an emotional state and the movement came as a consequence of that. I realised that talking as if explaining

¹⁶ Monni K., (2004) *Olemisen poeettinen liike*: Acta Scenica pp. 73-74

and remembering made the memory more vivid and stronger. I also discovered that by adding the emotion to the voice helped to emphasise the movement quality.

My challenge was to find a way for Copette to relate to the memories. After I could name the emotions. I had a memory or an image in mind, I explained my experience and then asked her to find her approach to the particular emotion. The working method was to choose a particular emotion and explore it alone for 20-30 minutes. After that we showed it to each other. By watching each other we were able to choose the motifs for each emotion that were interesting and meaningful to us. That way we could also emphasise the interesting movements.

The different feelings produced quite different sensations in the body. The care was somehow soft and air-like and felt around the heart, whereas the disgust made the muscles contract and was felt in the gut and throat. The feeling of the source of the energy was somewhat similar to the feeling I experienced during the research of different energy sources in the body. I could use my experience from that task to help me as I could recognise a particular part of my body for each emotion as a source of energy.

In order to get the emotions as whole body actions I imagined the certain part of the body as an engine pumping the energy to the rest of the body. For instance, I felt happiness the strongest in the sternum which was the engine from where the energy was sent to the rest of the body. I used additional imagery recognising blind spots in the body and thinking of them while opening the emotion pouring in.

I shared this personal experience with Copette when guiding her with the found material. For example, the respect gave her soap bubble kind of an image. I advised her to feel the soap as the emotion. Additionally by the eye I could spot which part of her body was restricted and then to guide for imagining of these parts opening and being filled with the “emotion soap”. Personally I could see the change in the movement being more global and somehow stronger.

The advice that we got from Angelus was to work with the improvised material regarding space, time and dynamics. However, changing the dynamics in this case was questionable as I felt the dynamic was given by the emotion. But by space and time we could give structure to the material and the relation of the two of us. He gave an additional advice to find repetitions

that would made the material more abstract and also to find a structure, to give a hypothetical example of A-B-A-A-C-B-C-C-A.

After the structure was there, the challenge was to keep the movement fresh. It was still somehow improvised yet it had relatively strict frames. I had certain memories that triggered the movements. In the way I needed the certain images, but I realised that to keep the movement alive and evolving I needed additional images and memories. On top of that I needed to make the already existing imagery stronger. The previous tasks I had done such as the work for “dresses” or the research of falling while using imagery had helped me to understand the helpfulness of the imagery. I noticed I was able to use them in a more complex way in the process of Issue. What I found very helpful was to keep the connection with the movement and to have an imagery with more than just one sense e.g. a visual image and a smell. Sometimes I could strengthen the movement by an inner dialogue, as in the same manner as I used to get into the emotional state in the first place.

During the process I came across the question whether it is possible to go too far in the feelings somewhere deep in the *psych* as I was dealing with emotional things I had not got into, took me far away from the reality at times. The more I allowed my body to go with the shake of it, the stronger it made me feel. I remember asking myself if there is a limit over which I should not go. However, I was most of the time in the studio with Copette which made the situation “safer” than being alone. With experimentations I became more accustomed to the feelings as I believe I processed them somehow in my mind. They did not feel threatening but that I was in control of them and I could strengthen or weaken them in the scale of 0 - 10. A valid advice from Angelus was not live the situation on the stage, to have the imageries and feelings but not to replace the stage situation with a real life situation. The other tool was to make the movement abstract e.g. by repetition which also brought the feeling of being in charge of the emotions and movement.

Another question that the process left me with was if I can say that I was improvising on the stage when performing Issue. The movement was initially improvised but later got the order and the spacial directions. For sure there were parts with set structure but other parts had wider frames. The movement could not be produced just by a physical act but with the connection with the mind. In the introduction I define improvisation as spontaneous

movement without planning. Yet I knew what I was going to do but at the same I could surprise myself with the movement. If I was not improvising in these moment what was I doing as it was not actual set material? Was it something in between that I do not have a term for yet? Does it actually matter to put a term to it and to categorise my actions?

4. CONCLUSION

I have understood that improvisation has been an important method for me to improve my dance technical skill. I think the expression "kids learn by playing" suits to this fact. As I have mentioned before, improvisation allows me to be the child in the playground and to let go of the overthinking brain. Through the childlike curiosity and the playful approach when discovering my body has enabled me to find freedom to overcome many dance technical obstacles such as finding the spirals for turns, having the control when landing from the jump on one leg or finding the coordination of the arms in relation to the rest of the body when moving.

In addition through improvisation I have been able to find richer movement qualities and to find access to the blind spots of my body. I have found the use of imagery improving my dancing especially when it comes to movement qualities. I have encountered with imagery before, but I was not conscious of the effect of them until starting to work with them more for the stage works. I feel exploring the use of imagery with improvisation has improved my ability to use imagery also in set material. I also feel using the imagery helps with my stage presence in order "not to perform".

