AN INVESTIGATION INTO FACILITATING THE WORK OF THE INDEPENDENT CONTEMPORARY DANCER THROUGH SOMATIC PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an ongoing artistic research project that constructs a somatic approach on the basis of character analytic body psychotherapy to support independent contemporary dancers in working with what is here termed performative choreography. In this framework, dancers work with collaborative forms of immediate performance, and are required to possess heightened sensory, perceptual, reflexive and interactional skills. The article links the evolving somatic approach to the context of proto-performance, underlining that somatic work, which transforms the embodiment of the dancer, is already a starting point for performance. At least in this sense there is no clear distinction between artistic process and artwork. It is suggested that character analytic body psychotherapy shares interests with performative choreography as it fosters personal and interactive skills that support the regulation of the reactions and actions of an individual in the actuality of the here and now. Therefore, it might likewise enhance dancers’ ability to embody current trends in contemporary dance. Finally, the article discusses some initial steps in applying this form of body psychotherapy to artistic practice. Keywords performative choreography contemporary dance independent contemporary dancer somatic psychology character analytic body psychotherapy Wilhelm Reich body armour and performance

INTRODUCTION

Dancing performs an odd function in representation. Apparently a break from language and signification, it usually erupts to express an excess of feeling – revealing in those moments not necessarily ‘the body’ but the social and affective forces that traverse a body and bind it to a collective. (Lepecki 2010: 162)

This article presents an ongoing artistic research project that addresses the recent changes in the authorships and role of the independent contemporary dancer in a (North) European context, as well as attempts to facilitate their work through an evolving somatic approach. I myself am a contemporary dancer and conduct the project at the Theatre Academy Helsinki. This I do in collaboration with a few Finnish artists and educators in dance and theatre art, as well as graduate students from the Department of Dance and Theatre Pedagogy. In the vein of artistic action, the research explores the construction of a somatic method that draws on insights and exercises from character analytic body psychotherapy to support the performance of the contemporary dancer. In the contexts of both private and group encounters, this form of psychotherapy utilizes verbal and bodily exploration to bring awareness to and expand the patterns by which an individual relates to and acts in the world. Through analysis of observations of and participant feedback from the project's ensuing artistic practice, the research likewise attempts to formulate an understanding of how dancers currently embody dance.

What motivates the project is that, while choreographic approaches in contemporary dance differ from one choreographer to the next, they have likewise undergone a shift from a theatrical to a performative paradigm that influences the role of the dancer. However, as dancer-researcher Jenny Roche points out, ‘Across dance studies, choreographies are usually discussed as representational of the choreographer, with less attention focused on the dancers who also bring the work into being’ (Roche 2011: 106). Despite some phenomenologically influenced research, the dancer’s perspective on the processes of dance-making still remains under-theorized (e.g. Rouhiainen 2003; Kozel 2007; Ravn 2009; Roche 2011). The piece of research this article discusses aims to describe, understand and facilitate the manner in which contemporary dancers embody dance and contribute to what performance theorist André Lepecki (1999) and choreographer-researcher Kirsi Monni (2011) have tentatively termed performative choreography.
The project also finds impetus in timely concerns in research in the performing arts. Increased attention is paid to understanding and conceptualizing the developments in the psychophysical and pre-performative training of the performer. This training relates to strategies that foster the performer's ability to adapt to and be fully aware of circumstances with a readiness to act, react and respond to others (e.g. Loukes 2006; Zarilli 2007; Kirkkopelto 2011). As ways in which the performer constructs his or her body into something particular for performing, performance theorist Richard Schechner (2002: 225) also discusses such training in terms of prototype – a starting point that gives rise to and belongs to the process of constructing a performance. A similar tendency is observable in dance training related to what is variously termed somatics, somatic studies or somatic education (Bateson 2009). The terms denote a field of study that combines different learning methods to foster awareness of the body within its environment that are utilized in both the artistic and pedagogic practice of contemporary dance. Some of the general goals of the related practices are to develop individuals' sensory and perceptual sensitivity, as well as to increase flexibility in their movement skills for further variety in personal options to act in the world to emerge (Fortin 2009).

