

Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy

Dancer BA

WITHOUT A MAP

Reflecting on the creation process, choreographing
'LOL'

THESIS

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Budapest, 2020

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Acknowledgement

I would like to direct appreciation and thanks to five people that have played an important role in the realization of this thesis.

First of all, my supervisor, Júlia Hadi, for great support and guidance of this work. Bringing clarification and focus to the topic. Thesis coordinator, Dóri Albert, holding the regular meetings related to the thesis process and encouraging me with constructive feedback. Anne-Charlotte Ek, for final proof-reading, giving feedback on the structure of the text for a better reading experience. Jessibeth Papouchado, for correcting grammar and spelling mistakes. Carin Dackman, for the great support as a mother and proof-reader of all I have ever written due to my education.

Introduction

‘A principle is a way to make a map where no map exists. The landscape is there already, but a map might help you decide where to go. Entering the landscape without a map is also fine, so long as that’s what you want to do.’¹

The choreographer Jonathan Burrows offers this poetic description of two opposite ways to enter the process of creating a choreography, with or without guiding principles. My intention with this thesis is to inspire myself and others to trust one’s own creative ability from idea to finished piece, using curiosity to enter the landscape and experience to add more details to the map along the way.

My experience of creating has been a feeling of entering that landscape during the night, not seeing where I am heading, searching for something. Trying to create a piece has also felt like sailing on the big open sea and frequently changing the direction, uncertain of where to go ashore. In the beginning of a creation process, I usually only have an assumption of what I am interested to explore. By working with improvisation, I start stepping through the unexplored landscape. I set up marks to be able to return and to continue with the process of creating a piece.

In this thesis I will return to my first semester as a student at Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy (BDCA) and reflect on the process of creating a piece about laughter. I intend to investigate if and how my working strategies have evolved since then. I shall assess what I struggled with and the potential reasons for these challenges. Furthermore, I shall reflect on what I know now that I was unaware of at that time. I shall also question what there is to learn by reading about others’ strategies of choreographing and thoughts on the process of creating.

My solo piece ‘LOL’ (laughing out loud) is my personal experience of a creation process that I reflect on throughout this thesis. The creation of ‘LOL’ became an almost four month long working period which ended with a performance lasting five minutes. It took place during an

¹ Burrows, J., (2010) *A Choreographer’s Handbook*, USA and Canada: Routledge, pp. 4

evening of school performances, in Trafó House of Contemporary Arts in Budapest, in December 2017.

I have selected parts from my notes made during the time that I worked with 'LOL'. Some of the notes are translated and interpreted if the sentences were incomplete or has misspelled words. The selections are like landmarks along the path of decisions that constructed this solo piece and reflects my struggle of what to focus on and how to relate to the subject that I decided to inquire through dance and performativity.

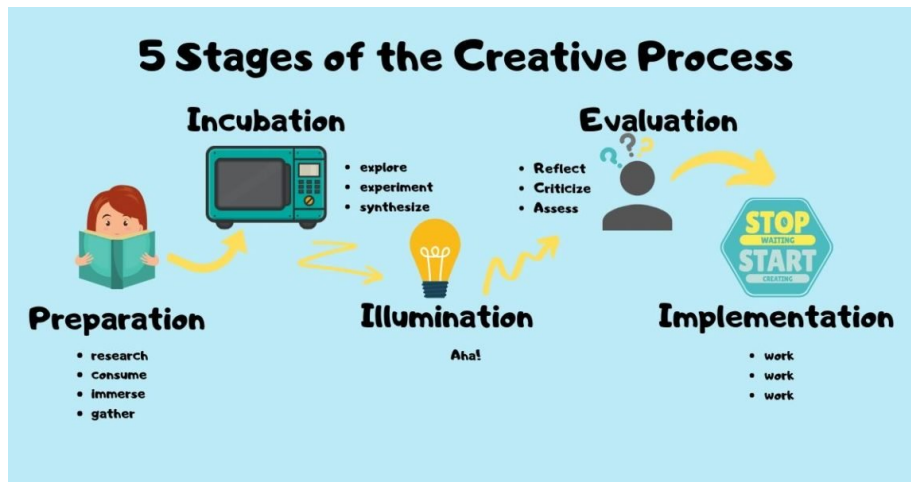
I am convinced that there is not one way or set of instructions which detail how to proceed when working with choreography. It is a learning process which requires being able to identify what one finds interesting, and which methods and tools one finds useful to guide the creation.

Definitions of key notions related to the creation process

The creation process - A series of actions leading to the creation of something ('Something' in this case is a choreographed piece)

My experience of the creation process relates to the working method of BCDA. At the same time, I became inspired by illustrations found online. These show their definition of the different parts of the creative process. One example divides the process into five steps: Preparation, Incubation, Illumination, Evaluation, Implementation.²

² Na Navilon, G., (12/04/19) 'The creative process: To improve your creativity, follow these 5 steps', *Ideapod*, Available at: <https://ideapod.com/the-creative-process/>, (accessed: 25/04/20)



Dividing the process into different parts helps to identify and understand it more clearly. Therefore, I decided to formulate my own division of the creation process in the context of creating a choreography. My illustration of the different parts is presented one after the other, but the order of the different parts is not fixed. The parts do not start and finish one after the other but interlace throughout the process. By making the different parts visible I can better understand how I wish to work due to my personal preferences in relation to each creation. I also want to encourage others to reflect and identify what works best for them.

My own division of the creation process making choreography

Working Method – The system/approach that is used to frame and guide the work through the different parts of the creation process

Source – The idea, interest or inspiration to create a choreography

Research – Exploring one’s interest theoretically and practically

Clarification of intention – Formulating the focus and reason for the creation

Making material – The practical work of creating movements, actions and situations

Selection – Deciding what parts to be a part of this specific choreography

Composition – Arranging the materials in relation to one another in space and time

Related artistic decisions – Sound, costume, lights, scenography, audience relation etc.

