

On the presentation of the choreography research "always becoming, never arriving", November 2017 at DOCH.

Jan 2018.

Hi Tuva.

Hello.

Let's start from a blank page, assuming that I wasn't present at your presentation, and that I might not be experienced in dance practices. I also want to encourage you to dare to not know and be personal, as I see you have a pattern of escaping into theory, which you actually have less experience with than practical experience. Is that ok?

Yes..

Would you like to explain to me what you were doing during your presentation?

Ehm... yes. I find it difficult to articulate in a concrete way, though I appreciate the challenge. You do not really know what you are doing until you experience the friction of your action becoming something new by it being perceived and recognized by others. I can have a clear intention, but at the moment of performing the performance is not mine. The underlying improvisational practice being the catalyst for the presentation does not need a witness to exist. However I did use language in the presentation which had a function in relation to the audience's experience and something changes in my nervous system and consciousness when being seen, even if I attempt to avoid it through following a specific score. By presenting my practice as a choreography I was giving myself an impossible task, and I find that interesting. I was negotiating how to have autonomy, agency, ownership of my practice, over my body, while the event taking place being everyone's, with consent, on mutual terms, within the power-structure of an "audience-performer" setup. There is a history of expectations and power relations ingrained in the space of the theater, studio, dance institution. The practice separates itself from these and creates something like an anarchistic-feminist-behavioral utopia when it exists on its own. In the presentation, I moved following a somatic score and attempted to practice the practice in its intrinsic value and not give my experience of my self, my body away in order to please the viewer. To not desire to be recognized from a specific intentional perspective, neither pleasing the expectations on myself conditioned by my stored language of somatics, performance and choreography. I am wondering whether I can create a space which within there is no end-gaining, behaviorally, in our whole mind-body. I question to which extent dancers and performers let go of their volition to please the assumed expectations of the common-place, which is related to power. Is there such a thing of a will of one's own? The score focuses on using thought to perceive the physical material of the body, the sensation of it, experiencing my body in its intrinsic value, not as a means to an end. Thought integrated with the body, dissolving into the body. Having bodily agency and autonomy by being able to listen to one's body separate from other people's desires. Is it possible to experience a collective and individual autonomous body simultaneously? Can I as a "performer", or everyone in the space, be perceived as a subject and is it possible to erase the power-structures in the room? Can the spectator be invited into the intimacy of my experience, experience their body as matter, and potentially witness and experience ideas around bodily agency, physicalism and sexual subjectivity that comes up in the practice?

Why no end-gaining?

When end-gaining we follow learnt protocols of how to behave to get to a certain place. These codes make up the awareness of the self, identity, which is why some claim one is always performative, but within this the majority of the experience of ourselves gets lost...

You think we can be in a state which is not performative?

Yes... At least in my own subjective experience, my perception of myself. The person perceiving me might still make me performative by relating through pre-determined language.

Let's return to that later. Would you like to finish WHAT you were doing?

Yes. The practice is based on my relationship with improvisation, somatic movement practices and therapies, mainly Alexander Technique, Open Source Forms/Skinner Releasing Technique and the work of Eva Karczag who has a background in Alexander, Body Mind Centering, SRT, Ideokinesis and Tai Chi, and me having improvised with some pioneering female improvisers in the NY downtown scene. I am merging ideas and language from these practices together to desexualize, ungender and subjectify the body. I wanted to use this opportunity to explore something new, but not sure how daring I was in the end... To expose the most basic part of my practice and how I relate to it personally felt like something I had to do to move forward. Before I have transformed it beyond what it is, listening to what kind of work the community and society seem to need at that moment in time. It also feels like a "personal" practice and that is also why I have never felt the right to present it in a choreographic format before.

Why?

I question power. It seems self-masturbatory and patriarchal to force someone watch me being in a state, if I do not have a clear intention around what I want to offer. The access to a somatic practice is a white privilege. If one treats art as activism, that brings a lot of pressure on the function of the work one makes for the public. Which is funny, as I also agree with the philosophical discourse around "art has no function". Then I thought of the feminist slogan "the personal is political", and to dance in front of someone without intending to please them, or satisfy myself, has a function. To feel pleasure "in-itself" is political.