The following sections of the article consist of a more detailed description of the motivation and frame of the discussed project. Following the discussion of Lepecki and Monni, the term performative choreography is introduced as a guiding concept informing the work of the contemporary dancer. The particular strand of body psychotherapy or somatic psychology the project engages with, and some of the possibilities it might offer to the artistic practice of independent contemporary dancers, are likewise examined. Finally, the article introduces some early insights from the first stages of the practical investigation.

PERFORMATIVE CHOREOGRAPHY AS A BACKDROP

During the past several decades, western forms of the performing arts, including theatre and dance, have dealt with forms of performativity that induce public bodily acts, which constitute instead of depict reality in the actuality of performance. According to performance theorist Marvin Carlson (2008: 6–7), theatre theoretician Erika Fischer-Lichte has described this as involving a refiguration of the relationship between subject and object, observer and observed, and artist and audience in order to create dynamic and transformative events. In these instances, there is often no separation between the production and work. Additionally, experiencing and participating in the performance event are prioritized over interpretation. Fischer-Lichte (2008: 22–23) further maintains that the performative redefining of the performing arts is observable in the apparent dissolution of boundaries in the arts. Creative processes in different artistic media tend to be realized as performance. Instead of works of art, artists produce events, which involve both themselves and audience participants.

It is evident that current forms of contemporary theatre, contemporary dance and performance art permeate each other (Lepecki 2010: 133; Numminen 2010: 13–14). Already in the mid-1990s performance and cultural theorist Elin Diamond (1996) listed some characteristics by which performance art and studies challenged and influenced the theatre arts. She writes:

*Performance [...] has been honored with dismantling textual authority, illusionism and the canonical actor in favor of the polymorphous body of the performer. Refusing the conventions of role-playing, the performer presents herself/himself as a sexual, permeable, tactile body, scouring audience narrativity along with the barrier between stage and spectator [...] In line with poststructuralist claims of the death of the author, the focus in performance today has shifted from authority to effect, from text to body, to the spectator's freedom to make and transform meanings. (Diamond 1996: 3)*

While similarly arguing that transformation and diversity determine contemporary theatre, theatre theoretician Hans-Thies Lehmann (2009: 41, 70) points out that simultaneous and multidimensional perception has replaced a linear and sequential mode of perceiving in performance. He also argues that instead of the intentional subject, the subconscious subject, a body-subject, has increasingly taken over the stage (Lehmann 2009: 44, 75).

Similar views about perception and the body in performance are related to contemporary dance. In his writings Lepecki (1999, 2000, 2004) suggests that especially European contemporary dance moved from a theatrical to a performative paradigm in the late twentieth century. Among other things, the new paradigm emphasizes the moment and process of performance over choreographic planning. It explores the discursive, material and affective effects that performance acts have on the world. It involves distrust in representation as well as the spectacular and an insistence on the material presence of the dancer's body in its bareness (Lepecki 1999: 139, 2000: 366, 2004: 172, 177). Together with dance critic Sally Banes (Lepecki et Banes 2007), he considers that performance practices often investigate and create unsuspected sensorial-perceptual bodily realms. Here sensation and perception are considered as culturally informed agents that performance practice activates and represses, reinvents and reproduces, and rehearse and improvises (Lepecki et Banes 2007: 1).

Choreographer and dance researcher Jeroen Fabius (2009: 331–32) supports these views by arguing that in
contemporary dance, kinaesthesia has lately often been the subject matter of performance or a mode of presentation, and even a principle of choreographic organization. Dance scholar Susan Foster (2010: 32) and art curator Stephanie Rosenthal (2010: 4), in turn, point out that in contemporary dance, choreography is increasingly understood as somewhat open frame or set of principles that structure movement – suggestions for possible courses of action to be taken by performers and the audience members or both together. These frames provoke the exposure of both personal and social kinaesthetic values and practices for their participants. For example, European based proponents of social choreography Michael Klien and Steve Valk (2008) find that the new choreographic approaches they work with are closely tied to the opening up of new modes of perceiving. In their view, this calls for experiential and experimental investigation of the sensory and perceptual realms in their sociocultural contexts (Klien et Valk 2008: 147, 150, personal communication, Theatre Academy Helsinki, 29 April 2011).

