

Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College

Dancer BA

EXPLORING THE PERFORMATIVE TOOLBOX

A journey from the surface to the source with the help of
improvisational methods

THESIS

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Introduction

In this thesis, I will elaborate on the process of changing my relationship with dance. Throughout my early dance education and later academic studies, my focus evolved from a superficial engagement to an introspective exploration.

I had my first dance class at the age of three, therefore I had a very long-lasting era in my life of practicing modern dance and a touch of classical ballet combined with contemporary ballet repertoire. In this phase, my focus was on dance training and following through with the choreography made by the choreographer. At that time, I was convinced that my dream would be to continue this way professionally: to train and eventually join a dance company.

Moving more into contemporary dance and starting my academic studies opened a gate to a very different perspective on how to be a dance performer. This change of environment aligned with the journey of self-exploration. My focus shifted from a rather superficial goal of “dancing and performing on stage” to an actual curious and continuous search about “what is happening within when I dance?” Ultimately it became a search to move and create from within and find out what inspires me, rather than putting the focus outside with the intention of executing beautiful movements.

Thus, the interest of this thesis lies not only on the transformation of my relation to dance, but also on the tools I gained throughout classes and creative processes during my BA dance studies which profoundly impacted this shift. What made me curious about these tools and my whole actual transformation was first the potential to create new ways on how to approach dance and finally the experience that there is always something new to be found. In my experience, applying these tools can help get out of old habits, find new moments, and realize artistic ideas. Still, mostly it serves us with a deeper understanding of our moving selves.

My background was mainly focused on repetition and execution; thus, diving deeper or creating movement meant a greater challenge. Applying these methods and improvisational tasks gave me a lot of support.

This thesis is structured around the metaphorical concept of layers. Each layer represents a phase in my journey in my dance practice, from the surface to the source, from the external to the internal.

Starting from the surface, which for me means my amateur dance education years, through multiple layers. First layer is getting to know the technical principles of contemporary dance. Second is about external improvisational methods, followed by when movement arises from within, and finally it arrives to the source, which in this context is me as a person, as a dancer and as a creator.

I believe the elaboration of the creative tools in front of the background I am coming from; provides a perspective of the values I gained engaging in contemporary dance.

Chapter I. The surface

Beginnings and getting to know the genres

I would like to briefly outline the path I took up to the academy:

I enrolled in the Pódium Dance and Ballet School at the age of 3, where I started with children's dance. During these classes, we playfully learned various movement forms. Our teachers used the Berczik technique, which used gymnastic-based movement material and dance technique. The focus was on harmonious body formation by developing muscles and enhancing flexibility. These classes served as the foundation for later learning classical ballet and modern dance. I attended similar classes until I was about 6 years old, followed by ballet preparatory classes, focusing on leg lifts, foot movements, outward rotation positions, and strengthening. There were back muscle exercises, arm exercises, and lots of stretching. I remember shedding tears often during stretching when the teacher pushed us.

At the age of 8, I started classical ballet classes, which took place at the barre. The exercises were structured according to ballet methodology: barre exercises, center exercises, diagonal exercises, and combinations. I was introduced to modern techniques (Limón, art jazz) at the age of 11. These techniques introduced fluidity, isolation, and momentum, which is different from the strictly structured ballet.

Until I was 15, I attended two places simultaneously. Alongside Pódium, there was Eszterházy Károly Főiskola, Gyakorlóiskola és Alapfokú Művészetoktatási Intézmény and later I only stayed in the latter, because I felt a more supportive environment and teachers there. Here also modern dance was the main element during training, and the choreographies could be categorized as contemporary ballet. In my teenage years, we placed a great emphasis on competitions, the annual program revolved around them. We achieved good results in these competitions, and between the ages of 16 and 19, I even performed as a soloist. At the age of 19, I had the opportunity to participate in a dance performance of the local theatre dance department.

The first few years of dancing weren't particularly enjoyable for me. Looking back now, I can see I understood dance as a series of obligatory exercises. I enjoyed playing, spending time with my friends, and performing. Ballet itself wasn't my world. Dance was just a mandatory afternoon activity in my life during these early years.

The change occurred around the age of 11 when I became acquainted with modern dance. Even during training, I noticed that there was something different in these exercises, they were not as strict, there was more "life" in them.