Through improvisation I have understood that for me the state of mind and movement are linked in two ways. The movement can drive me to a state, or the state can be the engine for the movement. Firstly, the improvisation with Adrienn Hód is an example of where I got to a certain state of mind through the movement. Secondly, when creating the movement for Issue I approached the movement through my feelings therefore it is a reverse example.

"...when I'm doing improvised performances, that's very different (than when I made choreographies). So when I was very interested in this and I started to practise how to be on

stage and improvise and ask the question how can I go on stage when I improvise. What do I need to know? What do I wanna tell when I'm there and improvising?" (Gál 2018) ¹⁷

I have come up with a similar question to Gál's. The more I have improvised, the more I am thinking of what to tell on the stage. I have realised how important it is to be aware of what I want to transmit or to tell with my improvisation. Before I was mostly just enjoying the freedom it gave me and not really thinking the content of it, resulting the movement appear without a purpose. This kind of approach worked as a way to find the pleasure and freedom in dancing but not really to tell something to the spectators. Nowadays I am more aware of having something to transmit. Especially the improvisation works aimed on stage have helped me in the process. What I have discovered is that the more clear I am with myself of what I am doing and where my focus is, the more I can convey what I am experiencing to the outside. However, this is still an ongoing process.

5. REFERENCES

Albright A.C. & Gere D., (2003) *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Alexander, K. (2003) *Unravelling the Dance: an exploration of dance's underdeveloped relationship with its kinaesthetic nature, with particular reference to Skinner Releasing Technique*, Available at: <http://www.skinnerreleasingnetwork.org/sites/skinnerreleasingnetwork.localhost/files/alexanderconnectivities.pdf> (accessed 11.5.2018)

Franklin, E., (1996) *Dynamic Alignment*, USA, Human Kinetics.

Gál, E., Interviewed by: Torkko, V., (13/1/18)

Goodwin, J., (3.6.2007) 'Free Your Mind, and Your Spine Will Follow' *The New York Times*, Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/03/arts/dance/03joy.html> (accessed 11/5/2018)

¹⁷ Gál, E., Interviewed by: Torkko, V., (13/1/18)

Kourlas, G., (2015) ‘Ohad Naharin on Batsheva Dance Company: “It’s about doing more with less”’ *Time Out New York*, Available at: <http://tanzraumberlin.de/A-Toolbox-for-Dancers--435-0.html?id=705> (accessed: 19/2/2018)

Lankolainen, E. ‘Yhteisötaiteilijan ensimmäinen kysymys: "Kuka sinä olet?"’ *Savon Sanomat*, Available at: <https://www.savonsanomat.fi/kulttuuri/Yhteisötaiteilijan-ensimmäinen-kysymys-Kuka-sinä-olet/985043> (accessed 11/5/2018)

Laughterpiece Productions, (2006) *Tacoma Narrows Bridge Collapse (Sound Version) (Standard 4:3) (1940)*, [YouTube], Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFzu6CNtqec&app=desktop> (accessed 28/4/2018)

Monni K., (2004) *Olemisen poeettinen liike*, Helsinki: Acta Scenica, Available at: https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/33790/Acta_Scenica_15.pdf (accessed 28/4/2018)

Moricz, T., (No date) *Movement Awareness with Tamas Moricz*, Available at: <http://www.tamasmoricz.com> (accessed: 19/2/2018)

Räsänen, A., (27.4.2001) ‘Paula Salosaari väittelee baletista. Tanssijat vaikuttavat baletin muuttumiseen’ *Helsingin Sanomat*, Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/art-2000003964599.html> (accessed: 27/2/2018)

Salosaari, P., (2001) *Multiple Embodiment in Classical Ballet. Educating the Dancer as an Agent of Change in the Cultural Evolution of Ballet*, Helsinki: Acta Scenica, Available at: https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/33758/Acta_Scenica_8_2001.pdf, (accessed 25.2.2018)

Szoboszlai, A., (Ed. Péter Petra), (2010) ‘Teaching the teachers. Documentation of a methodological seminar for dance-teachers and dancers’ *Műhely alapítvány Workshop Foundation*, Available at: https://www.tanckritika.hu/images/stories/pdf/ttt_bp2010.pdf (accessed 11/5/2018)

Tafferner-Gulyas, V., (2015) 'Contact improvisation, a dance technique as a representative art form of the seventies in American culture' *European Scientific Journal*, Special edition, Available at: <https://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/download/5912/5696> (accessed 11/5/2018)

Illustrations:

Copette, J., (Illus.) (2018)

Franklin, E., (illus.) (1996) *Dynamic Alignment*, By Franklin, E., USA, Human Kinetics.