To draw some of the previous themes together, according to Lepecki (2006: 5–8), the task of choreography is to rethink the subject in terms of the body, in terms of what the body can do. Instead of something fixed, for him subjectivity is a process of active becomings. He terms such choreography that exposes the body as a site of historical inscription as well as questions and refashions the norms of its production as performative choreography (Lepecki 1999: 139). Following Fischer-Lichte's arguments about a performative aesthetics, Monni (2011) likewise underlines the exploration of the material potentials and social conditions of embodiment in performance acts. She suggests that such choreography that highlights the event nature as well as the experiential, material and contextual characteristics of performance could be called performative choreography (Monni 2011: 6–7). The research discussed here relies on the background of the abovementioned and somewhat open definition of performative choreography in that it is committed to exploring the contemporary dancer's process of embodying dance in such choreography that involves exploring 1) sensation and perception, 2) norms of embodment, 3) interaction between performers and audience members in the act of performing and 4) collaborative approaches to creating choreography.

ON THE CONTEMPORARY DANCER

The abovementioned shifts in aesthetics towards a performative mode of performing challenge the traditional competencies and tasks of the dancer. Instead of concentrating on single-handedly honing his or her physical movement skills according to specific regimens, he or she, among other things, explores the implications of sensation, perception and kinaesthesia for dance-making through a variety of somatic approaches. The performative aesthetics have likewise fostered a more egalitarian relationship between dancers and choreographers. As mentioned in the previous section, they have placed emphasis on interactions between dancers, spectators and the environment in the moment of actual performance. In these instances, dancers question their perceptions and actions whilst in the midst of producing emergent and interactive dance performance. For the dancers this requires a heightened awareness of and an ability to utilize their immediate experiences as material for performing.

The authorship of the dancer has thus moved from him or her being a skilled interpreter of a choreographer's intentions by dancing to him or her working more collaboratively in planning, making, practicing and performing the creative undertaking (Arlander 2010: 95–97). The dancer is positioned as a self-reflective and creative entity in the process of co-constructing and performing dance together with others (Roche 2011: 106). While being both performers and makers, dancers likewise explore the interrelationships between the positions of creator, performer and the audience (Preston-Dunlop et Sanchez-Colberg 2002: 13, 14).

Independent contemporary dancers, who work periodically on a project basis with different collaborators, have for some time been considered to require a multi-talented and well-functioning body in order to embody and (re)present choreographers’ intentions and ways of restructuring cultural values. These dancers are skilled in embodying different movement styles, and gain expertise in transforming and shifting from one style of dancing to the next on the varied projects they work in (Rouhiainen 2003: 242, 245; Foster 1997: 255). In so doing, they build what Roche (Roche 2011: 111) calls a corporeal portfolio of idiosyncratic combinations of embodied movement paradigms and experiences that are reshaped by each new dance project. In their work dancers, then, negotiate the relationship between what has become familiar and stable and what is unknown and produces change. Roche further describes this by writing that:

...flexibility enables dancers to embody a number of different choreographic styles and become many bodies in one body. Indeed, a dance piece could be conceptualised as a temporary resting place or landing site for a specific embodied identity that both absorbs the dancer fully and gives a sense of stability for a period of time, albeit finite. (Roche 2011: 115)