The choreographies and performances brought completely new experiences: For the first time in my life, dance and movements affected me emotionally. The choreographies were completely different from before, it was not anymore about telling a children tale, dressing up as birds or fairies, but about something not so literal, not so graspable. There was seriousness in them, there was the opportunity to get in touch with them. When I was able to participate emotionally in dancing, my attitude completely changed: I attended every class, classical, modern, pointe technique, stretching class, rehearsal, and even practiced alone in the studio. I went running, attended cardio workouts; this new experience gave me a lot of energy. Dance evolved in my life, into something joyful, not as restrictive. Around this time, the thought began to emerge that maybe I would like to pursue this more seriously, which came to a solid decision as I gained confidence from the competition results and got an insight what this profession might look like, when working with the theatre dance department.

As I visit my memories of dancing from my early years to young adulthood, I see how it evolved from a compulsory action to a passion which was the steppingstone to pursuing dance professionally.

Chapter II. The first layer

A new perspective

The Shocking Encounter

In 2015, I applied for an audition to the Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy for the first time, thinking that I had already learned contemporary dance since we competed in contemporary dance category. It was during this audition that I attended Adrienn Hód's class for the first time, where I experienced an improvisation session.

I didn't quite understand how they would determine who was a good dancer based on this. I gave it my all to show how flexible I was because, for my competitive mindset, this was one of the main criteria by which a dancer's ability could be judged. Then she said, "Use your voice while you dance." "What? Why should I vocalize while dancing? This is not natural at all," I thought to myself, looking strangely at the dancers around me who were vocalizing. I felt very embarrassed and didn't understand what was happening or what the others were doing. I struggled through the class, stubbornly refusing to do such crazy things, and even grumbled to myself afterwards about the point of it all.

Starting this chapter with this memory brings a smile to my face as I recall my initial repulsion to using my voice in the class. Little did I know that the next time she asked me to use voice I screamed out loud. I like to think back on it now, especially considering how this moment hinted at the transformation in my approach to dance that I'll explore in this thesis.

Creating the body

Introduction

Moving to Budapest and getting familiar with contemporary dance made me realize this realm reaches far beyond my experiences and knowledge. Everything I knew about dance was confronted with an entirely new world. I encountered several new techniques (for example flying low, release, contact improvisation, partnering) that challenged my preconceptions about dance. I had diverse experiences with each technique, though I noticed a common thread among them. They all emphasized fundamental principles such as utilizing gravity, the floor, and the body's natural structure to move effectively, as well as the importance of release.

While these principles resonated with me on a basic level – how one moves ergonomically in everyday activities like walking or falling – they were new in the context of dance. In other words, while I understood them conceptually, I hadn't applied them in my dance practice before.

I soon realized that these principles formed the foundation of contemporary dance techniques. In this chapter I would like to talk about these principles, which were the steppingstone for me in contemporary dance.

Gravity

“You’ve been swimming in gravity since the day you were born. Every cell knows where down is. Easily forgotten. Your mass and the earth’s mass calling to each other.”¹ (Steve Paxton)



1. Figure: Body affected by gravity

Transitioning into this new field, one of the first things I had to learn is to work with the effective use of gravity (see Figure 1).

¹ Steve Paxton. *Small Dance*, Contact Quarterly, Volume 11, No. 1, Winter 1986.

“In our bodies is a constant interplay between gravity and movement. When we move, the action happens through two physical alignments - one with gravity and one against.”²
(Thomas Kaltenbrunne)

If I relate to this quote, I believe that in my previous dance experiences, I tended to mainly work against gravity. There were movements implying momentum, but I always maintained control and stiffness.

Therefore, surrendering to gravity felt counterintuitive at first. It seemed to contradict all the years of training I had aiming to defy it. However, it became my partner in my movement. Rather than resisting, I learned to embrace it, allowing it to guide my interaction with the space around me. It allowed me to explore my weight, experience momentum, and suspension. With these elements there is the possibility of movements which I couldn't reach before. And I didn't need to work more – I needed to work less.

² Thomas Kaltenbrunne. *Contact Improvisation: Moving Dancing, Interaction: With an Introduction to New Dance*, translated by Nick Procyk, Aachen, 1998. p. 50.

Floor

“Solo dancing does not exist: the dancer dances with the floor: add another dancer, you will have a quartet: each dancer with each other, and each with the floor”³ (Steve Paxton)



2. Figure: *Dancing with the floor*

Coming from the forms of ballet and modern dance, my path into contemporary dance involved a significant and necessary shift—getting acquainted with the floor. In my previous practices, the floor wasn’t consciously considered, it was a surface to stand on, land on, jump from. I did use it always, but never acknowledged it.