Finalization – Looking over all the elements of the piece and making the final changes if needed

Performance – The meeting between the audience and the creation where performance art takes place

Approaches to the creation process

Experience at BCDA

My major experience of the creation process relates to the working method of BCDA. The routine at the school is to apply with your idea each time you wish to start an independent project. The reason for this, as I understand, is to practise how to formulate your ideas and learn how to plan a project in relation to a deadline. If your project is not considered clear enough or realistic in relation to the timeframe or a previous experience, a consultation with the director of the school can be arranged to clarify the work plan before you can start with the practical work in the studio. Through consultation, we try to identify what is missing and suggestions may be made to develop the idea more extensively or search for another, before going further in the creation process. As a first-year student at BCDA, I was assigned to do a project by myself and decided to create a solo. Thus, this was how I presented my project during the application.

Working title: LOL (laughing out loud)

Description: Get inspired by the rhythm of different laughter. Laughter for different reasons, happiness, fear, satisfaction, nervousness, insecurity, surprise. The vibration of the laughter from deep inside. The facial expressions when laughing, somehow really close to crying, can have the same rhythm and is produced in the same place in the body.

Working Method: Improvisation with the laughter and movement together. How it can be transferred in my body into the rhythm of my feet. As shift in levels up and down from the floor. Facial expressions that come with the laughter. Read about it (laughter) function, situations, connections. The phenomenon of it being contagious.

Working plan: 2 weeks, 4 rehearsals to try it out for myself, after research I can have a clearer idea if it is a solo or if I want to ask others to work with me. 3-5 min (imagined length of the piece)

Useful tools in the creation process

Creating a working plan to get an overview of the project

When I applied with my project 'LOL' I had no clear vision in what way I imagined it to become a piece but could only express my thoughts on why I found laughter fascinating. I could not formulate a work plan for the entire creation process, as with very little experience I had no point of reference. I wanted to start with a period of research with the hope of finding more clarity. Presently, I can provide slightly more detail in how I plan my work although I am still not able to manage a full overview of the whole process. As I see it, the function of the work plan is not to use it as fixed instruction of the process, but more as a framework. This is to help manage the different phases of the creation process in relation to the timeframe you are given. In addition to a work plan for the project, I have learned to make a work plan for each rehearsal. I find it helpful because then I know what to focus on and how to approach it before arriving to the studio. During the rehearsal, the working itself can take a new direction, which I perceive to be a part of the process. This is achieved by staying open and realizing interests and connections that I could not plan beforehand but appear organically through the work.

Gathering thoughts and experiences through documentation

At BCDA we are encouraged to always have our notebook close by to make notes about our experiences and thoughts in relation to classes, self-managed practices and creations. This is to maintain an ongoing documentation and reflection on what we do. The work with this thesis has strongly convinced me of the importance of gathering all of this detail in one place. It gives the possibility to pick up on something I want to repeat or continue to develop. By reviewing the documentation of 'LOL', I can observe from a new perspective and do not have to purely rely on my subjective memories of the process. Instead I am learning from my own struggles and realizations.

When I make notes, I have learned to start by writing a title and the date so that later I can easily navigate through my notes to see when something took place and if it refers to my own

project, a class etc. I mostly make lists of sentence or paragraphs, each new section starting with a star at the left side of the page to help separate the different parts. Here is an example.

25/9- 2017

I made a mind map around the word laughter and the branches created different categories.

- *Own unique –can't be modified—can be held inside—or released*
- *at – with*
- *In all ages*
- *High notes—low notes—grunting*
- *Frighten—happy—nervous—reaction—distraction—mean*
- *Smile—grimace—teeth*

Sounds that are recognizable

That relates to a feeling

Everybody has a laughter

That is something human but monkeys can also laugh

What other animals can laugh?

Does it have a function more than that it is a communication and that it starts/ releases positive substances in the body?

In situations when I feel overwhelmed, doubtful or creatively blocked I sometimes use 'automatic writing'. This is when I set a timer for a time between five to fifteen minutes and then allow the thoughts to wander freely without any instruction or related to a certain question or situation that occupies my mind. The thoughts arrive on the paper and I can more clearly see an overview of them. I used this technique during the creation process of 'LOL' when I felt doubt and fear and needed to verbalize such feelings.

Personally, I rarely use drawings as a way to remember and describe an action although I know it can be very useful. However, when working on composition and especially when creating a floor pattern, it is much easier to illustrate it with a simple drawing, rather than explaining the locations and directions in space with written instructions. A drawing helps to visualize and offers an overview of the space and the actions that are arranged within.

As a complement to the written notes and drawings it is convenient to use video documentation. As an aid to remember a set sequence or improvisation, I find this to be the easiest method of gathering material. This was especially with 'LOL' as I was choreographing my own solo. Recording myself gave me visual feedback that I could not have perceived while performing. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware that the video is not equal to the experience of the live performance, but is a useful working tool.

Reflecting on the creation process in relation to ‘LOL’

Finding a working method

The working method is the system/approach formulating how one intends to go through the different parts of the creation process in order to arrive at the performance stage.

As I see it, the different parts of the creation process can be approached in the manner that fits the choreographer best. One choreographer might have a clear artistic intention and the source for a new project, and may start to create material. Another could have a source for inspiration and starts to research to then realize that the costume plays an important role. With this finding, the choreographer continues the research to clarify the intention of the piece, to then start creating material, and so on. The choreographer can also have different working methods in how to approach each part of the creation process, such as working method for composition, for research, and so on.

When I began this project, I had not formulated a working method. I only knew that laughter was the source of the project and that I needed to start with a period of research. Looking back at my notes, my method of working seemed to go in cycles for each new idea I gained, starting with making material, selecting, composing, evaluating, to starting over again. My only tool for the research was to use improvisation to explore laughter in relation to movement and performativity.

Reading following quotation by Anne Lynne Blom and Tarin Chaplin, I agree that choreography is a know-how which you learn through practice.

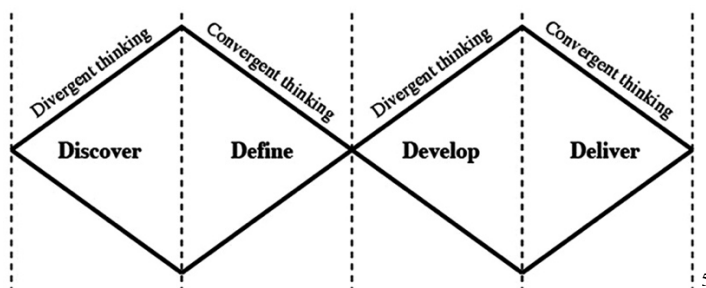
’Many people have beautiful, creative ideas for dances, but few of these are ever realized as choreographic entities. One of the main reasons for this is that it is hard to know how to get from the idea, the flash of insight or inspiration, to the fully completed presentation. You do not learn to choreograph by reading about it, hearing about it, or by watching the major companies in concert. You learn by choreographing, by experimenting, by creating little bits and pieces and fragments of dances and dance phrases, by playing with the materials of the craft over and over again until they become second nature. You learn by

getting your ideas out and into movement, onto a body (yours or someone else's), giving your dance an independent existence.’³

So far, I haven’t found a working method to help me arrive to a finished piece. Each person who works with choreography needs to find a working method that works for them. I will give four examples of working methods showing different approaches to create choreography.

The first example is to work in a chronological order, movement by movement or section by section, from the beginning until the end. Each section builds in relation to the previous. The beginning initiates what should come next and where to arrive in the end. When the piece exists as a whole there is still the possibility in the finalizing phase to adjust and make changes.

Another possible working method is to first research for material that you than can select from and compose with as the piece starts to take form before finalizing. This working method can be illustrated as ‘the double diamond’⁴



This model can be used to illustrate the whole creation process or in different situations during the creation process, to gather material and gain an overview and from that perspective make the selection.

³ Blom, L. A. & L. T. Chaplin, (1982) *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 3

⁴ Hyper Island, (2020) *Toolbox: Idea & concept development*, Available at: <https://toolbox.hyperisland.com/idea-concept-development>. (accessed: 23/04/20)

The process of choreography is an ongoing act of making decisions. Who, what, where, when and why? One choreographer that made a radical decision and invited chance to be his main tool to approach the process of creating choreography. Dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham describe his experience of this working method, called chance operation:

'Then the use of chance operations opened out my way of working. The body tends to be habitual. The use of chance allowed us to find new ways to move and to put movements together that would not otherwise have been available to us.'⁶

By using chance, his creations were beyond his own imagination and as he mentions, were not limited by his own or the dancer's habits.

Another dancer and choreographer, David Gordon, details how he tries to distract himself in the process of creating and express himself:

'I'm still trying to get lost. In making a new work, I attempt to start someplace that I haven't started before. Sometimes I put a piece of music on the machine and I work in relation to that music. Then I pull it off and I put on another piece of music and try the same material. I do what it takes to upset the balance of knowing.'⁷

I interpret what he says to be his working method, even if he does not refer to it as that himself. He seems to produce his choreographic solutions by entering the landscape and refusing to use a map, heading in a new direction and looking for unknown meetings.

I see the benefits of an understanding of one's own way of working. However, my perception is that there are many methods for the process of creating. I have become aware of that what I often manage to formulate in the beginning of a project is the source and interest of a

⁶ Morgenroth, J., (2004) *Speaking of Dance, Twelve Contemporary Choreographers on Their Craft*, New York and London: Routledge, pp. 16

⁷ Morgenroth, J., (2004) *Speaking of Dance, Twelve Contemporary Choreographers on Their Craft*, New York and London, Routledge, pp. 48-49

research for a potential piece but I am unaware of the intention of the piece. This realization indicates that my working method often begins with a research, getting to know and establish a relationship to the source and then formulate an intention of the piece.

Intention to create a choreography

I can identify three different levels of intentions:

- Intention to create something artistic
- Intention of a specific creation
- Intention to engage in a creation process

They all refer to the motives behind one's interest to act. By being aware of your motives, you can make clearer decisions about what to do in order to achieve what you want to create.

Intention to engage with artistic work

In an interview the filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, he expresses his thoughts on the purpose of art and one's intention to create art.

'I believe that to form a concept of art you first have to face another, more important question: Why does man exist? We have to use our time on earth to improve ourselves spiritually. This means that art must serve this purpose.'

Tarkovsky expresses his main intention for his work. Through his films he brings up different aspects and questions about the human existence that he wants to share with his audience. He continues:

'If I had chosen another departure point of my life art would have meant something else and I would have made other films. Some want art to be educational like all other intellectual and spiritual activities.'⁸

I have not defined an overall purpose for myself that serves as intention to why I want to create and express myself through performance art. But I know that I wish to meet the

⁸ Eyes On Cinema, (2015) *Andrei Tarkovsky on the purpose of art and spirituality*, YouTube, time 1:10-2:11,

Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7qZFe7elAQ&list=PLRi21pyXBcmOveMo9KqA4D5Q0hzKQuZNd&index=2&t=0s> (accessed: 06/04/20)

audience through emotions rather than the intellect. It can be achieved through recognition of beauty, through humor, discomfort, and so on. According to Turner:

'Art attacks the mind, not usually through its logical or analytic channels, but more commonly through its senses, passions, and anxieties. Under the distant guidance of the artist, the brains of the viewers gather the disparate pieces of evidence placed before them, while they draw on their own experiences to reconstruct the artist's intent.'⁹

What Turner writes reflects what I relate to an experience of art, when you as an audience have been touched by what you have seen. Sometimes your experience can't be verbalized although you can recognize that it had an impact on you in some way.

Blom and Chaplin are identifying and questioning the so called artistic or philosophical goal of a creation. The goal or intention, as I would call it, of a creation indicates what the choreographer finds meaningful and want to communicate to the audience.

'Simplicity does not preclude complexities, subtleties, and nuances, but it does demand that they be presented in a perceivable and more or less accessible fashion. Accessibility to the viewer depends in turn on the artistic or philosophic goal: should dance be pure entertainment, served up for easy consumption, appreciation, comprehension? Or should it be a challenge to the spectators' perceptions and ideas? In either case, each detail of the dance must work toward that identified goal.'¹⁰

I am interested in choreography that can be engaging and challenge the viewers perceptions. Reminding myself of this can help to formulate the intention for future projects. I wrote in my notebook during the creation process of 'LOL':

⁹ Turner, M., (2006) *The Artful Mind: Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Human Creativity*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 13

¹⁰ Blom, L. A. & L. T. Chaplin, (1982) *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp 13

2/12-2017

I'm thinking that performance is communication and can be/ create recognition, consent, surprise, misunderstanding, show something new, inform, show alternative worlds, share ideas, fall flat.

I'm still finding out about my ways to create such performance art.

The reason to engage in a creation process

In relation to one's major reason for creating, reason to engage with the creation process can vary. It could start from the wish to investigate a particular topic through movement, or an interest in a specific movement quality to compose in relation to a certain pattern. A piece of music may be the source to create something and can be used as the inspiration and framework for the piece. Sometimes it is simply the decision between two or more people to dance and create together. These examples and more are possible reasons for becoming involved in the creation process. For some, the creation is visualized and formulated before starting the practical work. For others, it is a decision to work together and see where their ideas and interests meet, evolve and form along the way. Personally, I experience it as much more fulfilling to share the process with someone else as the ideas can bounce back and forth. This is in contrast to working alone where I have to depend on my own desire and ability to create. The way that one prefers to work is highly personal, and may change from project to project.

With 'LOL' the premise was to work on my own project, and I chose to create a solo. When I started to work with 'LOL' I had no set intention of what I wanted to offer the audience and no clear visual idea of how it could become a piece. Laughter itself was what I found interesting and what I wanted to explore. During the process I questioned myself multiple times for the reason behind what I was doing. I see it as a part of the process to continuously return to that question and to be open to the answer potentially changing, along with the evolution of the creation. If I cannot answer, I need to continue working in order to discover.

I find recognition and support in what is written in 'The Intimate Act of Choreography', regarding not knowing clearly but wanting to do the work.

‘Sometimes there isn't a clear intention; there is only an inner drive, a restless energy, vague and undirected, a need to create. And sometimes for a while that vague nudge has no clearly defined, identifiable intent or theme. Often the choreographic process itself includes discovering and defining the theme and intention. The choreographer goes to the studio and begins to work, and in the working, in the moving, something happens, something connects, something becomes important, and almost on their own, the theme and intention self-clarify.’¹¹

I wonder if the different methods of entering the process can be beneficial and valuable. I also question whether a clear description and intention of the piece as a starting point can be obstructive for the creative process instead of constructive. These questions relate to the quotation by Burrows that starts this thesis. What he mentions as a principle or map is what I identify as the intention to create something artistic. It is the thing that leads all the actions and decisions in the same direction. When entering the creation process without a map, the creator is interested in working with something they could not plan. Alternatively, they could not verbalize but wanted to have an experience in order to understand.

¹¹ Blom, L. A. & L. T. Chaplin, (1982) *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 9

Laughter as the source and inspiration for ‘LOL’

Rereading my application and the description of ‘LOL’ today it is clear that laughter is the source and inspiration. In the application I started to name things that I connect to laughter similar to when you create a mind map. In the book ‘The intimate Act of Choreography’ it is discussed what is seen as an appropriate choice of theme for a choreography:

‘...themes, such as "all the possible relationships between two men," are unrealistic choreographically because of their tremendous breadth or their too general nature.’¹²

While I was working with ‘LOL’ I believe I was relating to laughter as the topic of the piece. I would now identify it as the source and inspiration of the project. However, it is an unspecific topic. Throughout the whole creation process I never fully clarified what I wanted to focus on. As I did not clarify my relation to laughter, I also missed the understanding of intention with the piece. Earlier mentioned with a quotation about his working method, Merce Cunningham, talks about the source for his creations.

‘My work always comes from the same source—from movement. It doesn’t necessarily come from an outside idea, though the source can be something small or large that I’ve seen, often birds or other animals.’¹³

As I interpret his words, he does not create his choreographies in relation to any formulated topic. The main topic is movement. Movements he has seen in nature or elsewhere are influential to the movements of his choreographies. He does not seem to want to tell something but to show a version of what he has seen.

¹² Blom, L. A. & L. T. Chaplin, (1982) *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp.12-13

¹³ Morgenroth, J., (2004) *Speaking of Dance, Twelve Contemporary Choreographers on Their Craft*, New York and London: Routledge, pp. 14

The source can be whatever inspires the creator, starting research or formulating the intention of the piece by putting the source in relation to a certain context of interest for the choreographer.

The use of research in the creation process

‘A detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover (new) information or reach a (new) understanding’¹⁴

When someone conducts research, they usually work according to a method. This is to systematically obtain information about the topic that they wish to gain new understanding of. Working with ‘LOL’, I had not formulated a method but was using improvisation as a tool to observe laughter, and was allowing my question and interest to guide the process. I intended to explore the performative potential of laughter through practical inquiry and by researching online for facts and various contexts related to laughter. I was searching for movements and situations that would help formulate the intention of the piece.

My first approach to laughter was to relate to it as a sound. I was playing with my own laughter, observing how it shifted in volume, intensity, depth, rhythm, interval and vocalisation. The laughter could be vocalised on either A, E, I, O or Ö in relation to the sound of H produced as the air was pressed out through the mouth by each contraction of the diaphragm. I acknowledged the similarities between laughter and crying, as both are produced at the same place in the body as the diaphragm contracts and release repeatedly. One idea was to relate different sounds of laughter to different movement qualities. I searched for laughter on YouTube. In one particular video, there was a domino effect of laughter. One person saw a video of other people’s laughter at the same time as they were being filmed laughing out loud. It made me aware of how contagious laughter can be and how each person’s laughter is very characteristic to them just like their voice.¹⁵ These were the first notes I made related to the project and my first rehearsal.

11/9- 2017

Collect laughter (YouTube)

¹⁴ Cambridge U. P., (2020) *Cambridge Dictionary*, Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/research>, (accessed: 20/04/20)

¹⁵ Skypelaughterchain, (2008) *Skype Laughter Chain*, YouTube, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p32OC97aNqc>, (accessed: 27/04/20)

Find body language (phrase) to different kind of laughter

Laughing falls and throwing's

I acknowledged that the laughter and moving was happening in parallel and was not really relating. The act of laughing did not make me want to move but rather take different positions, as it made me contract and bend forward with my hands placed on my chest, stomach or knees. There was also laughing to the sky with an open mouth creating an A sound, the chin lifting up as the head tilted back. I found support to laugh from different positions on the floor. Laying on my back, I could clearly feel the bouncing vibration of the laughter as the contraction of air was pushed out as an attack in the beginning of each wave of laughter. As my research was partially about finding the intention to make a piece, I have gathered a few notes that indicate to such findings.

8/10- 2017

Laughing alone is connected to madness and evilness.

When I wrote this, I had in mind the evil character in a movie that laughs out loud as they declare or accomplish their plan. I found it interesting that laughter per se is not an action of shared joy and the one laughing by themselves can be an image of someone who has gone mad. These thoughts could have been something to go deeper into but I never did.

20/11-2017

- *I'm laughing at myself, at the laugh and the absurd situation I'm trying to create*
- *I'm laughing just to feel it in my body to experience the shifts from produced to automatic*
- *I'm laughing to share some laughter with you*

8/10- 2017

The laughter is a meeting, a unity and a shared understanding over something that appears funny, triggering for a laughter.

What I express here is the direction that I was circling around but did not fully embrace. How could my act of laughing transform to common laughter? The practice of transferring from a

manipulated laugh to actual laughter became the focus for me as a performer but what I wanted to achieve artistically with this act remained unclarified.

If I had chosen to invest work in the following instructions, where laughter is the inspiration for movement, the intention would have been to work with the physicality and rhythm of laughter.

10/10 -2017

- *Moved by the bubbling/bouncing in the laughter*
- *Moved by the intervals of the laughter (laughter break by inhalation)*
- *Moved by the laughter in different twists, each breath gives a new direction*

The laughter itself would have been used more as inspiration and sound and the interpretation into movement would have been the focus of the piece.

Rereading my notes, I would say that the research did not remain as a starting point of the project but continued throughout most of the process. I created new versions and was questioning if this was what I wished to present or not. I was hoping to gain the feeling of certainty but I never really felt that strongly about any of my proposals. My lack of experience as a choreographer brought many questions and I did not find a direct approach in how to answer them for myself. The questioning and doubting influenced the whole work process as well as the outcome of the piece.

Creating and finding material for the piece

Depending on what the choreographer knows before starting to make material affects the way they work. For example, if the choreographer has inner images of what they want to see, they work to realize those visual ideas. If the choreographer is looking for the visual representation of their inspiration, the research can lead to material that later is used in the piece. In *'The Intimate Act of Choreography'*, improvisation is mentioned as a tool to create material.

'Improvisation is a way of tapping the stream of the subconscious without intellectual censorship, allowing spontaneous and simultaneous exploring, creating and performing.'¹⁶

Improvisation is a tool to let go of the judgement and dependence on what you can imagine, and allows the action to reveal the possibilities and limitations. Improvisation is the tool I use mostly when I want to create material. I find the movement that comes out from the flow of the dance is more interesting than the one's I create by first thinking and then doing. Burrows explains another tool to create movement material, where the first movement/situation initiates the next, and so on in this pattern.

'Cause and effect can be a useful tool. It produces streams of movement which point forwards in the imagination of the watcher, and at the same time creates a patterning in the body which helps us remember a sequence or keep an improvisation going.

Cause and effect can also become habitual to do and predictable to watch.'¹⁷

As I read Burrows words, I relate to the movement material in 'LOL' that came about as a result of the act of laughing. During my research, I came to realize that laughing was very much connected to my body posture and limited my ability to move. As I chose to work with laughter as a live act in the end, it required that the movement material became a support in the task of maintaining the waves of laughter. In the search for the intention of the piece I was throughout

¹⁶ Blom, L. A. & L. T. Chaplin, (1982) *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 6

¹⁷ Burrows, J., (2010) *A Choreographer's Handbook*, USA and Canada: Routledge, pp. 111-112

the process creating new material I and took influence from the feedback that I gathered from people who saw the work throughout the process. From a selection of notes, I will illustrate a few examples which refer to different movement material.

20/9- 2017

- *Find a phrase that repeats in the rhythm to a recorded laughter*
- *Laugh without any stop*
- *Pass on the laugh*
- *Taking position and rise the head facing the audience and start to laugh. Laugh as long as possible then drop back and start over after gathering new energy and to mark start and end.*
- *The laughter is like quick contractions and release/ fall expanding*
- *This action can be shown with shoulder-contractions and into a bounce of the arms that are creating swinging combinations of movement.*

At this point I tried to translate the rhythm of the laughter as a sound into movements through my body. I connected it to contraction and release, falling and expansion. I was considering using laughter as a recorded sound where I, as a performer, would be focused on the movement in relation to that sound. My alternative is to have the laughter as a live act and focus of the performance and the movements related as a support for that action. The following notes are referring to the feedback I received after showing a version of the piece.

31/10-2017

- *Find different types of laughter. Are they connected to different emotions, situations? Or is it only different intensity of the same thing?*
- *What am I laughing at? How am I communicating with the audience? What is our game?*
- *'Think of the process as when you prepare a meal. Bring a balance of sweet, salt, sour and umami!'*
- *How is also important not just what*
- *Take time for things to exist*

Related to this feedback I made new movement material where I tried to bring in different ‘spices’ to the movement material divided into 4 parts. Each part had instructions of how I should move and explained a little regarding the atmosphere and approach to the audience. The instructions are about the movement and do not mention the relation to the laughter that was present throughout.

7/11-2017

- *1st dance starts with jumping dolphins and closed eyes; elbows take the movement backwards and into a titanic balance on one leg leaning forward*
- *2nd dance is a slow-motion dance with a lot of groove and the feeling of a winner*
- *3rd dance with the hair out with a lot of swings with the head and turns with the body. Upside down eye contact. Hand and arms playing with the hair.*
- *4th dance of the YES! Expressed in different ways with a lot of facial expressions. Starting with a clear change of direction running with one fist straight in the air like you have made a goal.*

1st part is an internal giggling and intimate play with myself dancing with closed eyes relating to my own imagined world. 2nd laughter is big and excited, shown in slow-motion to stretch the feeling of satisfaction. 3rd laughter is like a fresh breeze and I provide instructions to make contact with the audience. 4th is the action that different football players do when expressing the rush of adrenalin after making a goal, celebrating with the audience and team members.

To create a solo for yourself indicates to work with double roles, both as choreographer and performer at the same time. The advantage is that you create the movements that suit your body and the piece at the same time. You need to decide if habits are desired or not and if not, through observation, realizing habits and finding strategies to trigger new beginnings, forms and qualities of the movement. Another thing I found challenging regarding the double roles was not having the outside perspective and the audience experience of the piece.

Shift of interest during the process, selecting the material

Throughout the creation process the selection of what to be a part of the piece can change. The selection for the finalization, is related to the intention of the piece, so at that point it is necessary to have made that clearer for oneself.

After about six weeks of work we had one of our regular showings in school where we show each other our own researches and creations. For the showing I had created a score that contained a set spatial pattern to loop through, guided by different instructions for the quality of the movements. The sound of my laughter was recorded live by my computer as I was initiating different types of laughter, making my way through the loop. I had identified three main stages of laughter that I was using. One was a giggling sound where the breath was pushed through the nose and became laughter on Hmm Hi Hi Hi, resonating inside the body as my mouth remained closed. The second stage was a bubbling bouncing 'HaHaA' where the sound came through my open mouth. The last stage was a very high-pitched 'He He He' as a grand finale. The sound was replayed as a sound to dance to as I repeated the round a second and third time, each time with a different movement quality that responded to the rhythm, intensity, texture and volume of the sound.

After the first showing of 'LOL' my focus started slowly to shift form, moving from the sound of laughter to become more about the laughter as an act and form of communication. The selection of movements became more functional actions to trigger and release laughter. Instead of using recorded laughter I had to find strategies to laugh on command. I knew that certain postures were helping to trigger laughter. An example is bending forward as it is an imitation of something I would do normally when laughing. I put more focus on how the performance was perceived by the audience and how I could affect them with my laughter. The laughter was a symbol for something fun and amusing but could also be so frightening and mean. Below is a part from my notebook where I reflect on my experience of laughing in relation to the audience.

5/10-2017

Laughing on command at a set time feels so fake, it's so fake and what does the laughter contain then? What can feel so good and alive becomes unpleasant and frightening. How should it be

interpreted when it crosses the line? Laughing with, laughing at. The laughter lingers but the situation is shifting...

I was not convinced by what I created and wanted to try to bring in a second person to participate in the piece. The context of the laughter would be another and it would be possible to build a game between us. I was interested to see how someone else would relate to the tasks I had given myself.

13/11-2017

- *Move each other with your laugh, 'call in' 'push away'*
 - *One is laughing all they can and traveling at the same time, the other takes over*
 - *'attack' with a wave of laughter*
 - *Be physical with each other while laughing*
 - *Laugh in silence and move in slow motion relate to one another*
 - *Play with the laughter like a song*
- Searching for pictures of laughter to use as a template for the different expressions*

Two people laughing at something is more understandable and accepted than one laughing alone. Unfortunately, it was too late at this point to bring in a second performer as the program for Trafó was already set and 'LOL' was intended to be a solo piece. I gained important insight from the experience of sharing my tasks with someone else as I was able to step out and observe and learn from her way of approaching it. Depending on how much time you have and how you usually relate to what you create, this sentence has different meanings.

'There's also the chance that if you hold tight onto the thing you've found so far you might stop yourself finding something even better.'¹⁸

¹⁸ Burrows, J., (2010) *A Choreographer's Handbook*, USA and Canada: Routledge, pp. 78

In my case working on 'LOL' I didn't stay with one material for very long. For me it would be more important to know how to embrace what I have and work on it to arrive to its full potential rather than constantly creating new material.

Creating the context for the material through the composition

Through the composition all the elements of the piece are brought together. The compositional choices can depend on a narrative, visual pattern, musical structure etc., to frame the work. The choreographer organizes the sequences of movements/situations in relation to the space, the sound etc. to put together the piece.

A single movement or a sequence of movements can be developed in to variations of the original as the choreographer uses compositional tools, also named chorographical devices, such as repetition, canon, mirroring, reverse etc. When creating a group piece, the material can be arranged in countless variations as the movements of the different performers interact with one other. These tools are also at hand when creating a solo, growing and variate a movement or sequence in relation to the space and time.

At the beginning of the process I was thinking of how to travel with my movements in relation to the audience and made a simple drawing of a path that I mirrored to create a spatial loop. The order of the movements was set but the time and tempo were improvised. This allowed me to follow the rhythm and flow of the laughter and give space for moments of interaction with the audience.

2/10- 2017

Drawing of a spatial pattern to loop on.

The first round is a laughter attack and the second round are a reaction to the first.

1. Silent giggling 2. Bubbling laughter 3. Chuckle 4. Fail 5. Huge chuckle 6. Look up to meet the audience as an end.

Observing my notes, I would say that my compositional structure related to a crescendo. The laughter increased in volume and intensity with the movements. I was using repetition for my solo as I created a sequence of the positions that formed the loop. My intention was to escalate the laughter the second and third time I repeated the sequence before going into a new movement material. The second movement material started from a standing position and I was falling with my upper body onto my thighs at the same time as I folded my body by bending in the knees and hip. This action was also repeated several times trying to create a

bounce into laughter. When creating the composition, it is also important to give attention to what's in between the movements as well as how the movements give or take attention from one another.

'The meaning that arises from the relationship between things can alter their individual meanings. Your greatest material will only be great in the right place.'¹⁹

With 'LOL' I could have paid more attention to the silence and absence of the laughter as a part of my material. Working with contrast helps to emphasize what one wants to give attention to.

¹⁹ Burrows, J., (2010) *A Choreographer's Handbook*, USA and Canada: Routledge, pp. 113

Related artistic decision as important parts of the piece

Throughout the process the choreographer also needs to make decisions that are related to the presentation of a piece. If it is with or without music, what costume to wear. If the stage has a scenography, how to light the piece and how to work with the audience and so on. Depending on the piece, these decisions are clarified by the choreographer alone or through collaboration with someone with more expertise in the related field.

In this thesis, I have decided to reflect on the audience relation as this was something I was concerned with during the work with 'LOL'. The choice of music and costume and the other aspects did not receive as much focus, although these choices are important as a part of the piece.

Performer and audience relation

A piece comes into play together with its audience. Regardless of whether the piece relies on the audience reactions and participation or not, their focus gives value and meaning to the act of performing.