Roche (2011: 105) opines that dancers working with diverse projects in diverse settings create a moving identity. Being mutable bodies in flux, they forge the collation of embodied experiences into a unique way of moving that influences the outcome of a choreographic process.
One's experiences and actions for the sustenance of a satisfactory life. It supports the client to develop a more
playfully (Totton 2008). In my experience, this process-oriented approach worked with supporting awareness, tolerance and regulation of
routines necessary for the therapeutic journey, to act rather than be acted on, and to generate images and motifs freely and
physically through corrective treatment, the post-Reichian form of therapy that I learnt allows the client’s body–
healthy character is an ideal. Indeed, instead of simply attempting to adjust or realign the body energetically and
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considered dated. According to body psychotherapist and theorist Nick Totton (2008), what most agree upon is the
post-Reichian therapists have adopted some of his ideas, while changing and developing others that are now
different approaches, as Reich himself worked in different ways during different phases of his career. In addition,
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indebted to Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957). He took Sigmund Freud’s argument that our psychic life is rooted in our
bodies seriously, developed a psychoanalytic method that observed the body's expression, and finally endorsed
embodiment. The somatic field is generally understood to involve a plethora of different bodily practices that attend
to the body through a first-person perspective; are interested in the tacit knowledge that it encompasses; and regard
the process of becoming aware of the body as a path towards change, enhanced bodily functioning and self-
understanding. It likewise appreciates the agency of the individual and often supports self-directed action. Dance
educator Jill Green (Green 2007: 1121, 1128) has argued for a social somatics that considers somatic exploration as a
potential means to produce understanding of the social norms that influence our bodily behaviour. In addition, she
believes that it can offer a path towards encountering and appreciating difference, and thus towards enhancing
socio-political sensitivity in interaction. In clarifying this somewhat complex domain, somatic educator Martha
Eddy (2009: 7) points out that there are three main branches in the somatic world, namely, somatic psychology,
somatic bodywork and somatic movement. This research deals with integrating principles from a form of somatic
psychology or body psychotherapy into contemporary dance. In its somatic applications, Eddy places the latter in
the category of somatic movement.

Between 2006 and 2009, I explored my bodily experiences in a post-Reichian body psychotherapy-training
programme run by the Finnish Institute for Character Analytic Vegetotherapy (www.luonne.fi). Following Wilhelm
Reich’s early formulations, here vegetotherapy means therapy of the vegetative nervous system that is now called the
autonomous nervous system and mediates the involuntary aspects of our embodiment. Character, in turn, refers to
habitual mental and physical patterns with which people defend themselves from perceived internal and external
threat (Totton 2008: 90).

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different approaches, as Reich himself worked in different ways during different phases of his career. In addition,
post-Reichian therapists have adopted some of his ideas, while changing and developing others that are now
considered dated. According to body psychotherapist and theorist Nick Totton (2008), what most agree upon is the
importance of awareness of and surrender to bodily sensations and emotions, while downplaying Reich's emphasis
on sexuality. Many also question Reich's alleged notion of unearthing the healthy genital character in the
therapeutic process, even if he himself was of the opinion that each one of us is more or less neurotic and that the
healthy character is an ideal. Indeed, instead of simply attempting to adjust or realign the body energetically and
physically through corrective treatment, the post-Reichian form of therapy that I learnt allows the client's body-
mind to guide the therapeutic journey, to act rather than be acted on, and to generate images and motifs freely and
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Sharing similar views to Roche, in a recent text Finnish dance artist Riikka Theresa Innanen (in press) describes
what in her view being a dancer currently entails. She writes that dancers:

[...] are faced with a totally new scenario of how the dance can be performed (i.e.) it is not enough to have a virtuoso body but also a keen mind with an interest to
learn and a courage to share the creative processes in front of a public. (Innanen in press: n.p.)

She goes on to add that now there is a momentum that allows the following:

[...] also the dancer and the audiences part take in the creation by contributing with their own creativity, intelligence, learning skills, opinions and choice making abilities to the process. In
other words, changing the attitudes of the dancer doing a dance into being the dance, and the
action of watching into a process of being moved – from representation to an unfolding of the
Self. (Innanen in press: n.p.)

Here, Innanen implies that participating in performance calls for dancers' openness to change, their ability to
regulate their emotions, to be discerning, to make sense of things and make choices. Roche (2011: 115) likewise points out that, to assist the evolvement of creative dancers, it is important to train in ways that support building dance technique for the unique body structure of individual dancers and that foster their agency, self-reflexivity and skills in choice-making. The aim of this research project is to apply body psychotherapy to the practice of the dancer in order to hone exactly these traits with an emphasis on social interaction and the inclusion of an ability to surrender to the present moment. This is so since performative choreography, which I believe Innanen to allude to in her comments, often also questions the social and political awareness of its performers.