What do you mean with personal?

Partially, the practice has allowed me to free myself from the meaning of gender prescribed onto me. The identity, constructed body and behavior, power position of "woman" that I have been patterned with based on the sex I was born with. I returned to it on full-time when I had just graduated acting school, not as a means to become a better dancer. And, when the experience of patriarchal abuse in various forms had reached a breaking point. It became like a daily meditation. Allowing me to experience the physical reality, not the conceptualized reality, and change in relation to my present sensation of myself and perception of the world. Not perceiving through the lens of my fixed self. Through practice, philosophical, spiritual and political ideas came to the surface and repatterned my relationship to things. The personal is a micro level of separating oneself from neo-liberal capitalist and patriarchal values on a universal level. It allowed me to move not as a means to satisfy a virtuosic desire. To not automatically follow orders, conform to power-structures or be governed by a higher power.

Would you like to complete the description about WHAT happened?

Oh yes. Sorry, you weren't there. I had a text, written by me and recorded by my voice, played out loud as a sound score. I turned this text on and started improvising following a score in my own pace. The text suggested ways the audience could relate to the space, their body, verbalized parts of the score I was moving from and articulated some politics and philosophy poetically. For example undoing from the AT work, internal systems and anatomical parts from the BMC and Ideokinesis work and non-linearity and "seeing without naming", which I decided to go deeper into after working first with Nina Martin and then more thoroughly with Stephanie Skura, Joan Skinner's protégé.

In this course you read the book "my body the buddhist" by Deborah Hay. Were you influenced by

her?

No, not directly. Though non-linearity is a big topic in Deborah Hay's practice too, whom I've only taken one workshop with, in Spring 2017. The ideas in "My body the Buddhist" is prevalent in the improvisational practices taught, practiced and performed by women in the States. The philosophy of Buddhism is definitely a building stone for improvisation and somatic practices, alongside with phenomenology, even if none of the practitioners are philosophers or Buddhists. These techniques are influenced by eastern practices. Which is why there is a heated discussion around white supremacy and appropriation in somatic practices. It is interesting and provoking to me that Deborah calls her practice choreography and not improvisation, and I think this is separating her from the other pioneers. Anyhow, the presentation went on for 15-20 minutes, which is very different than doing the score for 2-3 hours. In moments I pushed myself, directed my body into end-gaining and contradicted the practice. One cannot be present with a conceptualized idea of what the end will look like. At the same time there is no way to do it right, it is just a practice, creating opportunities for things to happen - or not.

Would you like to speak a bit about the language you are using?

At first the sound score felt like the choreography and the physical execution it's opposition. Order and chaos. I was curious whether I could choreograph the space with my words and voice. Choreographing intimacy or empathy. Is it possible to erase power-structures and binaries socially through language? I attempted to apply the idea of "invitational language" used in trauma therapy, but also in Skinner Releasing Technique, where the facilitator/teacher creates a space for the "client"/student to sense and move their body, only when they want to, never to please the facilitator. However, opposite to the language in Skinner Releasing Technique, this language excludes imagery as imagery also can separate the mind from the body.

The language is manipulative, I am not erasing power-structures, I am still in power, as I am the author of the experience.

Can you really use language within a practice to reinvent it? Isn't language just reproducing itself and it's ingrained values?

Hm.. I'm not sure. And yes. Through language I reach a physical state where I let go of language. The science of this is a knot I want to untie. Our whole body is ruled by language through the way we have been constituted, and therefore follows every word, symbol, automatically. Each thought changes us on a cellular level. The language used in somatic practices is extremely specific, one has to be conscious of the affect each word has on the body and mind. The meaning, associations, sound, order, command or suggestion... Our thinking is developed through a pre-determined compartmentalized language. In the west especially, we have not learnt to have agency or autonomy beyond it. I am constructed through something intellectual, pre-determined, binary and patriarchal. Can I experience what I am without language written onto me? That demands us to not perceive through "thinking" as in thinking with meaning, but "thinking" as in sensing without naming. The brain registers, but without compartmentalizing into a defined linguistic articulation. An experience is temporal and stored in the nervous system, fascia, flesh. Remembering in language makes it a narrative, an artificial concept. Being separate from language, feeling as if existing in a void, in nothingness and being mindless, is perhaps the moment when our thought is integrated with our body. Not separating itself and making judgements from an outside perspective, but being a link between the outside and inside world.