³ Romain Bigé, Hubert Godard. *Moving-Moved. Steve Paxton: Drafting Interior Techniques*, Culturgest, 2019. 89–104. p. 96. <https://hal.science/hal-02440235>

Engaging in contemporary dance opened my eyes to a different relationship with the floor. It wasn't just a passive element of the space anymore, it became an active participant, a partner always supporting me.

At first going to the floor felt unfamiliar, especially when my body had yet to find the soft qualities. But as I let go of tensions in my body and learned to release myself into the ground, I discovered a new dimension of possibilities.

Engaging with the floor allowed me to explore movement in ways I had never before. From rolling, sliding, and crawling to finding support and stability in many ways (see Figure 2). When I roll, I can feel each of my cell connecting to the floor one after another. I can also spin six times in a row if I want to. Wonderful realization it was.

The floor gives a sense of grounding, both physically and emotionally.

Anatomical Structure

“In the 1970s, with an understanding that they were relinquishing premeditated aesthetics, innovators felt they were valuing natural bodily intelligence above virtuosity, and cultivating cooperation between a dancer and their body, as well as humanity more generally.”⁴



3. Figure: Anatomy in dance

Rather than trying to reach a predetermined aesthetic ideal of perfect forms and shapes, I met the approach of getting familiar with and utilizing what my own body structure has to offer. This approach helped me gain an awareness and understanding of my body through a more anatomically focused viewpoint, as opposed to a more traditionally aesthetic one. Movement

⁴ Duncan G. Gilbert *A Concoct of the Natural Body: The Universal-Individual in Somatic Dance Training* (thesis), University of California, Los Angeles, 2014. p. 88.

often originates from the centre of the body, radiating outward through integration of muscles and bones with less effort, which enhances the sense of stability and efficiency. By working from the core, we coordinate the entire body as a cohesive unit rather than relying on isolated movements of individual body parts. This brings a sense of connectivity and fluidity in movement. Rather than chasing ideals, focusing on what is given is a valuable and healthy approach. It doesn't only have the result of enriching our movement and knowledge about our body (see Figure 3), but also helps to prevent injuries.

Release

“You can't fake release. You just copy what someone's body's doing when they're releasing, and you can make your body look like that. The implications of that are that something will break down.... It's not an evil thing--they're doing what their teacher's want them to do. They're reproducing. Dancers are trained to reproduce what they're seeing what is correct or desirable, but when it comes to release, that's one thing you can't fake. You can try but unless you're really releasing, you're not releasing.”⁵ (Leslie Caminoff)



4. Figure: Body released on concrete

Either using gravity, or going to the floor, or exploring the natural structure of the body, I believe, the ability to release is a fundamental component. As I was already implying before, I had a long-lasting training phase which resulted in a stiff and restricted body. I remember

⁵ Doran George - *The Natural Body in Somatics Dance Training*, Oxford University Press, 2020. p. 12.

first times rolling on the floor with overstretched knees and pointed feet, wondering why it is so bumpy. To unlearn these patterns, learning how to release in dance was essential.

It involves surrendering to gravity, letting go of tension (see Figure 4), and allowing the body to move freely and organically. Releasing unnecessary tensions in the body gives the possibility for the energy to flow, which makes us more efficient.

Release goes against the precise control and formality that often were emphasized in my previous practices. Instead of forcing movement or clinging to preconceived notions of how a dance should look, I learned to listen to my body's natural impulses and allow movement to arise organically from within.

Chapter III. The second layer

Impactful improvisational tools on how to move the body with an external focus

Introduction

After starting to understand the new principles, and beginning to unlearn what needs to be unlearned, the next layer is learning how many ways there are to shape and enrich my movement. I am exploring this by engaging in different kinds of improvisational methods. This chapter is about the different focuses applied to movement, just to mention a few of the many approaches I encountered throughout my education. I would like to mention works with teachers or class members based on my own categorization:

Creating movement based on qualities, rhythm, and breaking of habits.

Creating movement based on qualities – Work with Dávid Mikó

In this segment I would like to mention the classes with Dávid Mikó, where we strongly emphasized moving with different qualities/energy. He also included to use our breath consciously, to enhance power. The choices of practices and principles were strongly influenced by Kung-fu training. According to Dávid, Kung fu “aims to experience the efficient use of energy in motion”. Principles of Kung-fu relevant to the classes:

- The main methods are precision, speed and skill, not physical strength. The Craftsmanship is achieved by a long and rather monotonous work on oneself
- All techniques are based on natural body movements, worked up to automatism. It is important not to learn hundreds of different techniques, it is important to repeatedly perform each. One movement, worked a hundred times is more effective than hundreds of different techniques performed mediocre

- For success practice requires Coordination - 6 main pairs of joints: palms-feet, knees-elbows, shoulder-thigh. The secret of effective execution of receptions-the work of joints and tendons, but not muscles. Stretching is an important part of the practice
- You open channels to circulate internal energy and learn how to manage it. The Basis of all trainings with internal Qi called Qigong
- The combination of rest and move, tension and relaxation is the basic principle of achieving qi balance. At rest — accumulate, in motion — throw energy
- It is the skilful use of qi energy that helps to reveal the unusual abilities of masters: the impact of the energy wave at a distance, “sticking” to the surface, “hovering” in the air during the jump⁶

The class would always include a kung-fu based training phase to strengthen the muscles and joints and use many repetitions to create muscle memory. We would emphasize the adequate usage of breath: We would combine and control inhale and exhale according to which breath action supports the given movement action. For example, there’s a section of movement where out of three movement, with the first movement I inhale to collect energy, hold the breath in the next move to prepare for the third move when I use the power with the exhale to act out a movement or position.

We would apply different kinds of dynamics throughout the training, which we would also use in improvisation. We could move soft, hard, fast, or slow, or other times the qualities would be as the elements of the globe. Fire would be fast and hard when we would always be engaged with the core and would keep the energy within the body, movements had qualities reminding of a whiplash. Water would be slow and soft, our movement would be a never-ending continuous flow with reduced muscle tensions, soft and reaching movements. With air, we move soft and fast, movement would be created with loosened joints moved by shifting of the weight, the body would have a very light quality. Earth would be hard and slow, we would move with all the time tensed muscles, with a heavy quality.

⁶ Shi Yanchen – *Training kung fu style and important principles*, Yanchen Shaolin Kung Fu. <https://yanchenwuguan.com/training-kung-fu-and-principles>

Throughout his classes I learned how to efficiently use energy, how to enhance power with the proper breathing methods and learned about how improvising with these elements can enrich my movement and make it more diverse.

Creating movement based on rhythm- Working on Melting Pot with Marco Torrice

„Rhythm plays a central role in 'Melting Pot,' serving as a facilitator for exchange and a bridge to empower a sense of collectivity. (...) Blending aspects of performance and recreation, 'Melting Pot' incorporates various stage presentation approaches. This includes the frontal contemplation of the dance show, the 'Cypher' – a typical improvisational structure of Street Dance, and the 'Happening' with participative performances, where the audience and performers merge into the same role/function.”⁷

When working on Melting Pot with Marco the aim was to create an atmosphere, to evolve a dance practice into a kind of party or social gathering, where we communicate through rhythm.

Throughout the training phase, we explored technical principles through various exercises, focusing on spinal articulation (isolating the spine, torso, head) and clear movement trajectories with usage of the floor (push, pull, jump, turn). Applying these principles helped us emphasize the percussive-rhythmic quality of our movements, making the beat visible through dance. It was crucial to be on the beat, which kept us together, so we had to learn not to follow our movement patterns and impulses, the rhythm and beat is at the top of the hierarchy. When doing Melting pot, movement is always improvised. We perform solo rhythm phrasing or share rhythm loops with others. As a group, we experiment with different formations and create rhythm lous which we would agree on spot with using body language

⁷ Marco Torrice, *Melting Pot*, 2022. <https://marcotorrice.com/Melting-Pot-1>,

and eye contact. After creating a shared loop, the rhythm is kept, and the movement is improvised.

The essential lesson I learned from this experience is that staying together means keeping the rhythm. To keep the rhythm, you have to prioritize rhythm and togetherness above yourself. It is not our individual actions that make the performance, but our willingness to work together, give, and take space with a common goal.

Breaking habits – Working with Orsi Vágner

Translation of Orsi's thinking about illogical reactions:

“The strange awkwardness arises from the unusual, the surprise, and the constant change. During the dancer's dance, it can be illogical to oneself, react illogically to others, and shape their dance illogically to meet the viewer's expectations, making it unpredictable. The highest level of illogical tasks is probably when the dancer combines the logical with the illogical and can also perceive when the illogical becomes logical or the logical becomes illogical during their dance. They play with proportions so as not to be predictable, maintaining tension and surprise for both performers and viewers.”⁸

⁸ Vágner Orsolya - *Szeretnivaló színpadi esetlenség (thesis)*, Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy, 2018. p. 10. (my translation)



5. Figure: On rehearsal with Orsi Vágner

When I was working with Orsi, there was always an emphasis on going against your instinct when we would improvise. She encouraged me to dance illogically, unorganically, or do the exact opposite of what I would do. We would sometimes go against or oppose the natural dynamic or flow or direction of a specific movement, for example starting a ballet arm movement but cutting it before arriving, and start moving our head, or jumping upwards but cutting the jump before it reaches its peak into a deliberate pull to the ground.

It was very difficult, but also the outcome was always unique. The possibility of surprise was a constant element, cause movements came from of some place opposing to our natural flow of movement, outside of our habits (see Figure 5).

One of my favourite projects to participate in was our duet called „Szösszenetek”. The concept was that she would collect short ideas and present them one after another. She would either think of a bizarre scenario, and make it into a form of movement, for example her doing floorwork as being the poop on the streets of Budapest, and I would dance above her, trying not to step on her, as the pedestrian trying not to step in poop on the street. Other times it was the other way around, and there would be an interesting movement, and she would try to create an image or a story around that specific movement, for example she found this jump

I mentioned which pulls to the ground, and she would make it to an image that we are picking flowers.

Conclusion

Embodiment of different energy qualities, rhythmic communion with others, or breaking habitual patterns, each type of improvisation served as a gateway to deeper exploration and connection with the language of the body, and capacities which lie within. I was learning different approaches on moving the body, but the essence I take from each reach further than technique. The work with the internal has started, by getting to know our energy, with giving space and with discovery.

Chapter IV. The third layer

Impactful lessons on how to move from within the body

Introduction

After understanding how many factors can colour our movement with the right applied focus, it is time to dive deeper into understanding the internal factors that can also greatly influence movement. In this chapter, I would like to mention my experiences when the given improvisational tasks were based on finding inner sensations to form movements.

Creating movement based on states – Working with Adrienn Hód

“TRANSPARENCY can be used during any movement. You allow whatever comes, whatever happens (breathing, sound, reactions) to immediately manifest in movement, form, and sensation as well. If something arises, you can react to it, allowing what's happening internally to be visible. I let it happen, going where it goes. It's internal allowance, continuously seeing into the space, reacting to what's happening, and there are also directions; the space, the people around me influence it. Breath, state, form: Breathing begins, bringing with it a form, which brings with it a state. These three layers intertwine and emerge from each other. I always change a unit and let it naturally shape the other two. Sensation: We start moving and continuously perceive. We let existing perception influence, change our physicality, forms. Amplifying the senses during movement: While moving, we bring our senses into focus. We observe how it affects us and changes our movement.”⁹ (Adrienn Hód)

Throughout the academy we met with Adrienn Hód on multiple occasions. What I recall from her classes is that they never stopped. We were given a task for a long amount of time with the aim of exhausting each task. Her presence and choice of direction always impacted the

⁹ Hód Adrienn: *Tánctanítás improvizációval (thesis)*, Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy, 2014. p. 35. (my translation)

ambiance in the room. Her classes were always connected to sensation and working with states.

I have one very impactful memory of one of her workshops, especially if I make it to parallel with my very first encounter with her and my rejection of making a sound. In the first year of the academy, she gave a workshop where we delved into the use of breath and voice to access explosive states. The emphasis was on allowing internal sensations to manifest externally, leading to moments of release. Moving freely in space, we transitioned to static positions to consciously build energy, intensifying our breathing until we exploded into movement and sound. Adrienn's encouragement led us to explore new movements fuelled by this heightened energy, until exhaustion.

After exhausting the energy, we built up, we would return to our charging positions and go again.

Personal experience of the class:

This was the first time for me that a task, with the appropriate guidance of Adrienn, could bring me to such high states. I (a relatively reserved, normally a bit shy character) was screaming out loud and bursted with energy. I found it even hard to deal with the amount of energy, my muscles were cramping, my face was red. Adrienn leading us and encouraging us on how to use this power into movement was crucial in these moments. I remember by the end of the week I released a lot of pressure which was sitting there for a long time.

Adrienn taught us the importance of breath and internal energy, showing us how to access these resources independently. While she helped us discover this power, I realized it was always within reach, waiting for us to access it through focused practice.

Working with sensitivity and the imaginary – classes with Éva Karczag

„We remember our habits cellularly. To ‘unlearn’, we need to touch into every cell.”¹⁰ (Éva Karczag)

Working with Éva Karczag we enhanced bodily awareness through exploration of anatomy and movement.

In Éva's classes, we would begin by engaging in a conversation about a specific body part, using 3D images of the skeleton and associative pictures for a better understanding. After that, we were encouraged to get a partner, and explore the given body part with a sense of gentle curiosity, putting each other under a microscope. We were collecting sensory information, aiming to find as many details as possible. This process allowed us to get into unknown spaces and sensations and helped us free up and expand internal spaces in the body.