A STRAND OF SOMATIC PSYCHOLOGY

Performative choreography and somatic approaches to dance and body work share an interest in exploring
embodiment. The somatic field is generally understood to involve a plethora of different bodily practices that attend
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the category of somatic movement.
Engaging with this form of body psychotherapy supported my dancing, especially improvisation, but also influenced the way in which I taught contemporary dance classes. For teaching, it offered material to ask students to focus upon and explore the intentions, attitudes and feelings with which they performed class material, and thus means to support a subjectively engaging manner of dancing. In my own dancing, I felt I was more openly attuned to my experiences and reacted to my emergent feelings, actions and images more spontaneously than before. I could question my habitual ways of responding to performing and creatively play with them. Therefore, I came to believe that an artistic application of this practice could facilitate the work contemporary dancers undertake. I understand this to mean utilizing an empathic, dialogical, bodywork- and movement exercise-based as well as conversational approach to enhance dancers' awareness of their sensations, feelings, perceptions and impulses as signposts for artistic work – and thus to hone mindful action.

THE BODY ARMOUR, CHARACTER AND PERFORMANCE

What especially influences the discussed investigation is Reich's understanding of the body armour and the bodywork that supports increased awareness of one's body, as well as loosening of excessive stiffness or revitalizing limpness (e.g. Reich 1973; Välimäki et Saksa 2006; Totton 2008; Young 2010). Reich argued that pent up emotions and unreleased psychosexual energy produced unnecessary tension or physical blocks within muscles and organs. It was for this reason that Reich carefully studied the body language of his patients. He became interested in how they expressed themselves physically in addition to what they said. He looked at their posture, movements, gaze, tone of voice and muscular tension, for example. He learnt that the physical tension acted as a 'body armour' preventing free flow of energy, as well as open expression and regulation of one's impulses and emotions. He thus opined that unexpressed feelings and undischarged anxieties are bound to the structure of the body-mind through patterns of tension that at the somatic level appear as muscular armouring and psychological level as character armouring (Totton 2008: 89). Developed to regulate the interrelationship between internal impulses and external demands throughout our lives, these armours are habitual, and influence the characteristic style or demeanour of the individual. Reich considered the forms these armours took to depict the sociocultural conditions in which individuals live. In this sense, they are embodied socio-political inscriptions (e.g. Välimäki et Saksa 2006; Totton 2008).

In Reich's view, a healthy person is sensitive to internal and external stimuli and capable of regulating them – spontaneously acting upon them by opening up to or withdrawing from circumstances when appropriate. Most of all, psycho-physical health meant the ability of the individual to fully open up to the sensations of the body and to completely engage with what he or she is doing or who he or she is at the present moment. Reich believed that a healthy person was capable of being in contact with others and her or his environment – able to be impressed by them, nature and the arts, for example (e.g. Reich 1990; Corrington 2003; Välimäki et Saksa 2006). To help his clients loosen excessive rigidity of the body armour that narrowed the scope of their sensations, feelings, perceptions and reactions, Reich utilized a character analytic method that among other things involved clients becoming aware of their characteristic styles of reacting with and comporting the body, sensitizing them to their feelings, releasing tension and emotional blocks through deep breathing, and expressing their experiences in both verbal and bodily ways (Boadella 1973; Välimäki et Saksa 2006). Reich placed great emphasis on the client's ability to breathe freely and fully, since he believed that restricted breathing to a large extent is the mechanism by which we control our feelings and turn them into psychological and somatic symptoms (Reich 1973: 333, 336; Totton 2008: 91). Working in this fashion can foster a subtle understanding of the expressivity of one's own body. This implies a move from performing predetermined contents and forms of expression to feeling and expressing in the present moment (Reich 1990; Mannila 2009).