So, you think it is possible to deconstruct language and reformulate our relationship to it?

To a large degree I agree with the discourse saying that there is no essence, we will always think when perceiving, and thinking always includes language. Though, *if* we can exist in the mere physical sensation of something and experience the matter, undefined, even if just for a brief second - when one then returns to the reality of definitions, one potentially has the opportunity to redefine

what they see.

Why do you claim that the somatic improvisational practice is a feminist, anarchist and queer practice?

It is probably very naive of me, as I don't have a theoretical background. When I speak of feminism I speak of an environment where there are no power-structures governing privileges, experiences, freedom of will, or identities, among other things. I am also speaking of a specific type of intimacy. Based on purely listening to what is there, not what we think or wish was there. Where one is able to listen to oneself at the same time as listening to the Other, a specific way of perceiving by our physical self reacting to our environment and vice versa.

In order to feel like one exist we articulate our "self" into narratives that can be recognized, both by ourselves and by others. We conform our experience into a universal normative language. The search for the "self", is then, perhaps, a search for the part of ourselves we have lost through self-narrative. We are looking for the memory of the sensation of the experiences that has made us up, but which we do not give an account for as we weren't able to put it into language.

Queerness, is to not fit into the codified knowledge of the world that most people are navigating themselves through. When I communicate I reproduce values which does not include those that do not feel that they can identify with this language. I am not the woman which my mind has conceptualized that a woman is. In the same way, we ascribe body parts specific values. Today queer is contradictorily also an identity, with behavior and looks ascribed to it. Self-narrative is a way of creating a beginning and an end, creating completion so that our sentences or movements will be understood. What's queer in this practice, to me, is to not give into this act of molding my self and my body into something artificial in order to be recognized. Instead, acting in relation to my hormonal level, the density of my bones, my physical self reacting energetically to what's outside of me, not to the form I am aware of displaying. Also, when improvising perhaps one can be in touch with that one has lost through language, the queer part of ourselves we do not usually give an account for. To move, behave, and follow inner desires for our own pleasure autonomous from an authoritarian voice, to not obey the higher power with our body, is also anarchist.

Would you like to explain the link between the practice, intimacy and sexual violence that you are hinting on in the text?

We're dealing with power and the body. Dance technique conditions the subject to conform to other's desires with their body. The symbols/meaning prescribed to my body in society will decide how my body is being interacted with physically. The power-structures and desires we view bodies within conditions a human to have specific thoughts and reflexive behaviors in relation to a body. Watching violent porn creates a specific expectation on pleasure and performance. Watching women being compared to objects in advertising, desensitizes the viewer when they meet an actual female body. Men are portrayed through violent ideals. When touching, when being sexual, one is often communicating with the image, concept, rather than the subject. It creates a lack of empathy. A person's sexual arousal is often used a means to satisfy another's. Touching a body is often a means to have sex. Sex is often a means to reach a climax, a goal. Can the female have an erotic body, experiencing pleasure, and still be a subject? Can there be two subjects touching, viewing, perceiving and relating sexually to each other? To learn how to stay with the sensation of ones own body while being in contact with another body will help one to be able to voice wants, needs and say no. To have the opportunity to listen to the physical self, to your body's desires in relation to different physical encounters creates bodily agency, ownership and the potentiality of noticing the power-structure one is within and the ability not to obey to it. As well as creating empathy for the body one is touching. I am looking to see the sexual encounter as an improvisation, based on the concepts of listening, not end-gaining or naming.

Ok, sorry to interrupt you but we are running out of time. There are a lot of topics. I am interested in how specificity can support the choreography to develop further.

Yes, definitely. Me too.

Ok, well... thank you Tuva.

Thank you!

Bye and good luck with the continuation of this research.

Thanks Tuva. Same to you. Hej då!