„Whole head moving delicately; torso lengthening, widening, and deepening; elbows and knees away; fingers and toes lengthening — the expansion of inner space, a source and resource for movement.”¹¹ (Éva Karczag) After exploring in pairs, the receiver had the opportunity to integrate these new sensations into a dance, as the giver was paying attention to it. The partnering work, the images and the conversation were all aiding the dancer to get into a deeper understanding and closeness to their own body. There was no need to intentionally search in the dance, or concentrate, we would just let the dance happen. The change had already happened within, and it was felt, when moving freely in space.

As I met with these sensations (either dancing, giving, or receiving), I had a sense oneness. Through her classes, I learned to approach my body with love and kindness, to build

¹⁰ Éva Karczag, As yet untitled 1992. p. 3.
https://www.alongthelines.net/files/ugd/51ef4a_751209e90a644ad9912e003f0b148929.pdf

¹¹ Éva Karczag, As yet untitled, 1992. p. 2.
https://www.alongthelines.net/files/ugd/51ef4a_751209e90a644ad9912e003f0b148929.pdf

connection to every cell within. This experience led to a deeper understanding of self and movement.

Éva's teachings left a lasting impact, on my approach to my own body.

Working with ecstasy – Working on “Adore” with Julija Pečnikar

In our first year at BCDA, we were getting ready for Beatles-drafts, where many etudes were made in the theme of the band. Julija's idea was to create a small piece that captures the wild excitement you see in concert crowds, where fans scream and sometimes even faint out of excitement. Julija wanted to represent that chaos on stage (see Figure 6).



6. Figure: Ecstasy on stage

On the first meetings, each of us met Julija individually, and she encouraged us to dive into a memory that filled us with joy and excitement. We then looked at how that excitement affected our movements, gaze, and presence.

After we had our private sessions, we came together as a group, and were playing around in this state, and finding out, what is the peak of excitement for each of us. For some it came out as screaming, for others with fainting, being creepy or being lovely. As we continued, we learned choreography we applied the “euphoric quality” to it, which manifested in feeling excited, opening the chest, and reaching out.¹²

The exciting realization for me was that you can get into a euphoric state with the intention to do so. Each time we would rehearse, I could feel the hormones working on me already as I was preparing to enter the studio. As in Pavlov’s research, the dog’s salivation starts for the ringing of the bell. My happy hormones were starting to release as I knew I was about to rehearse this piece. It was not the aim to try to “dance” euphoria, show euphoria. It was first finding euphoria, and only then figuring out how to make it into a dance.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the internal dimensions of movement, how inner sensations and states influence in expression. Through various improvisational tasks and classes with different mentors, I gained insights into the interplay between body, mind, emotions, and movement. From teachings on state, energy and breath to somatic practices and exploration of euphoria. Each of these experiences deepened my connection to myself and my movement. These experiences were aiding in self-discovery and internal exploration.

¹² Personal conversation with Julija Pečnikar, 2024.

Chapter V. The source

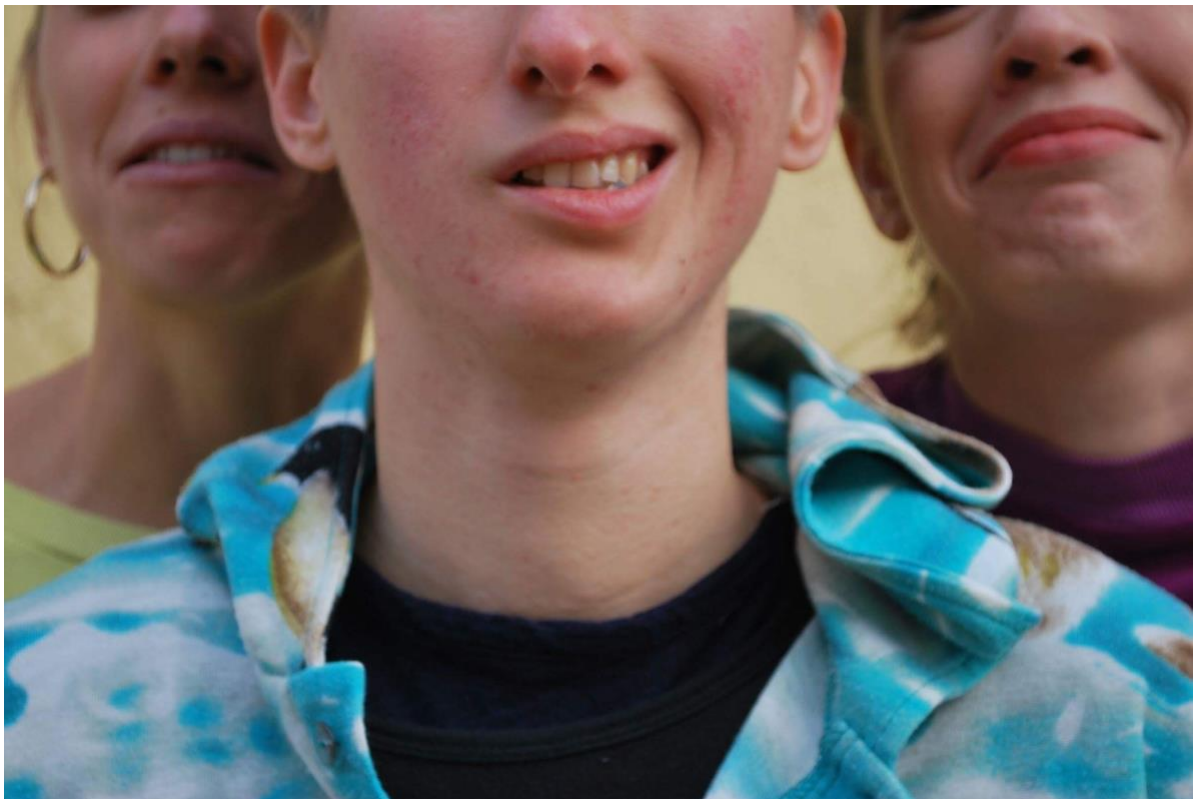
Utilization of the tools in my creative work

Introduction

In this chapter I would like to present the creative work called „Shy”, which I was working on in the second year of the academy.

I believe by describing the work I represent the two important lines which lie within this thesis: First, that engaging in contemporary dance was an introspective experience, and secondly, that the tools I gained supported me in my creation.

Shy



7. Figure: Promotion photo of "Shy"

The work started as a duet in creative garden in 2017 together with Orsi Vágner. The idea was that we are both a bit awkward sometimes, and we should make a piece about it. Funnily enough, the very first time we presented the idea, we were unprepared, we didn't really manage to create something graspable. Preparing for the worst, we decided we will just awkwardly explain how we failed to make something presentable, adding weird laughs and screams in between. As to our surprise, it was a success. Our classmates were really entertained, and our director, Angelus Iván suggested to make it to a piece to perform in the schools upcoming event in Trafó House of Contemporary Arts.

So as the schoolyear started, I collected a team of shy students to create a performance and started the work (see Figure 7).

Many scenes were inspired by examining ourselves and each other and recreate some actions on stage. A lot of ideas raised just from just observing how we act in general, outside of the studio, and we exaggerated these actions as little solos and duets. For example, we noticed that Hanga Czédulás is always using way too many hand gestures to counterbalance her nervousness when she speaks, so inspired by that she had a solo in which these hand gestures would eventually transform into a mayhem of limbs going in every direction meanwhile she explained a concept to the audience.

Another example is the jokes Gwendolin Bechler told always made an awkward ambience in the room, so we asked her to find a joke she will tell on stage, to which Kati Bitó had a nervous fake laugh which ended up in uncontrolled shaking.

Improvisational methods

We created improvisational tasks, which represent the shyness/awkwardness, and the inner frustrations which come with it.

1. *Mimosa*



8. Figure: *Mimosa Plant*

The idea of mimosa arises from the shy characteristics of the plant. As most of the readers might know, mimosa (a.k.a humble plant or shameplant) is known for its unique behaviour: when being touched or shaken it quickly closes its leaves and within a few minutes it slowly reopens (see Figure 8).

Inspired by this, we created an improvisational scene using the image of the

mimosa: We would move freely around in the space expanding outwards until the moment we would accidentally touch one another, at which time we would quickly shrink as small as possible, and then expand again. At first, we would meet rarely, and continue our growing dance, but eventually the meetings would increase until the moment of just bouncing from touch to touch, not being able to expand again from the closeness of each other.

2. *Entangled duet*

Entangled duet was a non-contact improvisation, representing the moments, when you wish to connect to someone, but you build your own obstacles against it.

The two dancers approached each other with an intention to make contact, however as they are about to touch, their bodies react with refusal. The whole body turns away, limbs tangle and twist around to stop the interaction from happening. There is a constant opposition between the reaching arm attempting to connect, and the rest of the body fighting against it, as if it would have a will of its own, making the dancers end up in entangled awkward positions.

3. *Ticks*

The idea came from how unaware we can be sometimes of our facial expressions, bodily gestures when feeling nervous (shaking head, weird frowning, jaws locking, sudden gestures)



9. Figure: Orsi Vágner doing *Ticks* during performance

Ticks were about little unexpected moves and gestures which comes from a change of internal energy. It's a similar feeling when you start to shiver, or for example when a fly flies on you and you react instinctively without thinking. The movements would arise when you experience a subtle shift inside. We would swing our hips from left to right, and when we would feel a change of energy, we would let it pass through our body like an electric shock, creating a small movement or facial expression (see Figure 9). It is important to always try to arrive to an empty place, and let the change

happen, being very attentive of what is going on inside of us meanwhile swinging.

Reflection on Chapter V.

It was a curious realization how our everyday actions can be transformed into choreography, telling a story about vulnerability, shyness, or awkwardness. How our memories and attributes can serve as a source for inspiration. It was common to me before to deal with my struggles via humour and exaggeration in my personal life. For example: listening to ridiculously cheesy heartbreak songs when being heartbroken made me realize how ridiculous I am too for crying, it is not even that big of a deal. Or popping up a champagne and putting on "Celebration" by Kool & the Gang meanwhile feeling miserable started to make me laugh. Somehow, humour and exaggeration always aided me to get through, to change my perspective. I could do the same on stage now, with another struggle of mine of being sometimes awkward, but this time with an even more profound outcome. The best thing about the experience of the work "Shy" was how by embracing internal frustrations and awkward attributes eventually led us to discover the beauty and loveliness within them. By approaching these traits with humour and exaggeration, we not only created an entertaining piece but also experienced a sense of self-compassion. Creating a piece ridiculing these issues made us not only accept and get through our weirdness, but even coming to love it and turning it to our strength on stage.

Conclusion

The structure of the thesis is going layer by layer, from the surface to the source. Starting from the surface, by elaborating on my experiences as an amateur dancer, going through the layers of technical principles, externally and internally focused improvisational methods ending up in the source. In this context, I call the source my character, my memories, flaws, in short, myself, as resource for creative work, creating movement.

The methods of my teachers and classmates were all different and unique, and I gained diverse knowledge by taking part. One thing was in common within all of them though: them being personal. Seeing how everyone found their own approach to teaching and creating inspired me to find my own personal interest and inspiration in creative work.

The thesis has an introspective line arriving to the last chapter, where I describe my own creation, which is both influenced by the improvisational methods and proves how engaging in contemporary dance had an introspective direction.

With the last chapter I am representing how the journey through my dance education was integrated into my creative work in the development of the piece "Shy." This exploration gives an understanding of how the tools and techniques learned in classes and creative processes could be integrated into my personal expression on stage. Now that I visited back my notes and was viewing my improvisational methods in an analytical way, I can clearly see the influence in each of them. Whether it be using imagery, internal energy or rules for creating movement.

It also presents how from wanting to be beautiful and perfect on stage in my early years, my focus of performance shifted into being genuine and embracing my imperfections.

As I conclude this thesis, I am reminded of the transformative power of my experiences through my dance education. Through introspection, exploration, and experimentation, I have gained a deeper understanding of myself and changed my relationship with dance.

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Illustrations

Figure 1: Harold Feinstein - *Blanket Toss*, 1955.

Figure 2: Orsi Vágner and Anna Jacsó performing „Szösszenetek” during Lépésről- lépésre performance night organized by Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy, Budapest, 2017.

Figure 3: Margaret H'Doubler in a master class at Mills College, Oakland, photographer, James E Graham, 1973.

Figure 4: Till Jenewein during the shooting of RAFT, Photo by Gergő Tornyai, Gödöllő, 2020.

Figure 5: Orsi Vágner and Anna Jacsó during a rehearsal, Budapest, 2017.

Figure 6: Evelin Novák, Aisté Adomaityté and Julija Pečnikar in Beatles Drafts performance by Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy, photography by Puskel Zsolt, Budapest, 2017.

Figure 7: Orsi Vágner, Hanga Czédulás and Anna Jacsó on a photoshooting, photography made by Katalin Bitó , Budapest, 2017.

Figure 8: Mimosa Pudica (unknown photographer) – Science news , <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/smart-plants-can-teach-us-thing-or-two> , 2018.

Figure 9: Orsi Vágner in Shy, photo by Hanna Cseszlai, Budapest, 2017.