Reichian body psychotherapist and actor Laura Mannila (2009) points out that our characteristic behaviour or character sets the boundary conditions for our expression and colours us as idiosyncratic performers. In its extreme it can present itself as mannerism, stuck and repeated habits, bodily attitudes and expression. However, when we become aware of our characteristic behaviour, we have the option of choosing and playing with it. Mannila writes that "You cannot eliminate your character style's influence on your performance by will, but you can become aware of it and turn it to serve your professional self" (Mannila 2009: 29).
A characteristic of live performance and communication is that it is embodied and mobile, and in many ways unconscious and beyond volitional control. A performer cannot fully control his or her behaviour and expression in performance. Part of this depends on learnt and habitual skills, as well as the reactions of the autonomic nervous system that affects the performers’ breathing, muscular tension and minute shifts in their bodies. For this reason, if a performer is not aware of his or her actual feelings or fights against them in performance, the intended action or expression might be unclearly received by the audience. This is so since the audience can observe the performer in his or her entirety; his or her attitude in performing including his or her efforts, carefulness, tenseness, etc.; and his or her actual actions (Mannila 2009: 44). Moreover, suppressing one's feelings requires both physical and psychological effort, and thus takes energy and attention away from other bodily and cognitive functions (Nummenmaa 2010: 156, 158). This restricts spontaneity in observing the rich flow of experiences the performer has while performing. On the other hand, contemporary dance is also an area in which volitional control is given up and unconscious and pre-reflective reactions are appreciated as potential pathways to previously unexperienced ways of performing (Foster 2003: 3). In these cases, the performer needs to surrender to immediate internal and external impulses and to allow the body to move or act on their basis.

Interestingly enough, Reich (1990: 358–59) considered bodily movements to be closely tied to and expressive of emotions. In his approach, the body is always considered to carry with it an emotional attitude. These attitudes are part of what is explored in bodywork and when familiarizing clients with their habitual behaviour. This view finds some support in recent research on emotions. For example, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio writes (1999) that consciousness and emotion are not separate, and that they are embodied processes. Emotions are automatic and unconsciously occurring patterned chemical and neural responses that play a regulatory role in maintaining the life of the organism. Feeling our emotions offers information on how we are engaged with our environment in the present moment, and helps us orient ourselves in beneficial ways. Even if we are not permanently under the spell of a so-called primary emotion, such as joy or anger, or a secondary social emotion, such as envy or shyness, we continuously entertain background emotions (Damasio 1999: 48, 51–53). These are observable, for example, in the speed and design of our movements, body posture and tone of voice. Their felt dimension includes fatigue, energy, excitement and tension. We cannot fully suppress automated emotional changes that occur in our body, even if we might disguise some of their manifestations by ignoring what we feel or altering their external appearance. Additionally, Finnish psychologist and researcher Lauri Nummenmaa (2010: 214) points out that when we become aware of our emotions through feeling, our behaviour no longer needs to be directed by automatic emotions, and we can make choices and regulate our responses and behaviour. Feelings are to a large extent reflections of body-state changes that influence the way in which we sense, perceive and understand our life circumstances (Damasio 1999: 286). Recent research has shown that emotions specifically affect three central cognitive processes: attention, memory and decision making (Nummenmaa 2010: 114, 117). For example, the emotional content related to an object reinforces the perception of it. Therefore, emotions likewise influence sensorial and perceptual attention and action in performance and artistic articulation.

However, emotions and habitual behaviour are not the only material explored in body psychotherapy. Totton claims that it ‘[…] is a therapy of the whole person which approaches whatever facet of a given individual – body symptoms, sensations, feelings, images, thoughts, subtle energy, spirituality – is most accessible in this moment as a way of making contact’ (Totton 2008: 26). However, Reichian work repeatedly returns to a focus on sensing one's bodily feelings. Alongside other insights, this work often relates to different levels of emotion.