I would like to share some questions that each choreographer must answer in relation to their piece. I will reflect on this in relation to my process of 'LOL'. Do I as the choreographer intend to tell something specific? If yes, then what and how is this best communicated to the audience? Does the performer acknowledge and interact with the audience or are they only witnesses to what happens on stage? Is the performance to be viewed from one direction or can it be a choice made by the audience members themselves?

In 'The Artful Mind, Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Human Creativity' Turner says;

'Artists might insist that the main driver of artistic experience is the engineer of that experience, namely the artist, and this holds partly true. Certainly, the way the artist manipulates events so as to set up an end-state in the minds of the audience starts the process running, and some techniques (such as those of film) can be extremely compelling in controlling the audience's experience. But the brain might deconstruct the world presented by

the artist in many different ways, and through many different paths, while the goals and methods of the artist are largely set by larger social-cognitive networks that are distributed.

The artist controls only a fraction of this process;²⁰

I see it as each person perceiving the piece from their perspective, with their state of mind influenced by earlier experiences which helps to form an understanding of what they see. I did not interview anyone who watched 'LOL' in Trafó 2017 about their experience and can only offer my experience of the piece which is from the performer's point of view. I did, however, receive feedback at different occasions during the process. The following notes relate to this feedback.

20/10-2017

- *Laughing at what? Why can't you stop?*
- *Relation with the audience! Communicate!*
- *Introduction is important to create a nice atmosphere or any atmosphere*
- *Create scenes, organize them, connect back to what happen before, for example that the first scene comes back in the end.*

These notes were made in relation to the home presentation at BCDA and are comments from teachers and other students. The impression I got was that they were curios although they didn't see a reason for the laughter. They gave feedback to find different ways to give coherence to the piece.

4/12-2017

Feedback from observer: Is it worth it to laugh at/with people. Still try to variate the laughter from a lot, can go back to a more inner laugh. Don't let the movement take the laugh, move from the laugh. Match laugh and movement.

The feedback indicates that my intention is not clear and my laughter don't seem to amuse them into laughter which was one of my goals. As an unexperienced choreographer I had

²⁰ Turner, M., (2006) *The Artful Mind: Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Human Creativity*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 12-13

difficulties differentiating my experience as a performer to the experience of the viewer. In the beginning I was thinking of how the spacing of my actions in relation to the audience would deliver a different focus. Coming closer would establish a more intimate meeting, paying attention to details and exchanging eye contact. The same action performed at a distance would bring the focus to the shape of the movements and the relation between the body and the space as well as the distance between the audience and me.

The relation to the audience became an important element of the piece and therefore also a part of the practice. I needed to understand how I could bring the audience with me and include their reactions as something I could react to. I imagined the relation a clown has to its audience, with both parties aware that it is all a silly joke and can meet on that premise. In Trafó, the audience could sit or stand behind the chairs placed in a half circle marking the outline of the stage. For the performance I received the advice to keep a bit of light in the room so I could see the audience and they could see each other as well. This was in order to become aware of one another experiencing the awkward, absurd situation together and hopefully laugh at it. Following notes refer to reflections on how to place the audience and how to start the piece, being our first meeting.

21/10-2017

- *Before I enter the stage, you hear a laughter that encourage laughter and sets the atmosphere.*

22/11-2017

- *I have the audience at two sides. Starting laughing from a distance and entering from the stairs*
- *Or I'm already in the space when people enter and I see them, they see me. greeting, laughing, smiling, building energy!*

21/10 -2017

Thoughts: It's a game with the audience and I have to first get them to understand that and to be up for the game. It is a bit similar to how clowns work...

Caroline Heim refers to Theodor Lipps's theory of *Einfühlung* ("feeling into," "empathy") in her book, talking about how the audience gets emotionally engaged with what they see.

'As the concept of empathy has evolved over time, numerous types of empathy have been proposed. Most fall under the rubrics of "cognitive" or "affective" empathy. Affective empathy, which "involves the capacity to enter into or join the experiences and feelings of another person" (Hojat et al. 2002: 1563), is the most consonant with Lipps's natural empathy. The experiences of the other touch my emotions to the point that there is a drive to respond with a similar and appropriate emotion or behaviour.'²¹

In Lipps's theory, he makes a separation between aesthetic empathy where the audience is "feeling into" something performed and natural empathy when the same happens in everyday life. I remember that I did not wish for the audience to experience the laughter as mocking but wanted it to be an absurd situation to laugh at. I was afraid of the unpleasant and wanted to keep it light even if the work may have had a different character that I did not acknowledge. I hoped for a reaction of laughter and amusement from the audience but I can see that this wish may not have been realistic in regard to what the final piece expressed. It was not necessarily funny even though I was laughing.

²¹ Heim, C., (2016) *Audience as performer, The changing role of theatre audiences in the twenty-first century*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, pp. 21

Last decisions and actions to finalize the piece

To finalize a work is to look at the piece as a whole. To see if things are happening at the right place at the right time. If not, now is the time to take the final decisions and make changes if needed.

For a performer preparing for the premiere, this phase includes repetition of the material and full run-throughs of the piece. At the general rehearsal in the theater all the details such as the costume, light, sound and so on is in place and the finalized piece is to be seen for the first time.

Getting closer to the final version of 'LOL', I had a rehearsal on the 22/11 where I asked a colleague who is an actress to help me with techniques to laugh on command. She was of great help guiding me into a more extreme laughter. I achieved this by practicing how to build it up, varyate it more and continue even if it felt like I had reached my limit. I remember how I enjoyed being directed for a change, having someone's focus while working. Her knowledge and guidance helped me to go further and find ways to become more playful with the laughter. In relation to this experience I want to shear a reflection from the book, *A Choreographer's Handbook*, as a reminder:

'Your mentor can't solve your problems for you, but with any luck they might help you to solve them for yourself.'²²

This one rehearsal gave me input and new tools to work with. However, I was still responsible to maintain the practice to later manage what I had achieved with the help of her encouragement.

By showing 'LOL' a few more times to different people, I realized that I needed a good preparation to warm up my voice and become ready to meet the audience. I needed to feel my voice and physicality to manage my act and be present with them. I created a plan that I would use when preparing for the performance.

²² Burrows, J., (2010) *A Choreographer's Handbook*, USA and Canada: Routledge, pp. 98

6/12-2017

- *Long warmup from shake into walking playing with the head and then starting to play with the voice. Eventually take it to the floor still working with sounding, tuning in. Involve the breath.*
- *Explore the diaphragm*
- *Find position for the start*
- *Build slower like someone is telling you a story*
- *The ending let it be shown how it effects the body. It's ok to break it more times in the end, it is coming naturally*
- *The laugh ends on the ground and start again leaving the space*

Performing with 'LOL'

For the performance in Trafó I made a final score:

20/12-2017

- *First enter with the head and “ask” can I come in?*
- *Step in and “say hello” nice to see you all.*
- *Start to look who is actually there and greet them with a smile, the head and neck is free*
- *Have small moments of “inner laughter” that wants to pop out but hold back, while acknowledging people and contacting them*
- *Take it to the floor to start play I for one round*
- *E, OÅ, A all more or less one round*
- *Bounce into laughter and bring it into space*
- *Laugh to the floor, walk back, front with a swinging head?*
- *Let there be a break to then attack again*
- *Stop, stand still, be satisfied and finish*

Right up until the performance I was adjusting and making changes in relation to the feedback I received from different people, as my intention was to amuse the audience. Even if I was not fully confident with what the piece had become, I was ready to invest all of my energy. It depended a lot on the meeting between the audience and me. I needed to both trust in the prepared structure I had created for myself, and at the same time be open to the situation and people's reactions. I chose to play William Babinski's song '92982.3' very low in the background to set a calm, floating atmosphere, like a steady breathing to rely on.

The performance evening at Trafó was divided into three parts. Some shorter student pieces were performed in the studio before the pieces were shown on the main stage and after two short pieces in the club. More people than expected showed up for the first part and the studio was not big enough to fit everyone interested. Adjustments were made accordingly and the first and last part of the program was to be performed twice. 'LOL' was planned to be one of the two pieces shown during the last part of the evening. However, due to the change I had

fifteen minutes to reset myself and prepare to perform 'LOL'. I could not complete the warmup I had planned as I had to get ready quickly. I remember the first performance was a big struggle, forcing laughter and not managing to play with it in a way I had been able to during rehearsals. My feeling was that it fell flat and I was not pleased with my performance. Luckily, I had one more chance to try it out later in the evening as was planned from the beginning. The second time I felt more comfortable and present as I had tried it with an audience once already. Nevertheless, I still have the impression that my presence during the performance was vague, not really knowing what I proposed to the audience and I believe that my doubting and insecurity had an impact on the performance and outcome of the piece.

Though 'LOL' was partially improvised I see my job as a performer being not to aim for repetition of earlier successful experiences during rehearsals, but to focus on embracing the act and engage with it each time as it is, in order to perform it. My decision to keep it partially improvised, 'breathing', included acceptance of the un-expected to be a part of the piece. I remember being confused in how to be as a performer. I questioned how much the personal me was present or whether I was acting. When I perform, I am not playing a character. It is me performing, although I am not what is important at that point. The focus should be on what I am doing and by being present in the activity of performing, the audience will be able to be there with me. A quotation that reflects on the feeling of failure while performing:

'Audiences like failure, so long as they know that you know you're failing. It allows an act of human recognition and empathy. Conversely, if you are uncomfortable with your failure, then we are likely to feel uncomfortable too.'²³

I'm thinking if I had acknowledged that I was struggling it might have provided the possibility to change it or to give a different meaning to the act rather than trying to hide something that was visible.

²³ Burrows, J., (2010) *A Choreographer's Handbook*, USA and Canada: Routledge, pp. 163

Conclusion

Writing this thesis has helped me to better define and understand the different parts of the creation process. I will here try to summarize my reflections on the creation process in relation to my own experiences gained during my BA studies, mainly in relation to the creation process of 'LOL'. Firstly, I shall reflect on the writing of this thesis. The process of writing resembles my experience of creating choreography, as I have to face something that I do not have an overview of at the start. I began with reading, writing down my notes and slowly constructing different fragments of text. With great guidance, what I wanted to write about became increasingly clearer. A month before the deadline I defined my topic. The creation process and the thesis acquired a more logical structure. I am very thankful that this work has introduced me to interesting literature and widened my knowledge on choreography theoretically. I am intrigued to continue to read and expand my knowledge. I hope my thesis meets an audience and inspires someone else to reflect on their creation process. This would be more than satisfactory.

It is my opinion, linked to my own experience and referring to examples showed in the thesis, that choreographers establish their own working methods on how to navigate through the different parts of the process creating a choreography. The creation process is affected by the circumstances that the situation offers which means to work with the limitations of financial support, timeframe until performance etc.

I have become aware that creating is partially about managing decisions, such as what to continue and what to release in order to finally arrive. When no clear decisions are made it can be easy to lose track of the whole process. Personally, I find it helpful to be aware that all that has been created during the process exists and can be revisited and reevaluated. Certain elements may later find their place as a part of the piece even if they were left at an earlier stage of the process.

I have not become a better choreographer by writing this thesis. As mentioned earlier, I believe that to choreograph is a know-how which one develops through practice. I know for myself that my working strategies has evolved during these three years, even if none of the projects have succeeded in a finished piece. I can now understand that the intentions I have

formulated for my projects refer to an intention of a research and that is where I become creatively blocked trying to create a piece. The intention to communicate something specific through movement and performativity is needed to make the decisions that results in a piece. I do not see myself necessarily working as a choreographer in the future but hope to work with dance as a performer or co-creator in different projects. As I mentioned in my thesis, I prefer to go through the creation process together with others as I enjoy the exchange of thought and perspectives in the working process and gain creative energy through that. Still there is need for a method or agreement on how or who takes the final decisions that constructs the piece. By experience, I have realized for myself that it is a challenge to both be performer and choreographer at the same time and believe I need to choose for each project to be able to manage my work in the best way I can.

As Jonathan Burrows words helped me to begin this reflection on my work, I would like to finish with a question from him to resonate into the future.

'The question is: how can you make a friend of the way your body thinks? Perhaps then you can be free to choreograph.'²⁴

²⁴ Burrows, J., (2010) *A Choreographer's Handbook*, USA and Canada: Routledge, pp. 71

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