EXPERIENCES FROM EMERGENT COLLABORATION

The first open-ended artistic collaboration related to the research is being carried out in the autumn of 2011. It is a studio and site-specific performance that I am co-constructing and performing with actor-researcher Helka-Maria Kinnunen with the aid of video material filmed and edited by dancer-videographer Riikka Theresa Innanen. The artistic team also includes lighting designer Tomi Humalisto and sound designer Antti Nykyri. This project explores insights from Reichian body psychotherapy in artistic practice with a focus on using voice and speech as part of the dancer's vocabulary, as often done in performative choreography. This first artistic undertaking is meant to offer grounds for the second project, which is a collaborative performance process with graduate students in Dance and Theatre Pedagogy at the Theatre Academy that will take place in the autumn of 2012. The third artistic process includes work with a group of professional dance artists, and is yet to be planned in more detail.
Together with Helka-Maria, we have now begun exploring the application of body psychotherapeutic practice through engaging in breath work, physical release exercises, sharing our experiences, and envisioning our physical energies by drawing pictures of them at the beginning and ending of our meetings. Following the notion of proto-performance, we have ventured into performing our performance. To impart or rather perform the first stages of our collaboration for the study circle on artistic research of the Nordic Summer University that met in Sweden in August 2011, we established a score of the dialogical and physical work we had engaged with so far. The next paragraphs briefly describe and interpret this experiment to give some insight into our evolving work and how it might prove to be informative for the research.
We demonstrated the score to the study circle in a lecture room where we had freed floor space by pushing tables to the sides and placing chairs in an open circle next to them. We encouraged the participants to take part in doing and experiencing the score we presented in full or in desired parts or to simply observe us performing it. Some participated while others remained seated and watched our endeavours. Taking turns, Helka-Maria and I both verbally guided and physically practiced the score. Therefore, we acted with several shifting focal lenses: (1) we were aware of the participants and guided them to join the physical work, (2) between the two of us we related to and tuned into each other's words and acts, (3) we verbally and physically demonstrated the exercises and (4) we surrendered to practicing them. Even if we had not earlier worked with this approach together with a group of people, the rapport that had already been established between the two of us gave us a strong ground from which to engage with the shared and concentrated activity.

The following list is a part of the score, and depicts something of our demonstration-performance that focused on bodily awareness, worked with specific bodily tension regions that Reich paid attention to, and observed the present emotional attitude the body conveyed (Välimäki et Saksa 2006: 56; Totton and Edmonson 2009: 28).

1. Standing meditation, grounding feet and bodily awareness – observing bodily position, sensations and feelings –
tuning into one's present and immediate experience and exploring the related emotional attitude.

2. Eye and head movement exercise – working with becoming aware of sensations and releasing tension in the eyes, face, head and neck. Reich considered this to be one of the main areas in which we build muscular tension (Välimäki et Saksa 2006: 58; Totton et Edmondson 2009: 30). Dance anthropologist Judith Lynne Hanna succinctly describes the role of the eyes in interaction: ‘They indicate degrees of attentiveness and arousal, influence attitude change, and regulate interaction. In addition, the eyes define power and status relationship’ (Hanna 2008: 492).

3. Increasing and releasing tension in the shoulder and chest area – working with becoming aware of sensations and releasing tension in the chest and diaphragmatic area. As this area strongly influences breathing, this is another important point of tension Reich worked with (Reich 1973: 336; Välimäki et Saksa 2006: 60–61; Totton et Edmondson 2009: 40–41).

4. Engaging the full body through an internal stretch to induce surrender to pleasurable sensations and movements.

Along with some breath work, these exercises were followed by a moment of improvisation with dance and text that was initiated with the emotional attitudes Helka-Maria and I recognized that we had at the moment. My attitude was a positive but nervous anticipation. Together with a randomly chosen poem by a Finnish author that Helka-Maria recited, this attitude triggered my movement. Here I easily related to the idea that emotion is a source of human motivation that constrains and inspires people as they relate to each other through gestures and movement (Hanna 2008: 492). But as the improvisation took form, my initial emotive cue was permeated by the tone, rhythm and content of Helka-Maria's reciting and the glances and gestures we exchanged during our interaction. These had a clear effect on the forms of and dynamic qualities my movement took.

We received varied feedback from the participants, who were professionals in the visual and performing arts, as well as philosophy. Appropriate to the communal and effect-driven performative choreography and without our direct influence, the feedback addressed experiences of participation. According to my recollection, the commentary was of the following kind. Some of the participants felt it was liberating that they could choose either to participate in or observe the practice. Some who remained seated and observed what the group was doing were ambivalent about their choice, and felt excluded from the shared practice. Participants who performed some of the score felt their body states change and become more relaxed. One participant could not identify any emotional attitude in her body. Another was struck by how the atmosphere and the exercises induced awareness of her own sensations and allowed her to surrender to the emotive content of her experiences. This, she suggested, was the result of the way in which we, Helka-Maria and I, were present in what we were doing.

Somatically oriented Finnish movement philosopher Timo Klemola (2004: 81) opines that our capacity to become sensitive to different features of otherness is dependent upon our ability to be aware of the different characteristics of the experiential flow of life in ourselves. This is one reason why Finnish trainer in body psychotherapy Markku Välimäki (2007: n.p.) argues that therapists should first explore their own embodied character – creating an ability to stay tuned to it and to tolerate its sensations and felt-sense. This supports their capacity to engage with the present moment and to be containers as well as regulators of their clients' experiences and emotions that to a large extent are non-verbally conveyed.

Paying attention to the felt-sense of our bodies and breathing helps us anchor our awareness in the present moment. If done in a non-judgemental, unforceful and patient manner, it supports an attuned awareness of the non-verbal and pre-reflective dimensions of our being. Breath and movement work also influences the autonomic nervous system and muscular tension. This in turn can support better contact with the body's sensorial knowledge and the emotions and feelings dawning in the actuality of the moment. Becoming aware of our breathing and accepting the way in which we breathe in different situations can increase our potential for self-regulation and engagement with the environment (e.g. Martin et al. 2010).

In our performance, Helka-Maria and I acted with a mode of concentrated awareness that fostered a sense of presence that I believe was transmitted non-verbally to the others as well. In concentrating on performing the explorative exercises ourselves, we intended to foster an open space for independent investigation and recovery. Our approach and performance might have generated a shared manner of relating. Non-verbal embodied relating constitutes a central feature in interaction and learning. And the body communicates through gesture and locomotion, proximity and distance, touch, gaze, facial expression, posture, physical appearance, sound, voice and smell (Välimäki 2007: n.p.; Hanna 2008: 493).
The feedback we received from the participants in the workshop we gave in Sweden pushed us in the direction of constructing a participatory performance, in which participants can explore who they are by doing actual physical and observational exercises, as well as observing our performance. Themes related to the psychotherapeutic encounter such as empathy, contact, interaction, physical exploration and bodily awareness, voice and speech inform the tasks we plan to invite the audience to participate in. However, the construction of the performance as well as my exploration of exercises, interaction and dialogue with Helka-Maria are still ongoing. This process allows us to further understand how body psychotherapy might inform and enhance our performance. In so doing, we hope to gain further insight into developing ways of supporting the work of the contemporary dancer.

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REFERENCES


TAGGED WITH: body armour and performance • character analysis • body psychotherapy • contemporary dance • independent contemporary dancer • performative choreography • somatic psychology • Wilhelm Reich

WHO ARE YOU?

An investigation into facilitating the work of the independent contemporary dancer through somatic psychology  Leena Rouhiainen

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Kuka sinä olet – hengitystä, askelia, sanoja ja muuta?

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Students in the Somatic Psychology program at CIIS learn a counseling approach that combines traditional practice and understanding with attention to the crucial role of the body in the structure and process of the psyche. The program teaches a developmental sociocultural perspective that explores how embodied affect, expression, identity, and interaction are formed both in families and in communities of participation outside of the family of origin. What is Somatic Psychotherapy? Somatic Psychotherapies combine traditional approaches to counseling, including dream work, talk, interpretation, Working in the independent sector offered dancers opportunities for growth and fulfillment; they appreciated the autonomy, flexibility and freedom that the independent career afforded, as well as working with new people across roles and disciplines. In order to overcome the various challenges associated with the independent role, optimism, self-belief, social support and career management skills were crucial. The mental skills reported by the participants had developed gradually in response to the demands that they faced. The term “independent dancer” is commonly used to describe professional contemporary dancers in the UK who frequently transition between jobs and projects, typically without a long-term commitment to a company or organization. 2011. “Embodying Multiplicity: The Independent Contemporary Dancer's Moving Identity.” Research in Dance Education 12(2): 105-18. Rouhiainen, Leena. 2003. Living Transformative Lives: Finnish Freelance Dance Artists Brought into Dialogue with Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology. Helsinki, Finland: Acta Scenica. Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine.