

Living movement

Ballet class as a non-performative practice

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MASTER PROGRAMME IN DANCE PEDAGOGY

**THEATRE
ACADEMY**

X UNIARTS HELSINKI

2019

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Date: 7 March 2019

AUTHOR Olga Potapova		MASTER'S PROGRAMME Dance pedagogy	
TITLE OF THE WRITTEN SECTION/THESIS Living movement : Ballet class as a non-performative practice		NUMBER OF PAGES + APPENDICES IN THE WRITTEN SECTION 53 pages + 1 appendix, 17 pages	
The final project can be published online. This permission is granted for an unlimited duration.	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	The abstract of the final project can be published online. This permission is granted for an unlimited duration.	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>This thesis work is an attempt to investigate ballet class as a practice without a specific focus on the performative aspects. Taking the inspiration from the martial arts practices, this research touches the issues of learning and ageing within a long-term practice, which gives a new angle for seeing training in ballet. Taking into consideration current social and cultural context, and with the support from contemporary research in phenomenology, embodied practices, and somatics, I try to see a way for inclusive and holistic approach to teaching and practicing classical dance.</p> <p>A series of open workshops at Theatre Academy of University of the Arts Helsinki served as a practical platform for this investigation. Practicing within a diverse and changing group helped to collect different experiences and opinions on the classes. While the material was grounded in Vaganova method, the somatic lens to the practicing and the supportive atmosphere enabled the possibility to work with practitioners' minds and mental states. The data for the investigation was collected via keeping journals, writing during the classes, and making short videos. Another part of the research was having interviews with theatre pedagogues familiar with martial arts practices and taking the inspiration from their experiences and approaches. Staying with the practice in a humble manner, but showing a number of findings, this work aims to be a possible basis for the future research.</p>			
ENTER KEYWORDS HERE Ballet, ballet class, classical dance, dance, practice, embodied practices, somatics, martial arts, spirituality, pedagogy, art education, Klemola, Salosaari, Shusterman.			

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
<i>1.1 Perspective</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>1.2 Research method</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>1.3 Theoretical background</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>1.4 Non-performative side of dance</i>	<i>20</i>
PREPARATIONS AND MINDSET	23
<i>2.1 Personal approach</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>2.2 Artistic-pedagogical research</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>2.3 Portrait of a practitioner. Martial arts influence and spirituality</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>2.4 A brief perspective on ballet history and actual events. Pedagogical concerns</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>2.5 Contemporary teaching and integration of techniques and philosophies. Somatics</i>	<i>37</i>
WORKSHOPS	43
<i>3.1 General description and the setting</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>3.2 Contents and the reflections on the practical experience</i>	<i>45</i>
RESULTS	55
<i>4.1 Data analysis and findings</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>4.2 Perspectives of future research</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>4.3 Conclusion</i>	<i>60</i>
REFERENCE LIST	62

APPENDIX	65
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Picture on the cover:

Author's workshop at PedApproach, 2018

Photograph by Leandro Lefa.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt at getting closer to the answers on several practical and theoretical questions connected to the dance pedagogy in a contemporary society. As I investigate the issues of style, accessibility, and movement expression, the fundamental questions arise, such as what is movement, what is that makes movement "alive" or lived, and how dynamics effect the movement.

This work combines my reflections on art education and the life paths of a dancer/dance teacher that have been developed through the years of my own practice together with the ideas of theorists from the corpus of supportive literature. Through observations and findings made during the teaching practice, which presents the practical component of this project, I try to achieve an insightful and inspiring outcome that could in a certain way influence the future work of my own and my colleagues.

Using classical dance technique (Vaganova method in particular), improvised movement, and somatic practices as instruments for my practice, as well as taking into consideration some aspects of physiology of the moving body, I try to find a form of a ballet class which is adequate to the needs of a particular group of people, not necessarily being professional dancers. I also observe the psychological, emotional, and physical consequences of taking this kind of class.

Looking at the development of ballet as a practice from the historical perspective, I intend on putting it into the contemporary context of somatic and mindfulness practices becoming more important and popular around the world. Trying to enrich the practice and expand the understanding of what the ballet class might be, I pay attention to the previous work in this field and find the ways to define what belongs to classical dance and if we should keep calling a ballet class the newer forms of work based on the technique.

I research pedagogical and methodical approaches to a ballet class: what we can retrieve from the previous and forgotten ideas of a dance lesson, but also what contemporary dance and other modern practices have to offer, being

grounded into contemporary philosophy and theory. By interviewing practitioners of martial arts, I try to reach the understanding of what can possibly unite the diverse practices of embodiment and what their pedagogical traditions share, as well as where the approaches take different paths. Through the lens of these materials, I invent and reinvent the role and the style of my guidance as a teacher.

Classical dance is a highly codified system, and while I acknowledge the problematic nature of the style, alongside the very specific requirements to the practitioners, I strive to open up the practice for a bigger audience and find the aspects that contribute to the physical, emotional, and creative development and enjoyment of movement.

This work presents a personal journey, grounded in the experience of everyday life in dance, and my wish to share it with other practitioners and pedagogues. The results obtained in a framework of the workshops are to be investigated and developed in future.

1.1 Perspective

My personal interest and need in this kind of a research started with me being a young unsatisfied student of a private ballet school in Moscow back in 00's. Even though I was coming from a smaller school, and apparently my creativity and thinking have not been entirely oppressed by harsh competition and a complicated atmosphere, as it so happens to many students of bigger and more established institutions, there was definitely present an issue of a missing agenda. My training days and endless amount of hours spent as an intern in a ballet company were full of tunings-in and repetitions, which were obviously not only a matter of acquiring the needed skills to become a perfect artisan, but also a part of the tradition. A common belief among my fellow students and colleagues used to say that a hundred of battement tendu movements could also heal most of your physical problems. The lack of understanding led to boredom, routine, and losing the respect for the practice.

Rehearsals were bringing a cheer for working on material of performative capacity, a chance for an artistic interpretation, while the obligatory procedure of the morning class was a completely different situation. One opportunity to

break through the grey everyday routine was to try to dance through the class, as if it would be a performance; however the intention would be soon lost as the attention stuck to the technicalities. The conflict between the excitement of dancing an actual performative material and the need to go through the technical routine to be able to reproduce that material was tangible.

However, ambitions to become a better- as it often appears to one very clearly in this stage,- dancer, pushes one very far on the scale of devotion, hard work, and on the ability to undertake any violence that comes from the ones holding the knowledge and power. By the moment of my graduation I was left with many questions regarding the spreading of the pedagogical power, and by the moment of me leaving the touring life with a ballet company in a favor of studying, I was left with even more questions for classical dance as a tradition and a practice in general.

The talks I had with my older colleagues many times brought me to quite heavy contemplations on what is left for the dancer after the retirement. The sacrifice of wearing out bodies and souls, often together with a certain artistic dissatisfaction, the investment of incredible efforts- far too often to discover your mastery slip away from you with the aging. It gave me an image of a flashlight, bright, but leaving only emptiness behind.

Later on, already as a pedagogue, I found another perplexing situation by working with amateur dancers, often older people. All of them had different motivations to come for the classes, most of them were never to perform any choreographic pieces on stage. However, they were working with a rare devotion and excitement. Partly it was possible to explain exactly by the fact that they did not have to be professionally responsible of the quality of their performance. But, I believe, that there is more to it than being a simple form of entertainment with a certain benefit for health.

Therefore, through the years of my practice as a dancer and a dance teacher, I have collected a great number of questions, some of which have led me to the wish to investigate more deeply the very essence of what presents such a big part of my life.

Is there anything more to ballet than performing?

1.2 Research method

In this research I draw on my own experiences from the past, as well as older and newer reflections upon them, in combination with the data collected throughout the practical component of this investigation. The practical part has been presented in a form of a continuous series of open workshops conducted by me at University of The Arts Helsinki's Theatre Academy, throughout years 2017 and 2018. The participants have been mainly students of Master programmes at the Theatre Academy, and the main condition for participating has been to have the presence of several years of previous experience in dance.

During the research process I have been involved in multiple roles- as a facilitator, teacher/guide, participant, researcher- which allowed me to see the issue from different angles, but which also introduced a set of obstacles. I describe the process in detail in Chapter Three of this work.

The data has been gathered through ethnographical methodology, involving keeping journals, writing during the workshop sessions, and filming some parts of the process. Another rich source of data collection has been discussions and interviews of participants and also practitioners from different fields, who were to a certain degree familiar with the issues of my research. I use the interviews of the people involved with various embodied practices professionally, but not connected to the dance field directly, to enable a critical view of my process and the processes in the dance field in general. The interview material has been collected in a form of audio taping. I approach data analysis from the phenomenological perspective.

I also search for support for my ideas from the corpus of literature that I will expand on in the following chapter. Some of the biggest influences from the theoretical side are essays on embodiment and education by Eeva Anttila and Timo Klemola, adding a phenomenological lens to the view on embodied practices; essays by Clyde Smith and Susan Leigh Foster, approaching power relationships in the practice of ballet through Foucauldian view on discipline and feminism correspondingly; as well as a number of references I use for the understanding of development of classical dance as a practice through historical perspective. Paula Salosaari's work on multiple embodiment in

classical dance provided a great inspiration for both theoretical reflection and practical implementation of this research. The thesis work of Pauliina Manninen served as support for incorporation of somatic ideas into a ballet class. Fundamental conceptualisation of somatics and somaesthetic was introduced through works by Thomas Hanna and Richard Shusterman. Finally, the work by Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta and Tere Vadén brought in a more structured understanding of methods in artistic research generally.

After all, I also find it important to mention the insights left outside the framework of the formal research, such as unrecorded discussions and private talks, the cultures of a changing room and a shared meal. I have met a great support and am deeply grateful to my mentors, colleagues, fellow students, and participants of my workshops.

1.3 Theoretical background

In this chapter I provide the theoretical support to the ideas that have come to me through my practice of being a dance student, a dancer, and a dance teacher. In order to find various potentials of what a ballet class might be, I am making an attempt to look at the issue from various angles.

In my opinion, nearly every kind of physical practice has a large potential for learning. As we know, in the second half of the 20th century cultural and social studies took the turn toward the recognition of embodiment as the crucial way of understanding the being (Anttila, 2015; Foster, 2013). Together with that, the phenomenological approach to scientific inquiries enabled the development of artistic and pedagogical research based on the participatory experience. Thus, it has become possible to constitute the knowledge obtained through practice to be assessed qualitatively, as the important and relevant for the scientific field. With this in mind, I want to describe, how bodily experiences are playing a special role in educational circumstances nowadays.

Let us abandon an old split of body and mind in Western philosophy and science (see Anttila, 2015; Klemola, 1991), and we are introduced to the fact that we are mostly familiar with the surrounding world and affected by it through the experiences of our bodies. We are embodying our process of living and our senses determine the way the world appears to us. Through our

bodies we simultaneously exist as subjects and objects (Klemola, 1991, p.3). When the body is being in movement, the experience alters from the experience of the body remaining still. Different types of movement have different potentials for the exploration. Therefore, it seems logical to suggest that through physical exercise and the practices helping to increase the bodily awareness we can expand our knowledge and connectedness to the world.

As Finnish philosopher Timo Klemola writes in his essay *Dance and Embodiment* (1991), referring to the ideas of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in dependence on the agenda of the exercise, it is possible to place all kinds of physical activities to four groups, which are respectively, Winning, Health, Expression, and Self:

Winning refers to those forms of exercise such as competitive sports with victory as a goal. When exercise is the means to a stronger and healthier body, health is the project, as in fitness training. Exercise as a key to self includes all forms of motion that involve the study of self, with the goal of discovering what can be termed actual or authentic existence. The last concept is based on the writings of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Projects of self include, for example, yoga, the various Asian self-defense disciplines and tai-chi. (Klemola, 1991, p.2)

Going further with these concepts, we can see that when we consider a particular example of movement activity, the projects can overlap as one kind of physical practice does not necessarily work for the benefit of only one project. Thinking about ballet training, which is the main focus of this work, now we can see how it can actually fit into all four categories of projects. On the level of a class without the professional demand, and under the guidance of a competent teacher, ballet training might contribute to the health condition of practitioners. Winning, even if it is not self-evident, is also possible in ballet, not only by the competitive atmosphere in some classes, but also by the intense culture of actual international ballet contests. When it comes to Expression and Self, the situation might be more interesting to investigate closely.

Klemola claims dance in general to be mostly a project of Expression (while not all the kinds of dance should be- for example, specifically sacred dance would be a project of Self) (Klemola, 1991, p.2). We can recognize classical ballet, with its never-ending strive to impress audiences, as a project of expression. However, the expression in ballet, a practice of a complex and sometimes, controversial history, is a very specific case. Expression in ballet is directed outwards, but not necessarily rooted from the inside of the performer. This kind of expression often does not come from the genuine intention of the performer and her/his actual connection to the spatial-temporal environment, but is imposed on her/him through the external choreographic vision and therefore presents recreation of the given form. Here it might be important to notice that other performative genres can share these characteristics with ballet, and classical ballet is just one of the well established practices where it appears as more evident. In the article "What do you choreograph at the end of the world?", written in co-authorship with dance dramaturge Steve Valk, choreographer Michael Klein makes a reference to development of ballet within a very particular culture of dance in the West:

In western societies dance has developed along the lines of what Nietzsche maintains is the opposite of dance, what he calls "obedience and long legs". [...] Strangely enough, when one looks at the development of dance in the 20th century in western society, one sees primarily that, "obedience and long legs". One sees the dancing body subjected to choreography. [...] But along the way, the map has been mistaken for the territory, the architecture for the experience. Maybe that is where it has all gone wrong. The structures are not the dance, they are perceptual orientations for getting there. In ballet for instance, the subjective range of movement is very limited, so only the best people can actually attain a state of dance. Most performers are simply executing movement within precisely defined limitations. (Klein & Valk, 2007, p.215)

Obviously, classical ballet has been historically developed as a practice of limitations and precisely fitting into a particular predetermined shapes. From this perspective, a ballet dancer often is reminiscent more of a specifically trained athlete, than of an artist. The purpose of their training becomes a perfect implementation of the artistic idea imposed by the other. Moreover, possibilities for making original choreography in classical ballet in the first place are similarly limited by the tradition of the form. To a certain measure, a

wider range of possibilities in ballet choreography opens up when it comes to integration of styles, however for a purist look such an approach leaves the frame of a classical ballet. Therefore, on a professional ballet stage the situation of preserving the tradition often prevails over the situation of artistic expression. Concerning this, it becomes complicated to talk about natural expression of a living body and bodily intentionality, an alive reaction and connection to here and now (Klemola, 1991, p.4). Another question in this line of thinking would be a possibility for improvisation within such a form.

The combination of restricting factors in ballet practice leaves a lot of controversies on the pedagogical side as well. A high physicality being placed together with a strict tradition and culture of teachers as persons in the position of power, holding the one and only possible knowledge, often produces quite a toxic environment for development of creative and critical thinking in practitioners. These conditions set a problem of developing a very particular type of awareness in a ballet practitioner. Let us return to the issue of embodiment. Referring to the ideas of American phenomenologist David Michael Levin, Klemola describes the levels of bodily experience as developmental stages. The bodily experience of a newborn child presents the "pre-objective body", which while in the lack of motility and still unconstructed ego, is ultimately open to the world, so "because an infant does not yet distinguish between subject and object because no subject has formed yet, there is only openness"(Klemola, 1991, p.8). The next stage of development is the pre-personal body, the body of a child that plays. At this phase certain patterns are learned, the ego starts to develop and social norms are also introduced to the child. Finally, after that follows the "ego-logical body", the body as experienced by an adult. This is the stage that is the most under the influence of the cultural environment, where the body acquires the patterns required by the traditions (Klemola, 1991, pp.9-10).

As mentioned previously, the tradition in the practice of classical ballet is very strong. The strict concepts of the movement patterns, clearly articulated requirements to the technique and the body shape have developed into, in the words of Susan Leigh Foster, "clear criteria of excellence" (Foster, 1996, p.326). Behind the scene, already on a level of education, it provokes the authoritarian situation described by Clyde Smith in his essay "On

Authoritarianism in The Dance Classroom" (1998). Smith uses concepts developed by Michel Foucault in his legendary work "Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison"(1979), and specifically the notion of a "docile body". The docile body is a body that develops through obedience to the tradition and circumstances, the body being under surveillance. As Smith writes:

According to Foucault, surveillance is a form of observation that is most effective when it is applied to the self. In other words, an atmosphere of constant surveillance must be created by the observer, so that the observed always feel watched. This feeling in turn creates a situation in which the observed ultimately maintains a state of self-surveillance whether or not the surveilling power is actually present. The dance classroom, with its mirrors, watchful teachers, and self-critical students, is a key site for both the external and internal surveillance of dancing bodies [...] (Smith, 1998, p.131)

Thus the abuse of using mirrors and always present teacher's eyes produce a dancer of high obedience to tradition or teacher's or choreographer's vision. Moreover, the whole culture of behaviour in a dance room becomes a competition of obedience. Taking an example from my own school experience, we always tried to sit or stand "beautifully" in the classroom, being in a full control of the body even between the exercises.

The total control plays a complex role in classical dance training. It is important to notice that analysis, precision and discipline acquired through this kind of education in general should be recognized as rather a positive outcome. The ability to stay with the form and perform it clearly is an inherent part of mastery in ballet. However, there is a fine line in between following the rule with awareness or by doing it habitually and blindly. As Kenneth Laws notes in "Physics and the art of dance : understanding movement": "Most dancers have had the experience of analyzing some movement to death, to the point that is no longer feels like dancing" (Laws, 2001, pp.5-6). It appears as quite a common situation in a ballet class. But in this manner the expressive power and even technical fluidity are easily blocked with the constraint of the rule. While performance in ballet has requirements of agility and "lightness", from my perspective, these qualities are rarely developed in traditional ballet training per se, as they would need more of "alive" reactivity to the situation than control for acting/moving according to the established rules. As

Klemola notes, the dance is being born of connection of the dancer to the surrounding world, the bodily intentionality (Klemola, 1991, pp.3-5). It seems to me, that dance, even being settled in a strict form, should not be ripped off of the opportunity to feel the connectedness to the world, at least because the physical powers making an impact on the moving body remain the same as with any other movement situations.

Therefore, as ballet practitioners are very vulnerable to the guidance coming from outside, the questions, of course, stay in the domain of pedagogical facilitation. In the atmosphere of trust, a reciprocal trust in between teacher and student, the imposed disciplining and corrections are just nothing more than a natural part of the learning process. The teacher's straight obligation in the situation of work with a formalized practice, such as classical dance, is to help students to open up the form, first of all not in the sense of breaking it or deviating from it, but in the manner of truly opening up its intention and potential. From the position of newcomer to a formalized practice, it is easy to get into a blunt reproduction of the visual shapes, while the initial idea of what should be implemented and experienced, sometimes on a level of the raw physique, is getting lost on the way. Pauliina Manninen writes on abandoning modelling as a system where a dance student has to repeat after the teacher and therefore the experience is often replaced by imitation, and also the teacher's demonstration is taken as a perfect version of the movement (Manninen, 2014, p.20)

Subsequently, if the initial idea of movement is lost in the imitation, we fall under the risk to bring up a student, who is bodily and mentally closed in the form, as perceived visually from another performer. This also raises an insecurity when a student discovers themselves in the need to improvise or create something new. Returning to the nature of things is becoming a serious problem. This is the case of, for instance, ballet dancers who are unable to do things "unballetically" in a contemporary dance production. As a former ballet student, who has been introduced to very few alternative movement practices during my school years, I can relate to this issue in a full measure. It took me a couple of years participating in contemporary dance classes after the graduation, in parallel with working for a ballet company, to find out the way

to move "as a human being". The natural way of moving and even behaving in a dance class had been totally lost.

I, however, would like to see a potential to talk about dance in the sense of being a project of Expression and Self, according to the ideas of Klemola, even within the domain of ballet. Having in mind these set of problems, familiar to many ballet practitioners, I also recognize that they are more natural to the old-school traditional teaching. Nowadays, in modern curriculums, the dance students are normally introduced to many techniques and approaches, as well as the integration of different techniques in ballet choreography is happening massively since at least 1970's. In her work "Multiple embodiment in classical ballet: educating the dancer as an agent of change in the cultural evolution of ballet", dance researcher Paula Salosaari notes:

The choreographic and performance practices in ballet thereby acknowledge ballet's past as well as its evolving nature. The vocabulary has been able to develop and adjust to outside influences. In addition to mixing ballets from different periods and styles in the repertory, contemporary choreographers may mix many dance idioms in one work or create their own movement styles, which are foreign to the dancers. (Salosaari, 2001, p.16)

However, as Salosaari continues, the demands to the ballet dancer now are quite high and actual teaching situation might not always keep up with the request. As ballet dancers might be often taught classes in many different movement disciplines, "ballet and other dance idioms are disconnected into their own 'islands', as separate modes of existing and being."(Salosaari, 2001, p.20).

Therefore, there appears the need in the integration on a deeper level, than just mixing the vocabulary. And there seem to be very beneficial ways of integrating theory, pedagogical approaches and somatic ideologies into ballet practice. Salosaari describes her successful experience of integration of Rudolf Laban's structural images of movement into a ballet class:

Focusing attention to the different potential qualities in dance, such as the experience of weight transference, spatial directions, skin surfaces or other body parts while dancing, the experience of the movement changed. The experience began to illuminate subtle expressive nuances in the previously mechanical movements and I realised new ways of performing

the same old vocabulary. Moving felt to me miraculously revitalised, meaningful and joyful, as if expedition to new ground. (Salosaari, 2001, p.12)

Agreeing with the beneficial influence of expanding bodily experience of a ballet dancer with other practices, I consider useful to look more into how the other bodily practices treat the issue of formalization. For example, in martial practices the movement stays itself through efficacy or functionality in the combat situation, while in dance the movement as an expressive vehicle has a bigger risk of becoming a visual ornament. In ballet tradition there is a place for the movement to be enacted and therefore present an imitation of the movement. This approach might be a consequence of influence by romantic movement on the practice in 19th century, with tricks such as stage machinery or even point shoes being incorporated in order to show the audience, for example, extraordinary lightness of a sylph. On the level of movement it appears in the wish of movement being theatrical and something else than it is.

Therefore, as a pedagogue, it seems crucial to help the student to overcome the imposed shape, not formally (even though there is a wide range of possibilities for that), but rather ideologically. The shape does not come out of nowhere, but once introduced an idea. Moreover, the idea might not remain always with the same focus, but student needs to learn to follow their own agenda, within the form or deviating from it, depending upon the circumstances.

1.4 Non-performative side of training in dance

Considering that the development of ballet as a form that we know nowadays has happened through the development of ballet performance, in this research I nevertheless want to concentrate on ballet as a classroom practice.

In my pedagogical practice I have often been in situations of teaching ballet classes to people who are not connected to classical dance professionally. I have been working with amateurs of different age groups, with contemporary or street dancers, with musicians for whom a ballet class was a part of the stage movement education. Due to the decisions of institutions, sometimes these people could even find themselves in the same class. Of course, these

situations could bring technical difficulties, but I rather prefer to see it as a pedagogical challenge and build up a programme that could be interesting and beneficial for everyone on different levels. This also pushed me into thinking about what could be a common denominator for ballet practitioners, what could be an accessible and shared experience, despite the level of technical proficiency.

As young professional dancers or students of dance programmes naturally find the main motivation in obtaining technical mastery for their future career as a performer, what could be a motivation for someone who is most likely not going to perform ballet on stage? Obviously, every person coming to a ballet class has a personal agenda. Such as for the benefits to health, to strive to obtain knowledge of strict academic forms of dance, for the warm memories of dance classes from the young years, or even a wish to belong to an elitist (as it is seen by many) practice.

The search for a common interest led me to compare ballet with other possible physical activities. If we try to see ballet practice as a long-term activity devoted to one's self development, what actually makes a gap in between of ballet as a practice and many other bodily practices, is the lack of ideology on the level of the practitioner. While many other practices are grounded in philosophy or religion, ballet has always been a practice for developing the ability to perform and be effective for the theatre audience. Historically, we lack a philosophical foundation in ballet, a purpose in it as a possible project of Self.

From my point of view, as now we are integrating perspectives from other bodily practices to ballet teaching, particularly from somatic practices, it starts to seem possible to find a way of connecting to the world and register bodily experiences through a ballet class too. Thus, the context of the practice changes with the portrait of the practitioner. First, that allows the practice of a ballet class to be more accessible. Yet no less importantly, it allows professional dancers to be more content with their work, as the effort in the class serves not only their performance, which unfortunately has been seen as "dying out" with them finishing their career, but to them personally on the level of obtaining knowledge of the world through experiencing.

Returning to the thoughts of Klemola, one more body type according to Levin is Transpersonal body. Transpersonal body is the body that can abandon its ego-logical state and reconnect with nature. This is also a point where body reaches the authentic way of being. Operating also with concepts of Heidegger, Klemola writes:

In inauthentic being, a person is actualized in the world by hiding being from view with masks and covers. These covers make it difficult for him to be the light with which being illuminates itself. In inauthenticity, man's self is "das Man selbst", the self, that is defined through others, through the passive subject, through Anybody. Man does then not define his being himself in any genuine sense. [...] In order to become an authentic self, man must free himself from the definitions of the others. In a way, he must return to himself. This is difficult, because the attraction of Anybody is great. Anybody relieves his burden. He does not need to take responsibility for his actions, because he can always refer to Anybody and say, "everybody else does so, too". Being Anybody, man is what everybody is but what nobody really is. (Klemola, 1991, p.11)

This somehow describes the possibility to hide behind the technique and tradition in dance. Becoming an obedient body, it is easy to suppress any actual experience of movement and connection to it. And on opposite, through reaching to the natural experience, we can obtain the state of Transpersonal body, the body that is in connection with the world and by being so, has the knowledge. As Klemola beautifully puts it:

In dance, movements may also create an experience where the mental-spiritual and bodily horizons of experience meld together, an experience of the corporeality of spirituality and the spirituality of corporeality. This experience is the birth experience of all dance, where the spirit turns to flesh and the flesh to spirit. (Klemola, 1991, p.13)

I guess, obtaining the knowledge and reaching to the spiritual is a very serious aim, and if our bodies are a perfect instrument to serve this aim, we need to be very attentive to our bodily experiences. Thus, especially now, when the world becomes more and more technological, the bodily practices start to play a very important role in our lives. And, I think, the practice of ballet class should not be different from any other bodily practices in this sense.

PREPARATIONS AND MINDSET

2.1 Personal approach

Preparing for this artistic-pedagogical research, even myself, I had been pondering over the issue of the artistic compound of this work. As I stay with the classroom practice, is it enough? Does it seem sufficient enough, if I do not offer an artistic product ready to be shown to the audience? However, I find the investigation of artistic and creative potential of a classroom practice highly important. No performance of high artistic qualities would be possible without a deep investigation in a classroom. So, even though performative decisions are out of the straight focus of this work, I see a potential to work on performative material with the mindset introduced in this work.

Also, keeping up with the idea of non-performative, I investigate my role of a teacher. Pedagogy is an art of staying behind the scenes, but it is often wonderful teachers who are behind any outstanding artist. Early in 2018 I first experienced my students performing my choreography on stage for a large audience all by themselves and was slightly shaken by this experience.

Previously I had not taught anything to be performed directly or would be performing myself together with my students. Often I only taught material for the students' further development and from that my interest in non-performative practice was derived. Seeing my students performing very well was an unexplainably happy and delightful feeling. However, even then I hoped much more for them to carry the material we worked on during the workshops before the performance and to be able to reflect on it critically in future, rather than just to perform excellently on one evening.

2.2 Artistic-pedagogical research

To find my approach to artistic research, I want to adopt ideas put in the work "Artistic research : theories, methods and practices" written by Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén. Describing the research methods for an artistic investigation, they say:

The question about the ways and methods of research must, however, always be solved case by case for each research project. In other words, it is worth choosing the methods in accordance with what is being researched, what is being asked and what is required from

the research. A suitable approach for artistic research is usually one in accordance with hermeneutical knowledge-constitutive interests. (Hannula, Suoranta, & Vadén, 2005, p.67)

In the case of this research, I would like to find out what the possible benefits are of a ballet class as of a non-performative practice. Through adding a somatic perspective to teaching in a ballet class, I would like to see what are the possibilities to address the corporeal dimension of human existence and how it can be incorporated into moving in a specifically codified manner. I would like to look at a ballet class as a continuous practice without an exclusive agenda in performing and, by seeing it through this lens, find the grounds for holistic learning in it. As well, I am interested to observe how participation in a ballet class affects the mental state of the practitioners within various time limits. Taking the described above into consideration, it seems correct to conduct the investigation in an ethnographical way, organizing a community of practitioners and observing the results of the practice.

The authors also mention that the purpose of research is to lighten up the phenomena from a new angle (Hannula et al, 2005, p.67). In this investigation I recognize the previous work in the field of incorporating somatic principles into ballet teaching, conducted by the researchers Salosaari and Manninen. However, I find the main interest and necessity in looking at the ballet class as a non-performative practice that is serving to a practitioner's development, as it gives a whole new meaning to the efforts given by any ballet student in a class.

Later in the text, Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén continue with explanations on the absence of particular common methods for research in arts. With this in mind, I recognize my responsibility and a special role as a researcher, with a need to articulate my thoughts clearly, use the correct vocabulary, and connect the theory with my practical component in a careful manner. A certain freedom of approach must still stay together with the clarity of the thoughts' articulation for accurate knowledge production:

There exists an abundance of research methods and approaches suitable for artistic research. The researcher's methodological task is to assess their usefulness. When necessary, it is possible and acceptable to develop one's own research method. In this case,

however, one must be particularly careful that the readers of the research can evaluate the usefulness of the developed and applied methods. Thus the research is also participating in the discussion about the methodology of artistic research and the development of this methodology. (Hannula et al, 2005, p.68)

As my research deals with the bodily experiences and the emotional subsequences they bring, it seems highly to be of a qualitative nature and I use methods of ethnographical observation. I observe what we learn from the experiences we obtain through doing a ballet class. Hannula, Suoranta, and Vaden say:

Learning from experiencing means what it says: the researcher listens, asks, and observes in order to learn to see the world in the customary way of the community, and lives the everyday life of the community she studies. (Hannula et al, 2005, p.92)

Therefore, while living through the experience with my community of practice, I aim to capture the evidence by keeping a journal, as well as the participants' writings of their thoughts and observations before, after, and sometimes during the sessions. I also make notes of the facts being revealed in the discussions and accidental talks regarding the practice. The newly obtained information is also being assessed through critical reflection and in comparison to the experiences from the past. With the ideas found via the data collection, I am trying to improve my guidance of the researched practice, by making corrections both to my teaching style and to the content of the taught materials.

Setting the boundaries of the research, I want to specify that during this research process I have been dealing with a particular group of students and, therefore, am focused on results of working with a diverse group, where the level of previous experience in ballet and the consistency of participation varies from a student to student. The initial idea of this project would be in research of long-term practitioners of ballet, who are ready to commit to the process. However, I want to keep it as an opportunity for the potential further research, while facing the need for being open and reactive to the circumstances, in which I have found different kinds of practitioners. Thus,

the conclusions in this research are made with a reference to working within a specific group.

To clarify the terms I am operating with, when I refer to a practitioner within this research, I mean an individual, who is pursuing the path of working with a physical practice, focusing on learning and spiritual investigation through the embodiment. In case of this research, I have in this role students of Theatre Academy, all of whom have a vast background in bodily practices, even if it is not exactly a ballet class.

I also find necessary to clarify to what I refer, when I refer to ballet. It seems important to take a look at the term from the position of marketing. The business approach to the issue at times helps a lot to realize audience expectations regarding encountering a concept. When I claim to teach a ballet class, what are the expectations? It seems as within the dance field, ballet often is seen in a juxtaposition to contemporary or modern dance. Let us take a look at a work on marketing in dance by Tammy de Jong:

Ballet is concerned with a more academic code or refined vocabulary and has become a tradition, a technique and an aesthetic all its own. This code, beginning its development as early as the 16th century, has been elaborated upon over the centuries and today is easily distinguished even within the varying schools of style. This refined movement vocabulary is recognizable to the untrained eye and is used repeatedly from company to company. Contributing also to the ballet is the lavish use of spectacle, props, scenery, and the continued use of plot or dramatic theme. (de Jong, 1991, pp.10-11)

Manninen, as a dance professional, goes more into detail and talks about the difference in between the terms "classical ballet" and "ballet". She describes how the concept of "classical ballet" appeared with the influence by Ninette de Valois in late 1930's. This concept first of all would refer to the style of several ballet performances, such as "Giselle", "Swan Lake", "The Sleeping Beauty", making up the "classic" repertoire, and also being widely spread around the world by touring Russian companies. However, in her work Manninen prefers to use "ballet" as covering a bigger concept (Manninen, 2004, pp.9-10).

When I refer to a ballet class in this work, I mean a classical ballet class, as I am not using any altered vocabulary. However, I also mean a type of a class that is carefully constructed in accordance with the needs of the particular participants. A traditional ballet class in a ballet company includes a broad variety of steps and technical elements that could not be included in this process due to their difficulty. For this process I found more importance in the clarity of the given tasks and possibilities for the practitioner to direct their attention to different aspects of movement. When I teach a ballet class, I mostly rely on Vaganova method of Russian ballet school, which I inherited through my teachers. However, as also mentioned by a professor of dance at DePaul University, Rory Foster, there is no precision in differentiation of teaching methods in ballet from each other, for teachers are rarely taught purely in one method (Foster, 2010, pp.20-21). Therefore, grounding in Russian classical ballet school, I also add the layers of information learned by me through the years of practice in contemporary dance and somatic work. Bringing the somatic lens, I aim to still stay with the classical vocabulary and observe the possibilities of somatic reflection on a formalized movement. The main goal of the research is an exploration of a ballet class as an inclusive continuous practice and finding out the benefits of this practice for the artistic expression and mental states of the practitioners. Keeping this focus, we are investigating and challenging a connection of the somatic and the expressive while being put into a ballet movement. When we talk about learning in this process, we as well give a possibility for a transferring the knowledge obtained in the class into other practices and spheres of life.

One of the aspects of this research I insist on and mention repeatedly is facilitation of the safe environment for practitioners. A classical ballet lesson might provoke discomfort, confusion, and even fear in practitioners with an unfortunate previous experience, and this might reveal itself in various ways. When the layer of negative stress is added to the practice, it is not anymore beneficial for learning, especially in the learning through the body (Hanna, 1988, pp.xii-xiii, 46-47).

Apart from the said above, it is worth mentioning that classical ballet is a very rich system and therefore, seems to be wonderful for borrowing ideas. With this I see a possibility to use a ballet class as a tool for diverse artistic practices

and the opportunities for that are only limited with the creativity of the practitioners.

2.3 Portrait of a practitioner. Martial arts influence and spirituality

The practicalities in the implementation of the actual applied part of my study shaped the idea about what kind of a practitioner I would like to see. Initially, I preferred to see with me people with an elaborate ballet past: advanced amateurs and dance professionals. As a pedagogue, I deeply enjoy working with the beginners as well, but within the framework of this research it would have meant missing flaws in the performance of movements and to subject an overload of thinking to a new practitioner when given too many tasks at a time. I had to recognize my inability to conduct my research and to give correct instructions at all times to prevent physical and mental trauma in beginners. Moreover, there were several moments in the relationship of long-term practitioner with the practice that I would like to take a closer look at. For example, especially in the case of the people who have not been in practice for a certain amount of time, the emotional states of aversion to some parts of it or, by contrast, the excitement of remembering.

From one angle, I was also interested in being in the position of such a "practitioner after a break" among the others. I tried to keep the practice in a non-strict and non-hierarchical way, where my guidance was just a needed tool for support, but never an instrument to add pressure. In this manner I was just in a different role in a class, but not in a position of power. Therefore, in some moments of the practice, especially when the most experienced participants attended, I could allow myself to give up on the continuous verbal guidance and exercise together with the others. I consider it a beneficial moment for it gave me a different perspective on my own future guidance, as well the fact that I could legitimately participate in the discussion and share my experiences from the role of participant. As Eeva Anttila mentions, practicing together is a great way for exercising empathy (Anttila, 2015), and I guess, sharing a similar background in practice gives it a very rich common ground.

However, this way of thinking also naturally led me to look for the perspectives from the other possible practices. The criteria of interest included the connection of the practice to embodiment, the long-term relationship in between the practitioner and the practice, and the purpose laying rather in the domains of Self and Expression. In this way, I found that martial arts and music are to match especially well with these criteria. Similarly to dance, and classical dance specifically, these practices require from the practitioner devotion, self-awareness, and recognition of certain forms. Another possible trait that unites these disciplines is the possibility of practicing alone and with the others, being in contact with other people and the surrounding world, and being by oneself. Changing the focus in this situation gives a great diversity to the experience.

In order to obtain a better understanding of experiences and pedagogical approaches in these practices, I found several persons, the practitioners, with whom the talks we had influenced my thinking. Surprisingly, these persons were also not too hard to find, due to their various connections to theatre and performative arts. The fact that these persons, coming from martial arts and music backgrounds reached out to the other disciplines also made me recognize that there are obvious connections on many levels in between the practices. Therefore, it is logical to suggest there are ways of practicing that we can borrow from each other, as well as exchange and investigate the influence of such an integration. In autumn 2018 I conducted several interviews with other practitioners that informed me in multiple ways. Among my interviewees were very experienced martial arts practitioner and art researcher Gabriele Goria, and theatre pedagogue Yuko Takeda, who is a long-time collaborator with a Japanese master Akira Hino. Through these interviews I was aiming to encounter the similarities and differences between the practitioners' relationship to the practice, their ideologies of discipline, creativity and of personal development, as well as pedagogical approaches. By seeing these things in their full brightness I would also eliminate my possible superficial assumptions of other practices. The excerpts from these interviews are introduced in the Appendix to this work. Talking with Gabriele and Yuko was a very valuable experience, also because both of them are pedagogues and in many ways share the pedagogical lens with me. In our talks we touched as

well the topic of switching in between different kinds of embodied practices and the meaning of such a switch for a practitioner's mind.

One of the differences in between the practices that was discovered early, a drastic one, is that classical dance is a highly gender-separate practice. Recognition of this characteristic helped to distinguish ballet from many other kinds of dance and once again to look soberly upon its specifics. When I talk about classical dance, I always have to be careful not to expand my thought on the dance in a general way. Generally, one could imagine a kind of dance that is not gender-specific, that could be performed by any human being in a relatively similar way, just as a piece of music could be played by a musician, or a movement sequence rendered by a martial art practitioner, despite the distinction of their gender. The canon of classical dance is highly specific in articulation of female and male vocabulary. This difference reaches its dramatic maximum in a classical ballet performance with exclusively all female artists demonstrating pointe technique, but even a traditional classroom practice would already discover many separating details as, for example, in posture, arm positions, preparation, allegro and so on.

Another crucial difference is the absence of a particular philosophical basis of practice for the practitioner. Both ballet and traditional martial arts were in the first place codified systems of movement with the main agenda elsewhere than in learning. Historically, ballet would be for the purpose of entertaining the audience and channelling political propoganda, as a powerful weapon of the people, in being able to afford the ownership of an opera theatre. For martial arts the agenda was and is in defeating an opponent. Classical ballet has always been a performance-oriented practice, and never seen as a means for the development of a practitioner in the aspects of learning and spiritual growth. Famous ballet dancers could be admired as master artists or "other-worldly" beings, however, that was rather due to their mastery in technique and acting, and in their presentation within a traditional ballet performance-distanced from the audience, specific costume dress, movement of high technicality, but also in a sexualized way-, than in their holistic education or bodily incorporated wisdom as could be the case for a martial art master. However, a recognized martial art practitioner appears in our minds in almost a caricature manner as an elderly sage, who, according to popular fables, is

able to win over any young and strong fighter due to his amazing experience acquired in the decades of training. Meanwhile, a ballet dancer is an ever-young commodity of royal theatre, serving for the entertainment of others and is easily disposable, often dying in poverty and having no social recognition as an elderly person. The level of devotion to the embodied practice and the mastery obtained in years of hard work in two might be equal, however, the agenda of both practices and practitioners differs dramatically. The traditional Asian martial arts has been grounded in philosophical and spiritual doctrines and has managed to unite the aspects of body and mind.

With this outlook to the popular ideas from the past, we could also soberly estimate that on the current level of social development in many countries, ballet has become a much more democratic art, as well as that ballet lessons are affordable now for much bigger audiences, of which only a small part become professional dancers. Therefore, we can speak here of bringing the wider well-educated audience to dance performances, but also of practitioners who see their own enjoyment in practicing. This gives a bigger range of the aims we can reach toward in a ballet class. Probably, alike to martial arts, we can see a constant non-linear growth in bodily practice, and ballet class can be one of the places for practicing.

For example, for a practitioner of traditional Asian martial arts, there is a notion of "do" or "tao", which generally can be translated as "way", but also refers to a specific doctrine or school. The one pursuing the "way" does not only commit to physical training, but at the same time stands on the path of learning and spiritual exploration. Peter Payne writes in "Martial arts : spiritual dimension":

It is important to realize that, at the deeper levels of the martial arts, the point of all these strategies is to develop an intuitive sense of the universal laws. The deepest aim is not simply to defeat opponents, but to come to the Way ("Do" or "Tao"), which is "the way the universe works"[...] The Way is a felt and intuited Way, which cannot accurately be expressed in words. It is an organic and transcendent Way, at the same time universal and profoundly intimate, of supreme practical use in life and in death. (Payne, 1994, p.29)

Describing the Way as "felt and intuited", and unarticulated by words, are not we sent to the corporeal experience, with its organic and practical nature? With this, a martial art practitioner is exercising their spirituality and understanding of existence through physical training, as an intensified experience of embodiment. Thus, there is a possibility for a martial arts practitioner to be wise through the body. In the Western outlook the wisdom and spirituality would be seen exclusively as a domain of mind, while body is predominantly occupied with the physical needs. The body and mind split is so heavily introduced in the Western thinking, that even nowadays it seems complicated to speak about the body without connotations to tearing it away from the cognition and spiritual life. For example, Richard Shusterman explains on his choice of the word "soma":

Because the term "body" is too often contrasted with mind and applied to insentient, lifeless things, while the term "flesh" has such negative associations in Christian culture (and evokes the merely fleshy dimension of embodiment), I use the term "soma" to designate the living, sensing, dynamic, perceptive, purposive body [...] (Shusterman, 2012, p.47)

Shusterman also provides many examples on spontaneity, control, and a balance in between them as the main ideas uniting the Western and Asian philosophies of movement discipline. This is another topic that does not appear often in dance education, however it might carry a special significance for formalized dance styles, as ballet. Asian martial arts seem to be aware on the flow of the movement, together with being present within it and reactive to the situation. As I mentioned before, that would be a helpful skill for agility in ballet.

However, returning to spirituality in practice, Klemola gives a beautiful example of a zen metaphor regarding reaching the spiritual through the embodied:

Under the pressure of our traditions, our ego-logical, everyday body has lost many of its experiential levels. Adapting to the body of "das Man", it had to accept certain modes of bodily experience and reject others. Movement, however, is the key to these corporeal gates. Movement can be the path to the gateless gate, which in the end is most difficult to

open. The gateless gate - a zen metaphor - refers here to the bodily experience where a person engaged in movement finally encounters the transcendent and experiences his relation to being. (Klemola, 1991, p.12)

With these thoughts, I do not come to recommendation of a particular spiritual or philosophical doctrine to connect to the dance practices, but rather want to indicate a presence of a place for it. The particular choice should be left for a practitioner. The possibilities seem to be wide and to be investigated.

2.4 A brief perspective on ballet history and actual events. Pedagogical concerns

With one of my recent experiences, I was reminded of how peculiar classical ballet is as a historical construct. I had an opportunity to watch a classical ballet performance in a cinema theatre, in the company of a friend who was outside of a professional dance culture, and specifically, classical ballet. When we discussed the impressions of the performance, I was given many questions on the form that I could answer from the position of the historical background of ballet, however, I realized that watching classical ballet as if taken out of its context is a very strong and perplexing experience. Professionals and ballet devoted audiences are taking for granted the movement and dressing codes, mannerisms, patterns and musical structures, while these features can be considered "exotic" in its very unique way. These moments normally slip away from a trained professional eye, which is ready to assess the performance from within the form and in a comparison to other classic performances, to other performers, even to the performance of the same dancers on a different date. The comparative possibility is a strong part of assessing the established pieces of classical performing arts.

With this I could also refer to my own experience of watching a ballet performance again after a long break. At one point in my career, I was involved in working with contemporary dance primarily and happened not to watch any classical performances in over two years. When I first watched the legendary "Shades" scene from La Bayadere performed by the ballet company of Mariinsky theatre after this time, I was struck with how weird it appeared to me. The movement of the dancers seemed so unnatural, artificial, and

sometimes unnecessary hustling. I could not deny the aesthetic power in it, but the athletic aspect stood out as well. The dancers performed excellently, without a significant trace of an effort, however, my dancing body reacted to the technical difficulty of the choreography. Moreover, I immediately and unintentionally started to assess the dancers' technique with the classical dance criteria, as this critical eye, trained in me through many teachers and many years of work was impossible to switch off. The more powerful this experience felt, as my professional vision was awakened very soon, there still was the first moment I saw ballet with new eyes. This brought in a lot of thoughts on the nature of the form.

Ballet, together with the intention of reaching out to the future, cannot abandon its roots and is widely recognized as a "museum" practice, a practice of preserving "classics" in its original form. Annually, there are multiple examples of restorations of old ballets close to the historical original in theatres all around the world, where intensive archive and research work is conducted in order to find the way to implement it. This is possible to explain with historical interest and romantic nostalgia of the past, both from specialists and a wider audience. An essayist and Professor of Performance Studies at New York University, Andre Lepecki, in his work "Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement" provides an example of choreography as a way of reconnecting with the past. He refers to the famous work "Orchesographie" by Thoinot Arbeau, dating back to the end of the 16th century. In "Orchesographie", a student, Capriol, and a teacher, Arbeau, are united in the process of writing a dance manual, that becomes a way of recalling "the companions of [...] youth" for the teacher, and a future possibility for the student to appeal to his master "once he is no longer among the living" (Lepecki, 2009, p.27). This is a great metaphor for the art of ballet, whose choreographic codification allows us to be nostalgic to the past, while presenting it in an embodied form of the living dance performance. The nostalgia arises a certain type of expectation from a ballet performance and this results in a set of problems in a ballet field.

First of all, as ballet being not only a museum practice, but also an alive and developing art form, it needs to keep up with its contemporary circumstances. Due to the growing versatility of repertoire in ballet companies, professional

dancers discover a need in a correspondingly versatile education. The problem of curriculum that prepares a dancer for performing in multiple styles, with each of them posing own specific requirements, has been present for a few decades now. In 2001 Salosaari noted:

The new working methods and mixed styles pose pressure on the flexibility and skill of the dance artist as well as the education, which prepares the contemporary ballet dancer to versatile and changing ballet environment. The traditional training, which concentrates more on refining technique than illuminating the art and its changing methods, has not expanded from reproduction to the needed skills of interpretation, improvisation and co-authorship. (Salosaari, 2001, p.17)

And the ballet world is still demonstrating a tangible rigidity to change, especially on a stage of education. Many dancers and dance educators still understand any change as a threat for the tradition they pursue. Melanie Bales notes in her article "Ballet for the post-Judson dancer. Evil stepsister or fairy godmother?":

As dance styles merge, collide, collage, hybridize, layer, and otherwise mix it up, it becomes essential for the choreographer and dancer, not only scholar, to recognize the cultural or individual contexts behind movement values. Some styles will die out, while others will prevail. Do we really want any form of dance, or any kind of training that is "style-free"? (Bales & Nettle-Fiol, 2008, p.78)

From this point of view it is possible to recognize that any dance form undergoes its own challenges as a part of a natural developmental process. The style is not universal and reflecting the time and the artistic decisions made according to the aesthetics and ideology of the time. Ballet is well known for adapting to the times, and that explains the success of the form for the last several centuries. As Salosaari mentions, "the [ballet] vocabulary has been able to develop and adjust to outside influences" (Salosaari, 2001, p.16). Due to this, we have whole generations of choreographers, who have been able to develop their own distinctive styles, based in classical ballet, starting from George Balanchine and coming to, for example, Alexander Ekman. With the whole ideology of denying classical ballet as a system in modern and contemporary dance in the first half of the 20th century, nowadays being

trained in ballet serves as a benefit for many contemporary dancers and artists of many performative genres.

But as we see the influence of the particular time period on the development of the art form, let us take a look at dance in the current political and cultural circumstances. The cultural trends in 2017-2018 are widely influenced by the third wave of feminism, and open up the issues of fighting harassment and violence to individuals and groups, inclusiveness, and power of the community. These themes were addressed to the dance world as well, and seriously challenged it. Finally, and, probably, for the first time, the mental and physical abuse of dancers was not discussed as a standard of the industry. A series of loud cases of accusations in mental abuse and sexual misconduct, followed by eventual dismissals of artistic directors and dancers in the most influential ballet companies in Finland, France, Norway and US, contributed to a public discussion on norms and ethics in dance. Articles by Kathleen McGuire for Dance Magazine and by Ellen O'Connell Whittet for BuzzFeed News were telling about damaging environments, injuries, burn-outs and depression as often neglected, but a very present part of dancers' everyday lives. All of these topics are not new, but still very relevant and it is truly great to witness the light being shed on the issues. However, the possible changes are coming slowly. Traditional power structures and hierarchy in the ballet world seem to be provoking for a violence in themselves.

While this is happening in a more harsh form in the professional field, amateur dancers are also not safe from abuse and negative treatment. For example, besides their own lack of confidence at times, they can be looked down upon by the dance professionals, which might be expressed in interactions of professional and amateur groups in dance schools, or even in the tangible differences of the teachers' approach to them. This creates an environment of many misconceptions and makes non-professional dancers feel incapable of artistic expression through dance, or even of being able to attend a dance class. Quite often I hear the stories of my colleagues' amateur students, or even directly from my own students, that they feel like they are in an "inappropriate" shape to enter a dance classroom. No matter where these ideas originate from, developing such thoughts are unacceptable in

contemporary world. Rory Foster writes in his work “Ballet Pedagogy: The Art of Teaching”, dated by 2010:

The majority of ballet teachers in America [...] are more likely teaching in a studio that has an eclectic assortment of body types and multiple levels of talent and ability. The class will mostly have students who are there for the recreational enjoyment of it, and perhaps just a few will have career aspirations in dance. (Foster, 2010, p.22)

I guess, this situation spreads not only in America, but worldwide, when actually there is a relatively small number of ballet teachers raising future professionals. However in my opinion, as teachers, our obligation is to give our best to all the students, despite their level and presence or lack of professional goals. We need to pursue the path of inclusiveness and help the students to find their own ways to learn and express themselves in dancing.

With the above said, I think it is legitimate to conclude that the implementation of the safe environment in a dance class takes a very important role. Only in an accepting atmosphere, with a great trust to the teacher and in the absence of any unnecessary stress, can a learner develop as a holistic being and discover their full potential.

2.5 Contemporary teaching and integration of techniques and philosophies. Somatics

In the search of what would be a teaching approach in ballet that is adequate to our time and in response to the needs of contemporary society, many ballet teachers seem to adapt teaching styles from more democratic contemporary dance as well as other bodily practices. Of course, the idea of interdisciplinary exchange is not new, and considering how easily the integration happens on the performative side and how ballet manages to soak in new movement vocabularies, it is natural to suggest that the ballet pedagogy is influenced in a similar manner.

The most powerful clash seems to happen in between ballet and contemporary dance. The actual division in between the two is next to impossible to define nowadays. Many, if not the majority of contemporary choreographers and dancers have a certain background in classical ballet, as well as the fact many

contemporary pieces are performed by classical ballet companies. Therefore, by the closest interaction the traditional strict and hierarchical pedagogical approach is challenged a lot by more dialogical, collaborative, and creative possibilities widely employed in communication between people working with contemporary vision. Due to this, the styles merge and we can now meet dance classes labeled as "contemporary ballet", that would borrow from both the forms in vocabulary and in teaching.

However, in the framework of this thesis, I would leave out an exploration of new choreographic forms, trusting in the classical ballet vocabulary, and channel the interest of a deeper investigation of its potential. In my opinion, it is interesting to see what an existing form that became a choreographic heritage has to offer for the dancers of modernity. Employing this idea, I integrate the more democratic and accepting pedagogical approaches that I have experienced working with contemporary dance and other bodily practices. Still, I would like to keep a critical look at the outcomes in order to decide on benefits and downsides of the practice. With this standpoint, I see the research of classical dance material possible from the aspects of, for example, physiology, somatics, and creative expression.

Another topic of interest for me in such a framework is the specific understanding of dynamics in classical ballet. With the way ballet tradition addresses the movement verbally, especially for practitioners who do not speak French, the formal language of classical ballet, the movement is not an action, but a construct carrying a particular name. What am I doing when I am doing a battment tendu? For an experienced dancer "battment tendu" becomes an action of itself. In a certain way, it is possible to do a battment tendu that does not carry a quality of battment tendu, but represents a visual image. I believe, many professionals are caught in this linguistic and conceptual trap.

Also, ballet movements are often explained in geometrical terms. For example, many ballet dancers have heard of a perfect arabesque as a shape that represents an equilateral triangle. However, it seems to be more comprehensible to claim that ballet poses are an approximation of geometrical shapes. This remark might have a serious impact as many ballet students led

by their usual perfectionism understand geometry literally and loosing content with their bodies, while often there is a physiological impossibility of following a strict shape. Moreover, while maintaining its clarity, the form in ballet is alive and moving in the space. With a careful exploration it is not hard to discover, how much movement actually happens even within a static moment.

But traditional ballet training can be not enough to notice these details. And here is the step when we need to turn to somatics. Bales notes:

In addition to the historical and cultural legacy (or baggage to some) that comes along with ballet, the dance experiences the technique on a highly personal level, a bodily or somatic one. [...] Each body will experience the particular shapes, steps, and rhythms of the ballet vocabulary in accordance with his or her physical makeup, training background, and even psychological relationship to the material. (Bales & Nettle-Fiol, 2008, pp.78-79)

In agreement with this, every dancer increases the bodily awareness through their practice. Even before they might be conceptually familiar with somatics, they can recognize some specific type of work they do with their bodily sensations. For example, in the article "My Body/Myself: Lessons From Dance Education", Susan Stinson tells about her experience of incorporating a somatic approach in teaching students, before she knew of somatics as a formed idea (Stinson, 2004, p.154). In this we can see that analyzing of movement experiences and bodily sensation are part of a natural process for a dancer, however the difference may lay in how conscious it is approached and how much dancer is able to learn from it.

The term "somatics" was suggested by Thomas Hanna, who while basing on the works of his teacher and colleague Hans Selye, criticized the way the human being is seen by traditional healthcare. In his iconic work "Somatics: re-awakening the mind's control of movement, flexibility, and health", Hanna writes:

What physiologists see from their externalized, third-person view is always a "body." What the individual sees from his or her internalized, first-person view is always a "soma." Soma is a Greek word that, from Hesiod onward, has meant "living body." (Hanna, 1988, p.20)

In this book Hanna points out how underestimated the potential of the internalized look was for resolving problems of health and ageing. He claims that by analyzing our physiological problems internally and corresponding conditioning, we can improve our health and get rid of the pain, as well as the reasons provoking it. He provides cases of his five patients, who by habitualizing a physiologically incorrect behavior had caused discomfort, pain and immobility to their bodies, but were subsequently able to overcome it with somatic exercises. Exercising through bodily awareness became a way to localize and address the problem, and give it the needed attention.

I guess, traditional ballet teaching often shares the problem of looking upon the body only externally and guides students merely based on the way their movements and their bodies must look like. However, teaching from the position of how the movement feels seem to be very beneficial and brings to dancers new ways of relating to the instructions and horizons of experience. I see a need in connecting the visual and proprioceptive aspects for an efficient ballet training.

Shusterman in "Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics" examines the essential skills of performance for an actor of Japanese No theatre, as they put in his work "Kakyo" by Zeami Motokiyo, the author of important critical writings on theatre and acting. The skills present mastering of directing attention into specific layers of consciousness and bodily awareness. These skills include "to be attentively conscious of the bodily action one performs, one's inner feeling or image as one performs it, the reaction of the audience, and also the image one's audience has of one performing that includes the appearance of how one looks from the back and other dimensions of one's appearance that one cannot logically see (say, the expression of one's eyes)." (Shusterman, 2012, p.211) As Shusterman notes, Zeami "was an esoteric thinker" (Shusterman, 2012, p.212), and did not reveal the secret of developing these skills, including one that appears to be the most problematic to acquire:

Ancient meditative traditions have developed a number of techniques for developing skill in self-monitoring and heightened, perspicacious, self-consciousness, some of which should have been known to Zeami from his close relationship to Zen Buddhism. Yet none

of those seem designed to address the most mysterious feat of self-consciousness that Zeami demands of the actor: seeing one's appearance from behind as one's audience sees it. (Shusterman, 2012, p.212)

Further in the text, Shusterman describes the possible strategies for obtaining that skill. First two are training with a system of mirrors, so one could see themselves from behind, and observing another performer from behind to become able to subsequently recreate their movement. These strategies "both rely on associative training that grounds an inference about one's postural appearance" (Shusterman, 2012, p.214). Then Shusterman says about the third idea, that he names "highly speculative and improbable", but worth mentioning:

If proprioceptive feelings of posture could generate, through mirror neuron systems, a corresponding visual input of that posture, then, in principle, someone very skilled in vivid proprioceptive awareness might be able to generate a visual image in his mind of how his posture would look not from a physical mirror or the empathetic mirror of looking at others but from his own proprioceptive self-observation of his posture or movement. (Shusterman, 2012, p.214)

I guess, expanding from just the specific reference to "seeing" oneself from behind, "someone very skilled in vivid proprioceptive awareness" could refer to a majority of dance students, who are highly trained in observing themselves in mirrors, as well as their peers performing in the class. They also often attend performances and have a habit of critically assessing dance videos and photographs. With a reference to the contemporary world we also can assume that dance students take a lot of pictures and videos of themselves to see their performance from aside and make corrections. They process incredible amounts of visual information and compare it to their own performance. All of this gives them a very advanced level of bodily and proprioceptive awareness and understanding of how they would look for an audience.

However, as my personal focus here is rather on the learning aspect, than on the aspect of performing for the audience, I would like to add that such a full understanding of ourselves as subjects and objects in space first of all helps to

understand our relations with the outside world, the world that is physically not included in our bodies, but affecting them and being in a constant dialogue with them.

Schusterman also writes about how the bodily experiences are seen as an ultimate background for consciousness by multiple philosophical systems of view including pragmatism, phenomenology, analytic philosophy and social theory (Schusterman, 2012, p.48). Deriving from these ideas, he notes:

The somatic habits and qualitative feelings of the background are both conditioned by the environments in which the soma is situated and from which it derives its energies and horizons of action. These environments are both physical and social. By bringing the somatic background in the foreground, we can also place that experience-structuring environmental background into clearer focus. (Schusterman, 2012, p.65)

From this point of view, a ballet class might be seen as an environment of intensified bodily and social experience at the same time, which gives a wide horizon for philosophical and educational exploration.

WORKSHOPS

3.1 General description and the setting

The practical component and the core of this work is a series of open workshops I guided throughout the years 2017-2018 at Theatre Academy of University of the Arts Helsinki. They were started off by myself and my course mate on the master programme in Dance Pedagogy, Helena Toivonen, in having ballet classes for the sake of body conditioning and rehabilitation of our previous skills in ballet. We did not follow any aim of restoration of these skills for performing a specific piece in the future, but were rather interested in coming back to the "roots" of our formal education in dance. Such a turn back was especially of worth as we had got a plethora of new ideas, concepts, and outlooks on dance through studying at the programme, and it seemed important for us to apply them and investigate their effects on what we knew from before. Both Helena and I also had spent several previous years working much closer to contemporary dance, rather than to classical dance, which obviously shaped our position towards approaching a ballet class from a different perspective. Early in November 2017, I started to guide the classes for us and, sometimes, for any of our course mates or friends who showed an interest in joining in. I intentionally chose the verb "guide" here, as my idea was in giving formal tasks as combinations or small choreography pieces and hints on performing them, but I wanted to keep classes overall as open to the personal exploration as possible. Considering the fact that our course mates are persons who are very well experienced in dance, no elaborate technical explanation or major corrections seemed needed, and this allowed me to take the class myself at the same time.

As the classes initially were an open project, I was happy to have as many participants as possible. However, it was not before April 2018, when I announced the classes as open for participation for all students of Theatre Academy. Previously we kept the classes irregularly, in dependence upon how many students of the pedagogical programmes wanted and could participate on a particular date, and on my personal schedule. Since April 2018 I launched the classes on the regular basis, twice per week, and announced them for students of the other programmes as well. The limitation was only the obligatory presence of previous experience in dance. The participation

system was flexible: with my biggest wish to keep consistency and to develop material step by step, it would have been incredibly hard to expect very busy students of Theatre Academy to participate in an out-of-curriculum activity regularly. However, several persons participated more often and Helena stayed with me practically every time. Having these practicalities shaped the way I was constructing the material for the classes and how I approached the guiding. I had to be careful with the expectations, but also open to the wonderful findings.

The material of the class would vary from time to time, depending on the participants, their needs, and their previous experiences. It implied a certain pedagogical challenge as every time I had to be prepared to alter things at place, and, sometimes, sacrifice my interests in the material planned beforehand, in order not to push very much on the attendants. At the same time, through all the doubts and confusion, this developed in me the trust to the process and the openness toward the results. Also, the group consisted mostly of female participants, but it could vary from time to time and I tried to approach ballet choreography of the given combinations as not gender-specific. From my point of view, and looking from the position of somatic work and dynamics in dance, the teaching should not be stuck to a particular historically constructed gender mannerism.

Without altering the traditional classical dance lesson's vocabulary, I wanted to bring in the advantage of some elements I drew a lot of inspiration from during my little previous work with Asian martial arts. I am not very experienced in them, however I have got the greatest pleasure out of participating in tai chi and aikido courses during my studies at Theatre Academy. Even after relatively short courses, concentration and precision from aikido and three-dimensionality of movement in tai chi, when body part moved in multiple planes, affected a lot my own patterns of movement. Practicing some movement that were quite different in quality from my previous experience in dance was highly refreshing and gave a new sense of a movement flow and dynamics, which, I believe, partly affected my ways of structuring dance combinations for classes. When I thought about the feeling of three-dimensionality of movement in tai chi, I came to the idea of bringing the touch to some of the exercises, to enhance the sensation of the body as

three-dimensional. Also the teaching styles and understanding of progress in these practices appeared to me as very inspirational. In the interviews of Gabriele Goria and Yuko Takeda in the Appendix of this work, there are many of the ideas that stroke me very deeply, as, for instance, the explanation on the concept of perfection in martial arts.

A great support in this journey was my teaching practice mentor Marina Tirkkonen. Marina is a person with a profound background in classical dance and also a talented choreographer and teacher, who also graduated from the pedagogical programme in the Theatre Academy of University of the Arts Helsinki in 2012. With her knowledge, rooted in Russian ballet tradition and a pedagogical vision that happened to be very close to mine, she has been an extremely helpful advisor. Marina appeared to be a ballet practitioner who deeply sees the essence of classical dance, but is also very open-minded and can approach pedagogy in an experimental way. Marina became a part of the process late in January 2018 and visited many of the classes. It was highly beneficial to me, as a person leading the class, to have another pedagogical look at my class structure and instruction style. Marina also introduced to me the idea of exercising with closed eyes in a ballet class, which provided an interesting possibility to explore the sensory experience of practicing even more deeply.

Marina also advised me on the idea of keeping the intensive period, the time where we could keep developing the material with the same practitioners intensively over several days in a row. The intensive period happened in June 2018, with the same three practitioners participating during all the days. This block of classes definitely gave a good perspective on what could be investigated more and marked possible ways for a further experimentation.

3.2 Contents and reflections on the practical experience

With all the experimental ideas and hopes to find a new angle to see the practice from, I still had to remember that I am dealing with a strong dance tradition and it must be respected. My own background as a dancer lays in a very strict traditional training based on Vaganova method and my pedagogical dynasty through many of my teachers comes back to Agrippina Vaganova

herself. The pedagogical approach and structure of a class developed by Vaganova has been, probably, one of the most important influences on the form of classical dance that we nowadays recognize as Russian school. Throughout the years this particular vision and artistic manner associated with this vision have developed into a tradition carrying a sacred status and that has a whole hierarchical structure around it. Obviously this system also proved to be efficient in producing excellent performers and teachers. Therefore, I did not see as wise to challenge the whole tradition completely, but I wanted to see a possibility to stay within it with a softer and more individual pedagogical approach. I wanted to find what could be beneficial for the practitioners on a personal level, even if they are not to become performers on a professional stage; a way to make them more familiar with the rules, but knowing how to apply them. With this I want to underline that considering that no one of us as practitioners was in a professional ballet shape, we needed to know how to care about our health. I wanted to give the practitioners the understanding of the form, which would be correct in the terms of the school, but keeping in mind that they had to alter it according to their physical abilities at that moment. Also I used several ideas to help us to deal with the difficulties, such as changing the supporting leg, concentrating on the breathing, slowing the tempo, which was especially important in the case of having the least experienced participants in the class.

At first sight, especially for advanced dancers, who could be interested in faster tempos and bigger a range and variety of movement, this could appear as a simplification of the class. However the actual work would happen on a deeper level. A slower tempo and the somatic exercises actually help to notice much more of what is happening in the body and in the way of how one controls it. As this type of work is rarely adopted in a traditional ballet class, this could fill into a serious gap of the understanding of movement origin for some of the practitioners. This work also gave the chance to trace the connection of the movement to emotional and mental processes. As many of us, as dancers, have a habitual need "to move on" to the next movement or a wish to do something very active already, after only a small amount of slow pace concentrated work, the more surprising that was to hear from many of the participants that they would love to try an even slower tempo with even fewer hints from me, to be able to go into a more detailed work.

Therefore, my main idea of the class was staying in the boundaries of a classical lesson, but adopting it to the needs of practitioners and incorporating a somatic approach to the movement. The basic structure of the class typically looked like this:

1. Warm up and tuning in.
2. Barre exercises.
3. Exercises in the center.
4. Tours.
5. Preparations to jumps and jumps.

Every class naturally started with the participants arriving to the space. The spaces were several dance classrooms in the Theatre Academy, normally the bigger rooms with the bars, mirrors, and professional dance floors. By our talks during the arriving to the space, I could recognize the current mood of participants, ask them questions, and we would approximately decide how we wanted to start.

A part of the class became also the ways of me collecting the data for my research. Every time we would write before starting the class and after the class finished. Several times I tried giving writing tasks in the breaks between the sections of exercise, but that seemed to interrupt the natural order of the class and could take more time than would be acceptable so as not for the participants to cool down. As such a situation could have provoked an injury, I stayed with the idea of writing just in the beginning and in the end of the class. Thus, the first step in the class was us writing on two or three questions given by me, that could already help with estimating our current moods and bodily conditions.

Following warming up was conducted in different ways, sometimes through the requests of the participants. Through the process of warming up I already aimed at sending the thinking into somatic a perspective. One of the tasks we used most of times was from a sitting position on the floor, where we would start with warming up our hands with the friction of one hand to the other and go through self-massaging the whole body from the top of the head to the toes.

This helped to "tune-in" into the mode of carefully listening to the body, recognize its shape and borders, reveal the discomforts, and, finally, acknowledge the mood with which each of us entered the practice. I often invited the practitioners to specifically give attention to the tensed places, so they could massage them more thoroughly, or, more importantly, to become acknowledged of them and treat correspondingly during the following exercises. I would separately underline that the participants needed to think about aspects of their physical and mental condition as conditions for that particular day. It could make them notice the difference in between how they felt during different practice times and eliminate the unsettling wish "to fix" something immediately, if in the case of any sort of discomfort. The rest part of the warm-up section could vary from time to time and was mostly aimed at speeding up the heart rate and becoming tangibly warm until first sweating. It could involve a simple cardio-intensive activity as rolling on the floor, jogging, hopping or jumping, or a structured improvisation task, also focused in the positioning of the body in the space.

Sometimes the warming up part could naturally lead to a short warming up combination with two hands on the bar. Before standing next to the bar, I would have a moment to send the participants attention to the placement of their feet on the floor, the knee-toes and heels-sit bone connections, their center of gravity, and the alignment. I would repeat hints on those points during the class afterwards, but this was the first moment to check these orientations in the standing position. Another idea to check the position of the hands laying on the bar, wrist hanging down and the hands are in the parallel to the shoulders. Here I would also give several somatic hints, for example, imagining standing under a waterfall at the moment when the water falls down your chest and shoulders, so that they would relax and spread down, as with an exhale.

The barre section typically consisted of these exercises:

1. Battement tendu.
2. Battement tendu jeté.
3. Rond de jambe par terre.
4. Battement fondu.

5. Adagio.

6. Grand battement jeté.

The elimination of a plié sequence in the beginning of the class here was intentional. As we can know, physiologically the plié movement involves work of the muscles of the whole leg, and even after quite intensive warming up, the participants could not be prepared enough for such a movement. My opinion on this is also based on the private advice of a physiotherapist and previous ideas from the field. For example, the pedagogical decision of famous Russian ballet dancer and pedagogue Nikolai Legat was to get rid of as many excessive plié movements as possible, especially from the fourth position (Lopuhov, 1972, p.169). A pedagogue and specialist in dance conditioning Eric Franklin writes:

Consider eliminating grand pliés from a warm-up, because they are not specific to most dance styles and they place great strain on the knees. Eliminating them from a class warm-up may raise a few eyebrows, but it will also lengthen some dancers' careers by discouraging a movement that can lead to injury. (Franklin, 2004, p.11)

The main concern here is the health of the knee joint, and naturally, I wanted to be very attentive to any health issues of the participants. As a pedagogue I always keep the health of the students in perspective and the safety of the exercises comes first before the other aims.

Therefore, the first movement at the bar after the warm-up was battement tendu, and it followed with battement tendu jeté. Through these movements, taking in consideration their qualities, it was natural to explore the alignment, center of gravity and weight shifts, try to feel grounded, in a tight connection to the floor, while also growing up and spreading into the space.

Understanding that a relative simplicity and modest speed of the movement opens up an abyss of details, my role here was at times to not give too many hints, or, at least, ask the participants to pick up only one or two at a time. This situation remained similar with the other movements as well, but was more present with these two very basic ones. During the classes with more advanced participants, we tried as well to perform these movements while keeping the eyes closed and trying to concentrate on the sensations. This

opened up a completely new large potential for investigation. Shutting out the vision helped to concentrate on sensations, but also gave a different proprioceptive experience. Obviously, the first complication of this task was remaining in the balance, which would become even harder in combinations with changing the supporting leg. After coming back to the exercising with the eyes open, the sensation of the balance would alter and, in some manner, become more complete.

Rond de jambe par terre sequence continued the idea of the connection of the surface of the sole of the feet to the floor, alignment and weight shift, but also introduced more space for the work with the upper body. The combination typically included port de bras, which gave a bigger potential for choreographic interpretation, and I would not give too much of a structure as the arm passed through the fixed positions in a particular way. Instead I just hinted main functional points, such as not to hide the eyes behind the arm, if we used the mirror, and to remember the arm as a carcass supporting the body and pushing against the air. We tried rond de jambe par terre combinations with the closed eyes as well.

With battement tendu, battement tendu jeté and rond de jambe par terre combinations we sometimes used touch. That was organized in a form of separating into two groups, where the first group of participants would give hints to the persons in the second group by touching them while the latter were performing a combination. After that the group would exchange roles. The touch here was meant to be a sensory input to pay attention to different body parts and carry the hints to alignment, elongation, or to possible alterations of the position of a body part in space. The touching was exercised only by more advanced groups, with more of a consistency during the intensive period. This exercise usually evoked a lot of confusion, ideas, and insights.

Battement fondu is recognized as a movement with a very characteristic elastic "melting" quality and complicated coordination pattern. Moreover, with multiple repetitions, it is quite heavy for the supporting leg. With this in mind, I tried to keep battement fondu combinations relatively short, with

changes of the supporting leg, mixing battement fondu with different movements of a similar quality.

Here I need to notice that while in a more advanced group, we would follow the traditional order of the barre movements, with the exception of a plié sequence, according to the traditional Vaganova method-based vision. That would as well include battement frappé, rond de jambe en l'air, petit battement. As those movements required more previous experience in ballet training and more detailed explanation, I often had to leave them out, or, for example, use only one of them. With these movements implementations of the whole combination with eyes closed was challenging for more experienced practitioners too, but we always used the option of shutting down the vision once in a while. In a class with people of less experience, we would move on straight to the adagio combination. For the adagio combination I usually had a plié, stretching and port de bras sequence with one of the legs laying on the bar. In this combination I would open up the possibility for different music interpretations, as it also felt natural to give to the participants their personally needed amount of time for port de bras and stretching, according to their individual physiological needs.

Grand battement jeté normally was a simple combination to get more concentrated on the sensations in the implementation of the movement. Relatively often we just did a combination of the swing movements, to feel the movement of the leg as initiated from the hip joint.

The further part of the class depended completely on the participants. As more advanced participants wanted to do something more active after standing next to the bar, we often would go straight to pirouettes from the diagonal. With a less experienced group we more often did adagio and battement tendu combinations in the center.

In its time, the complicity of allegro part depended on the previous parts of the class and, once and again, participants. Tours part could include a variety of different diagonals, different numbers and types from time to time: a préparation-pirouette diagonal, tour piqué, chaînés, tour dégagé. Before starting with the jumps we would normally do some physiotherapeutic

exercises such as, for example, several demi plié movements with the toes curled up. This was supposed to give an additional preparation to our feet for a strong physical load of jumping. Most of the exercises were borrowed from Eric Franklin's book "Conditioning for dance: training for peak performance in all dance forms".

With the most advanced participants, and especially during the intensive period, we were trying to tackle the notion of improvisation. Improvisation within the framework of classical ballet lesson is naturally a complicated topic, as we are talking about an improvisation that is still happening within quite a rigid form and structure. In my opinion, it was slightly easier to choose the allegro part of the class as more suitable for the improvisation. Allegro seemed to have more possibilities for interpretation in dancing as it was a lively part that did not require to be constantly concentrated on the sensory events. In allegro we could develop the material we explored in the previous parts of the class in a more danceable manner.

In the end of the class we always had several combinations opening more potential for dancing. Most often those would be the big jumps combinations. I have to admit that I see a potential to try more open dance combinations in the end of the class or even during the class, however within this research project I wanted to stay humble and with the clarity of a traditional ballet class. My main idea here is to research the potential to approach a traditional class in another manner ideologically, but remaining in the same structure and overall logic as a traditional class. At this moment, when we have the temptation of an enormous scope of possibilities for the integration of material from different practices or the melting of different techniques, I would not like to think that we can easily just give up on the system that has been developing in a particular way for centuries. Such a gesture would mean that we refuse the wisdom of the previous generations of ballet practitioners, and, of course, even despite the lack of the physiological knowledge we have access to nowadays, they were looking for the best in optimization of their efforts during the class as well. We made big steps in how we approach the physical training now and, first of all, in individualization of the approach, however, we always must think of what kind of the logic stays behind a whimsy shape of what we see in a ballet class. Adopting this mindset, I still

wanted to be careful about the tradition and cherish the traditional part of my education, but just try to see a different potential in it and, especially, from the perspective of what can be done on the pedagogical side.

Every class finished in a finely rondo manner with the writing. The writing in the end of the class was aimed at encouraging the participants to share their freshly obtained impressions and thoughts, and also to express difficulties and confusions. This writing material has become a great resource of feedback for me and helped to reshape the class practices every time. As I did not have the same participants every time, just as well as the same participants would not come in the same bodily and mental condition every time, this reshaping certainly was not a straight way to improve our practice immediately, but could inform me and make me more aware of the participants' experience.

Most often in the end we would also have a brief discussion on our experiences, concerns, and wishes toward our practice. These discussions were another source of feedback and allowed me to understand the atmosphere in the group. At times, the talk could continue with a common lunch and that worked as a perfect informal way of carrying on with the contemplations on our classes.

Another task that I saw as important for myself as a pedagogue was, indeed, the facilitation of a safe and encouraging environment for the classes. To a certain extent that was easier as many of the participants knew each other and were used to practice in a classroom together. On the other hand, many newcomers could feel alienated exactly by the reason that anyone else in the room was familiar to the others. Therefore, in the case of newcomers I every time organized a short introduction discussion. That did not take away too much time of the class, but could seriously help the comfort level of the participants. Starting from the talks in the very beginning, I was trying to conduct the working atmosphere that, however, would be rather informal and supportive of expression, questions, and discussion. As one of the questions for my investigation was to understand how a common practice of a dance class could affect us, I was interested in any comments of the participants. I see as well as a positive thing that we would often laugh on our experiences and in discussions, which for me indicated that we are open in expressing

opinions, confusions, and revelations. I was also very grateful to the participants every time there was an expressed criticism and we could discover and decide together that some of the exercises are confusing, or that something does not work.

One more factor of the influence to the atmosphere in the class was having visitors. I had my mentor, Marina Tirkkonen, and my supervisor, Heli Kauppila, visiting the classes, and they would usually remain aside watching my teaching and participate in discussions. I always explained to the practitioners that my mentors are coming to watch my teaching and not the quality of their performance, which meant to assure them that they did not have any judgemental look on them. The participants would normally agree, however, the presence of other people in the class still could affect them in one way or another. Usually, it could add some stiffness to the discussion part and to the easy flow of the conversation, but on the other hand with the more active and "danceable" part of the class it could feel nice to have an "audience" to watch. Through this it was interesting to notice the balance in between being "surveilled" and the wish to perform for the audience and be seen.

RESULTS

4.1 Data analysis and findings

The data that I obtained during the implementation of the practical part of this work were collected in forms of the writing that we did at every class, my own journal entries, and taped interviews. A part of discussions, as informal talks on the topics related to the class, remained unrecorded, but influenced the practice and the way of thinking about it.

One of the outstanding findings is that absolutely most of the participants write about the body and mind always separating them, even though they were often working in unity. In the feedback it comes with the phrases like "warming up body and mind", "my body and mind were more open", "this was a good class to assess body-mind relationship". I did not specifically stress the separating of the two in the instructions, and it is interesting that participants paid a lot of attention to the relation of the two as separate entities. Here I need to acknowledge the fact that body and mind split is a strong construct in many cultures. I could also conclude that, on a mundane level and in perspective of our practice, these many remarks were often provoked with us practicing in a calm and accepting atmosphere, and therefore, in the possible rest of the mind, while many of the exercises could introduce physical challenges.

The more distinctive within such a context was the effect of being perplexed with a bodily task on the emotional state. In this situation, my request of being attentive and caring to ourselves met personal judgements of the participants on their performance. Many of the participants, disregarding of the experience level, often became judgemental to the quality of their performance. Through some pieces of feedback it became visible that it happened to the participants in the case of many instructions given by me at the same time, which I later corrected. This appeared to me as a pedagogical revelation, because previously my teaching style would include me giving multiple directions as I assumed that participants individually picked up the most relevant tasks for them out of the cloud of my suggestions and ignore the rest of them. This was my style of guidance especially in connection to giving classes to dance professionals. However, in case of these workshops and, naturally, as they implied a lot of

somatic work it was enough for practitioners to stick to one-two tasks that they would like to explore during a dance combination, or maybe a whole class. "Less is more" became a very fruitful approach, as was later possible to see from the feedback as well. Later I found a similar result in Manninen's investigation of somatic work within a ballet class (Manninen, 2014, pp.22-23, 30).

Another big emerging topic was the body as a container for experience. In the feedback it appears with the phrases such as, "body tries to recall", "I would like to: [...]recognize my body", and "made me assess my background in folk dance- maybe later I'll let them talk between each other". Classical dance classes were coming into the context of the previous experience and the interaction with practices from the past. In this case it was good to see how, even through different tools, bodily learning becomes a long-term practice.

From here I would like to move to the technical findings in the process. One of the main struggles for participants was the balance in between sensing and dynamics. Partly, this is an obvious outcome, as sending the focus of concentration to both simultaneously is a very difficult task. It seemed to rhyme with the issues of precisely analyzed movement and automatic movement coming in a flow in the martial arts. Also sometimes it went together with problems in remembering the combination, especially for the newcomers. It comes out with the phrases like "difficult/can't concentrate", "ballet is not familiar, I had difficulties to calm down during the exercises", "created anxiety about where to go and what to do", "required self-confidence to be able to close [the] eyes". However, I normally went with the combinations of a simple structure, so the participants who came several times managed to grasp it and could easily switch to different themes in the work.

The thing pointed out by more experienced practitioners was the aspect of coordinating the movements of the head and hands in port de bras with the closed eyes. The well learned movement pattern in classical ballet requires following the palm of the hand or finger tips, however, in an absence of the visual input that feels confusing.

Also, on the way to the improvisation exercises, together with my mentors we came to the conclusion that improvisation is easier to approach from the continuous slow tempo exercises as multiple port de bras and, for example, a long demi plie combination. Dropping out grand plie from the beginning of the class for the safety reasons, I did not realize the possibility for making a long demi plie combination, involving coordination of the head and arms and the work with the breathing. Such a combination would be a helpful decision also for scanning through the tensions and checking many aspects of the posture. I guess, this type of tasks contributes to a "feeling of dance" the most, especially for beginners. The "feeling of dance" was a notion that appeared many times in the discussions with the participants, however, was complicated to define or contextualize. With a certain analysis, it seems to be connected to successful self-expression, or the state of "flow", which is determined with a specific type of the brain activity:

It reduces the activation of the neural network which is responsible for logical deduction and detailed observation. This makes room for the creative neural network which also has an important role in generating a relaxed state of mind. (Poikonen, 2017)

Therefore, it might be possible to think that the "feeling of dance" appeals to performing intuitively and exists in the domain of the project of Self.

Through the work with diverse groups and as I tried different variations of the class, the best outcomes seem to happen when the topic of somatics came more smoothly and evenly throughout the class. At times there were hectic classes, when, for example, with more advanced practitioners we rushed into doing more and using more technique, partly excited about the athletic aspects. I believe, these classes were also needed and brought a lot of enjoyment, however, on the long run the deeper learning happened from more consistent development of a few ideas through the class and when I specifically channeled the attention into some direction.

Another problem that we have found, and that was expressed in many discussions, is a difficulty of getting rid of the demands. Many participants felt the atmosphere as easy and accepting, giving the opportunity for the exploration, however, at some moment they found themselves caught into

judging on their performance and unsatisfied with it. Here arose the question, is it possible to get rid of the judgement within the classic vocabulary? We all have seen examples of what is recognized as a ballet excellence and it is easy to fall into comparison. One of the possible answers I found in the guidance of tai chi classes by Gabriele Goria, and I try to translate this thought in my own teaching: one aims for one's own perfection for today. This approach enhances the learning and gives it so much needed lens of a personal journey. I guess, in the end this idea translated into my instructions and participants' approaches. In the feedback it comes with these phrases: "I managed not to force my body to do things that would hurt it, but managed still to challenge myself"; "[found] points to correct, but let it go and didn't get stuck with it", "[I was] careful and caring". It is rewarding to notice how the somatic work in the barre part and the more dynamic parts of the class in the middle and allegro were, however, in a balance: "Nice to do some jumps after barre to have other kind of energy for myself as well. Nice concentration and thoughts inside my body a lot in barre".

4.2 Perspectives of future research

With these findings, I also see many ways for continuing the investigation of ballet class as a practice in future. From the somatic perspective it seems beneficial to go into much more detailed work with the touch, with the closed eyes, and with the images. Each of these directions in combination with a traditional classical lesson of a strict form can be fruitful for research. Another big idea, that unquestionably has been already explored, is an improvisation within a balletic form. This idea still has a big potential, being also inquired from a non-performative perspective of a practice. Finding freedom within a rigid form and specific rules seems to be a serious philosophical issue. For more experienced practitioners a question of potential is also "letting go", as we could notice from the data. The grade of how much we can rely on "automatizm" of our well rehearsed movement to still be able to find a dance and the connection to the surrounding world is unclear and definitely can be investigated more, perhaps, in the collaboration of dancers, pedagogues, and physiologists.

Researching the practice of a ballet class from the somatic angle would also, indeed, mean giving a serious dose of attention to the anatomical and

physiological aspects of dancing. Within this work I was more concentrated on the potential of a ballet class as of a practice and, therefore, discuss more the nature of it and its spiritual and pedagogical impacts on the practitioners, however, in future I would like to approach this practice from the side of health and ageing.

There are also social aspects to taking ballet classes. From the perspective of sharing the classical dance lesson together, it is possible to research the participants as a community of practice. What is that makes people keep coming to a ballet class and practice together? What is the nostalgia of ballet classes that the professionals who are abandoning their careers have? One of the possible answers to these questions is just a matter of facilitation. The people come simply because they have the opportunity to come. While we, as teachers, have so many pedagogical concerns, we sometimes forget about the fact that already opening an opportunity to come and share a practice means a lot and leaves a serious impact on people. On the other hand, the environment we facilitate is the direct reason for the participants to make the decision of coming to the practice or not. Even a single unfortunate experience can turn their interest away. With this, I come to conclusion that teaching in smaller groups is often more beneficial, as gives more chance for building interpersonal connections between the participants, which adds the layer of trust in sharing and, therefore, provides a deeper learning experience through exchanging the experience.

While in this paper I investigate the work with a particular non-homogenous group of practitioners, I see a potential for a further research of a ballet class within the groups united by particular characteristics, and therefore with clearer outcomes. One of such groups, that I consider of a specific interest, is the professional dancers after retirement. They are very experienced and have an ability to work with complicated material. At the same time, they are in a vulnerable situation, reconsidering and reshaping their connection to the practice, carrying a lot of emotional experience and the need to find a suitable way for a physical exercise after years of hard work. In this sense, it might be interesting and beneficial to channel their efforts into somatic work and approaching a ballet class as a tool for a personal development.

Also, I hope the look from the pedagogical standpoint of this work is useful for all ballet pedagogues, as a reminder that in a ballet class we can work far beyond teaching a perfect technique. Approaching students, we need to remember they are not only dancers, but as well complex and unique personalities.

4.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to say that bodily practices should be inclusive and accessible for wider communities. As a ballet practitioner and pedagogue, I would like to believe that ballet classes, just like any other type of bodily practice, can contribute to people's health and mental stability, as well as enhance the abilities to learn. Through this lens, even considering the complications of the formalized practice, it is possible to open the doors of a ballet class to more people, who do not need to be concerned with the reserved image of the practice and its orientation on performing and pleasing audiences, but instead, can find new joy and agenda in such a training.

Also, I believe the path of a continuous practice brings very special outcomes, both in the results and in the connection in between the practice and practitioner. As I envision the development through approaching the practice somatically, somatics seem to be incredibly useful in being incorporated into dance practices and, while even a short introduction might be very beneficial for a practitioner, the long-term learning gives more stable and lasting results. As Hanna writes:

You must be patient-looking not for a "quick fix" on your body, but for a genuine, lasting change in your comfort, range of movement, posture, and general functioning. Most importantly, you must be positive in your expectations, envisaging and aiming for the improvement you know your somatic system is capable of. (Hanna, 2004, p.97)

When I refer to something as to a practice, I imply the long-term relation in between the person and the activity. In this manner, the way the person passes with it becomes a continued learning process. Shusterman puts it nicely:

Learning is never over because there is not only room for further refinements and extensions of the acquired skill, but also because we often lapse into bad habits of performance or face new conditions of the self (such as injury or ageing) and new environments that require relearning or revision or adjust our habits of spontaneous performance. (Shusterman, 2012, p.205)

With these words, I see unlimited horizons for learning through the practice for everyone who pursues the path of it. Practice is a vehicle and only the practitioners themselves decide what they are actually practicing in one form, or another.

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APPENDIX

1. Interview with Gabriele Goria, 31.08.2018.

Gabriele Goria is an actor, theatre pedagogue, teacher in kung fu and thai chi, as well as a long-time meditation practitioner. Currently he is doing his doctoral research at the Performing Arts Research Centre at Theatre Academy of University of the Arts Helsinki. In 2016 I participated in course of thai chi he taught for Master Programme in Dance Pedagogy and this experience influenced a lot my thinking on bodily practices and my teaching style.

On technique in theatre and kung fu:

[...] I would like to make a comparison with the world of theatre. [...] When I did the theatre academy in Italy, it was a school very old-fashioned, where we did this old kind of making theatre, where the director would tell you how to say the sentences, how to move, how to do, so you were basically a sort of skillful puppet that had to really mold into the images of the director. After theatre academy, after many years I met other approaches, which were much more free, where I was asked to either improvise, or to develop my own character and I realized that I was not able to, because I was too dependent on the director. And it took me many years of experiments and other methods to discard this system. This I have to compare to martial arts because in my first five years when I did ju tai jutsu, that was very free. There were few techniques that you have to learn, but most of this was just about improvising. And that felt very nice, because I was somehow wildly expressing myself, but at some point frustrating, because I felt there was a limit of skills that I would never achieve, because I was lacking of the technique to do some things. And once I started practicing kung fu, which is tremendous discipline, there is a very precise technique, I noticed, I can do a split, all of a sudden, and these special jumps I did not know how to do before, because nobody explained me how to put the feet and how to move. So, I realized the importance of the technique. However, at some point, I got frustrated, because I felt- yes, but then if I meet an opponent and I am so locked into the structure, am I actually able to defend myself, or to improvise? I think, because before kung fu I did something else, I still had this wilderness in me, but still it all of a sudden was tremendously disciplined, and I think, looking backwards, that these two

aspects are equally important. The technique has one advantage and one disadvantage: the advantage is that if it is a clever technique, if it is a wise technique, it takes into account the bodily structure and humans more or less are similar. And in kung fu it is not just about the body, but there is a lot about the mind. So the technique becomes a method, becomes a path at some point. You make the step beyond just a physical structure, and you realize that there is so much that you can teach to your body, if you are able to step forward with your mind. Starting from the very basic of dealing with pain or discomfort, because an exercise is very demanding and physically exhausting, to more sophisticated ways of employing the mind. Believing that you can is the first step to make something happen, that otherwise would be never there to do. And I am not now telling yet in that properly spiritual discourse, just staying grounded to earth.

Now I just gave my black belt exam of Shaolin, after 25 years, and for the first time, my master told me: "Now- fight". So, after 25 years of practicing forms, even in pairs, but still choreographed movements, all of a sudden I had an opponent and there was nothing agreed, so we had to fight. What occurred was that, it was a lot of fun, and my body knew what to do. So, I did not have to think about fighting, it was just physically letting the body to act according to the movement which are happening around me. That was a sort of a small enlightenment, because that shows that technique when it is really interiorized after many years of practice becomes a part of you in a way. And even though it started as something externally imposed, if you have learned to love it, then it is something which is yours. And then in this case, the case of the fight, you never do the technique that have been taught to you, but you do something which comes out of you and yet without that technique, most likely, you would not be able to have that result. So, to me, it is a blurred thing. I am not against the technique, I am not against the discipline, I am not against this other idea of wild improvisation and wild exploration, I think they are two aspects of the same coin and that the limit of the technique is that it is externally imposed, it is an embodied philosophy, and so this specific style, this specific technique, has a certain specific thought behind. It is not the universal truth and it is only one way of doing things. So you learn well the technique, you might miss an entire other universe somewhere else, so that is the limit of the technique, in my opinion. If the technique is wrong, you ruin a person. And now just talking about that. But then, if we go to the layer of the

pedagogy, so how to teach the technique, or how to teach an educational method, the discourse is different, because the technique, again, is a tool, but then it is up really to the person or the context where this tool is provided to create a situation where there is always space for making this thing your own thing, for loving it.

On perfection:

Perfection is a very important word, it has been debated in many ways. First of all, my personal insight is that perfectionism is the greatest obstacle towards perfection. And often, even in martial arts, there are some ways of teaching that enhance this perfectionism. And this is really dangerous, because then you will always be dissatisfied, and you will always judge others, and you will always be judged. And this is just the opposite of what a path of self-development should be. [...]

On the criteria of perfection in martial arts:

[...] in this tradition of martial arts, it is these criteria to judge if something perfect or not, there should be this combination: beauty and efficacy. So, if it works, but it is ugly, so there is lack of coordination, lack of harmony, then it is violent. There is no the art part. If it is beautiful, but it does not work, again, there is no the martial part of it. It should be beautiful and it should work. What does beautiful mean? Again, it is not beauty connected to some aesthetic criteria, but in martial arts there is a set of, let us say, wise insights that has been transmitted to very short poems, which are very basic things, like, for example, that the body should be treated as a whole, so that if you move a little finger, you should be aware of what happens in your little toe. There should be coordination in between upper body and lower body, between inner body and outer reality. So the criteria for beauty in martial arts are really rooted into the laws of nature. They are not disconnected from them. That is beauty. So, when there is this union, when actually the human is acting as a bridge between the inner world, which is the Sky, the universe inside, and the outer world, the Earth. So, you are this bridge. It is not just a philosophical, metaphorical image, it really works concretely, in this embodied beauty. So when, for example, in tai chi, the shoulders and the waist, elbows and knees, hands and feet, they should all work together. Otherwise, you lose your

awareness somewhere, you are not fully in the body. There is a holistic view and that is, maybe, the most important criteria for beauty and perfection. [...] But I was also thinking, still coming back to this idea of perfection, that in martial arts, perfection is not something you have to achieve, it is something you have to discover, because it is there, it is part of you because you are part of nature and nature is perfect and you are perfect as well, so it is more of the idea of removing away all the layers which avoid you to be in touch with perfection. So, all these other criteria, like coordination, upper body[...] these are just, let us say, side effects of being connected with this perfection. When you are perfect in that way, when you are connected, when you are integrated and aware, all of this will happen. And you cannot escape it. [...]

2. Interview with Yuko Takeda, 11.09.2018.

Yuko Takeda is an actor, musician, and theatre pedagogue. She has been trained in Suzuki Method and Viewpoints, and is a long-time collaborator with master of Japanese martial arts Akira Hino. I have had an honor to have Yuko as my course mate from the theatre side of Master Programme in Pedagogy at TeaK.

On Suzuki Method, Viewpoints and Hino Method as her practices, Hino method in particular:

[...] But the third one, Hino method, has been developed by a martial artist, Akira Hino, and he is a master in what he does. Maybe I can talk about how I find this method particularly useful in my life, in my work life and how I came to that conclusion. I am an actor. I have always studied theatre since I was eighteen, so it has been a long journey, almost twenty years now. And, of course, my primary interest is acting and theatre, I want to perform in front of the audience, it has always been my motive. But in terms of my training and my practice, I have always thought about why, why do I practice this. Of course, to improve my acting skills, but what is it really? Is it just to laugh at command and cry at command? Is that all there is to acting? I did not think it was all. Acting is much more than "be sad" or "be happy", or whatever. It was not just about expressing things to me. It was something much bigger and deeper, and more meaningful, so I have been trying to find the ultimate reason why I do acting, and my conclusion for now is that I want to connect to

people the way that I cannot in daily life. And acting allows me to connect to, for example, that kind of humanity that is not always readily available. When you go through your daily life you hardly ever cry like a baby or laugh like a child. We are kind of, in a middle range and try not to go to the extremes. And acting for so long, allows me to go to the extremes in a safe environment. And so, I can kind of connect to the depths of humanity. So there are all kinds of layers in acting and then when I act in front of people, somehow something happens between me and the audience. It is a very special connection. It is very strong, and it is very deep, and it is very intimate too. It is something different from, like, a romantic relationship, it is something, for me, much better, because it is real, it happens here and now, in that space and there, right there, in front of me, and you feel it and they feel it. So, that is what I always want in my life. So, in order to achieve that kind of connection, or the depth of humanity, I looked for methods that could give me the opportunity to practice that kind of thing. And so, Suzuki and Viewpoints, they are the methods I learned in US, when I was studying theatre in US and I just like them because of the aesthetics. Suzuki method is very strict and formalistic, and you need a precision and vigor, and high mental concentration to get even through the practice session in Suzuki. Viewpoints is complete opposite. It is a very non-hierarchical practice and there is no right or wrong. It is all about opening up your sensitivity to the space and time and really improves your perception, how you sense, how you see things in the world. Both methods have one thing in common, which is that it really trains the core part of a performer, which is a sensibility, that sensitivity of a performer. So it is not just like a weight training when you build the muscles, but it is more like a sensitivity, a world view almost, how you taste the world, how you see the world, how you listen to the world, how you touch the world. All those things and then some more. It challenges you to practice that kind of thing. And so I liked it for that reason. It is not so much about the aesthetics now, at first I was really drawn to the aesthetics of the methods, but now when I practice I always go deeper than that and I have been practicing those methods since 2006, it has been twelve years. With the Hino method, I met Akira Hino in 2010-2011. At first, it was totally out of curiosity, I was just looking through YouTube videos about aikido and those things, just to kill time. And then, somehow his video showed up and I looked at his video and usually martial art demonstrations are "showy". With him it looked like a very precise

research. Of course, it is amazing, this big guy collapses with one finger, but somehow the way he did it made me feel "oh, he is maybe different than all the other martial artist that I see on YouTube". And so, I researched the theme, and he happens to be giving lessons in my home town, so "oh, I should go". And so I went, and that was the very first time and it was a shock, because I was imagining the martial arts practice to be like this [exaggerated fighting sounds], everybody is sweating, but no! The room was quiet, first of all. And everybody was touching each other in the way that was very serious and focused. And they were trying it over and over again and failing over and over again, of what he demonstrated. So, do this and he touches something and then you move, and then you collapse to the floor. I was watching it like, "what is happening?" and he would come to me and said "this is what we are doing", he would explain, and then he said: "As you can see, people think so much in their heads, and they are not really feeling their body. Their body is blocked by their thought. The head is a fool, the body is a genius". Wow. And I was just blown away. And I thought, okay, maybe this is something I should look into more. Because it is a very fundamental level of looking at things. It is like, "what is the body?" What is this? What does it do? And how sensitive can it be, really? And so, I started to go to his lessons after that. I could not do anything, I felt so much of a failure, because I just cannot do what he does. It was very frustrating, and I remember being very scared to go there, because I knew that I could not do anything. But somehow, I went, I kept going, and then what happened was that he found that I could speak English, and he was getting lots of emails about workshops. So, he asked me one day, could you translate one of the emails for me? I said "sure" and so I was translating, and that was the beginning of my translating job for him.

On translating Hino's workshops in Europe, the work with dancers:

So I did that a few times. And those workshops were for dancers, and I was really curious about how we would teach dancers the martial arts technique, basically? And, I think, the first one I went to in Sweden, Cullberg Ballet. And I was really really impressed because the things that he teaches are the same, he does not change his teaching, but somehow it was so resonating with dancers and they are blown away, and they are confused, but very excited at the same time, and they are exhausted, because they are using the things they have never used before in their practice, like the muscles and the thinking... so

they are completely exhausted, but it was amazing to see that they are really trying and this was something new to them. And now I am just thinking... this is really important, because he provides a completely different perspective into a dance world, at least, and what does it mean to express with your body, what does it mean to improvise, physically. And how to listen so completely, so you do not think what to do next, you just, kind of, go with the flow, truly go with the other people's movement, how does that feel and what does that mean. I hear dancers talk about that all the time, improvisation, contact improv and so on... So Akira Hino demonstrated with the dancers, who do contact improv and he said: "Do you think this is contact improv?" They said "yes", and so he does it with them and their face changes, like in a complete shock- I have never felt like that in the contact improv, because it was so precise and so... like a totally different sensation for them and it is really hard to describe in words. But as dancers they could definitely feel it, feel the difference. And, of course, they would ask: "How do you do that?" and then he starts his teaching... And, of course, as his student, I have been practicing on my own, but I think, the greatest thing about Hino method is not so much about the practice method itself, but his thinking behind it. It is like, how to think about your own body. So it is a kind of re-education of your thought, because really the consciousness governs that how we move and sometimes it is a huge block, to many of us. And so, how to re-educate this part of ourselves, so that the body starts to move "naturally". And, you know, I do not know how it feels yet, because I have been practicing, but I still cannot do anything, but that is not the point in this method, Hino method is not about achieving a certain level. You keep deepening your sensitivity, again the sensitivity, so that you start to realize how much of this is blocking and you start to realize how big of an influence it has. And how stupid that is, once you go away. It is like, everything becomes so easy. But somehow we just are trapped in that... So, he talks about it a lot, and really listen to each other, listen to other people and you truly connect. He uses the word "connect" a lot and, I think, I got this obsession with connection from him. Because I remember, when he touched me as a part of a demonstration, it was like... I felt connection and it was not in my head, it was just there. So, it is not a concept "connection", it is a real connection. So, my practice is about how to be actually practicing a connection, a real connection, not in my head, but in the actual practice. So Hino method allows me to do that. [...] It gives access to so many things, if you

can practice it. So that is how I look at practices and methods, it is not so much about the aesthetics, or it does not even matter if it is coming from theatre field or martial arts field, but I always look at the philosophies behind the methods. And how their philosophies can be integrated into mine [...]

3. Interview with Helena Toivonen, 6.11.2018.

Helena Toivonen is a dancer and dance pedagogue. Helena has been my course mate at Master Programme in Dance Pedagogy in TeaK, and as well a collaborator in many projects. Helena has been with me during all the practical part of this research project. Discussions with her were a big part of the process.

Olga Potapova : What do you think made you come to the ballet class now [...], what do you think was your intention to come[...] again, for yourself?

Helena Toivonen : Well, yeah, maybe it was for me... to go back to something that I have been doing a lot at some point. [...] Or when the ballet has been the most important thing. That is, maybe, the thing that I am referring to many times, and, of course, after that I have done ballet, but not in that way and not so much. [...] Maybe, yeah, going back somewhere that has been... or has not been there for a long time for me. And also, maybe, the fact that I knew that this is an easy environment to do that. I do not know if I would search a place or use so much energy and time for finding that kind... Of course, there are possibilities to do ballet. And maybe also I have been sometimes in these morning lessons which are organized by Tansille Ry, but this is also a really different kind of environment to go to after years of not doing ballet. So, it is kind of jumping into the cold water.

O.P.: Could you expand a little bit on the qualities of environment?

H.T.: Well, of course, this is I know you, you know me, and maybe the other participants as well. That fact and the material and going at the pace of going. It is really easier. And, of course, it is depending on the people, if it is just you and me, we can go a bit faster, but then, again, we are not going too fast and it is also easy to say if we are going too fast, or if I need to ask something.

Everything is really easy. That has been also maybe much to do with that we know each other and we are such a small group, comparing to if there are twenty people and I do not know any of them... and I am just jumping around, or coming after them. And the fact that people who are training there do maybe a bit more ballet, or some other thing, or they have consistency. Well, it depends on the teacher there as well. Some of them are showing everything and they are doing a bit more slowly, and there they who are just saying things and then put the music on- aah, I do not remember any of those movements!

O.P.: Are you saying with that, that to go somewhere for a ballet class, without a safe environment, would be a stressful experience?

H.T.: Yes, of course. Whatever you are going to do and if... and the fact that you know the environment and the place... yeah, then it is more safe or more comfortable.

O.P.: Behind a save setting, still what was the idea of returning to that? Did you have the idea of returning to sensing through movement articulated in a balletic way? Or was it to explore the, maybe, altered physical possibilities? [...] Because, I think, we talked about it before, that there is some sort of nostalgia behind these things. And I often try to reach to the core of what this nostalgia is, why something that is also possibly traumatic for you, because ballet practice is often traumatic, especially if it comes as a sort of bad memory from the childhood... why it is still so tickling as a nostalgic experience?

H.T.: Of course, there is a lot of that kind of things and not just those bad memories, and, of course, after a lot of time they maybe fade a bit. And it is more some sense... feeling of some type of dancing, just the feeling of dancing at the end, I think. And it is a certain type of feeling very light and flowing.

O.P.: I like how you say about dancing, because for me, I would say it is maybe the most problematic issue. And especially, what comes from the theories, theories that are talking about balletic movement not as a dance, or very problematic to understand in dance measures. Because it is very structured and then you need to be really inside of it to know how to dance with it as well.

For me, somehow, psychologically, or even through my training, it has never been a problem, and I am excited to see that for you as well it never failed to be the actual dancing. Or maybe, sometimes it did, but [...]

H.T.: Yes, and probably there are a lot of those movements and times when you are not dancing in that way, but just thinking maybe of some form. But somehow, I think, still at least most of people who are doing that, get the sensation of dancing at some point. Otherwise, how do you want to...

O.P.: ... motivate yourself to continue?

H.T.: Yes! If you do not get the feeling of... But then, there are, of course, sports, where you train a specific movement without getting a feeling of dancing.

[...]

O.P.: So, how was that for you to experience that sort of a class, which is somatic, but stays within the framework... and when I give you all the multidirectional notions of that you are supposed to feel something from the inside, but also feel how you are in space, what did you think? Have you had experience with that?

[...]

H.T.: Well, for me the way how we started many times, going into yourself, that and also the fact that we are moving before going into the bar is a really good thing. If I would come just from the door and into the bar it is somehow stiff. So, it is easier just to move, at all. And when we continued the work through the bar, it is good to start with it, it is easier to keep doing that. And the eyes closed [...], and through that go there, it was really nice most of the time and helping me to relax and to let go, in a way, as well. But then, especially the first times when we did, there came the question about the head [showing the head-hand connection in port de bras]- why am I doing this with my head, if I am not looking? So, what is the motivation for the head? Because it so goes with the eyes that I am turning my head. [...] And sometimes maybe especially the hand is a question mark as well, many times, why is that so important that I am not dropping the elbow? When I am eyes closed and I am

so concentrated for these things and there is always the elbow, why is this so important?

O.P.: I think, with these small things, I think about the functionality of that. Of course, it comes very much from the tradition, of how I was taught myself. Because for me, the functionality of that is, for example, "pressing against the air", so it kind of helps you to keep the balance. Or to have this extension to the air, so it helps your proprioception, to say. My teachers would not use the word "proprioception", but what comes from there is the idea, that it is supposed to help you to keep the orientation in the space and also somehow find this semi-nonexistent help for your carcass. So, for me, it comes from the functionality, but maybe part of that is semi-imaginary. And you, basically, do not know how to deal with it in the classical ballet framework. There are definitely a lot of things that are semi-imaginary, you cannot really explain why it should be so.

H.T.: And maybe, somehow... well, when we did not do that in the bar, we just did that in the beginning and then we went to the bar. Sometimes when we did that, they were maybe not so much connected. But when we continued the eyes closed working, then there were more of the continuous things, from the beginning to the bar. At least, from my experience.

O.P.: The work with sensations...

H.T.: Yes. Because it so easily comes with the history and it is so, so in the body, even though you have not been training for years. There is so much of memories there, so it is so easily goes there. So sometimes there were no connection with the [somatic] beginning and the bar. Because I was like, yeah, yeah, and then- to the bar.

O.P.: Yes, and then it does not work this way.

H.T.: Yes, different worlds that are in my body and mind. They are kind of- this is the contemporary and this is the ballet, when there is no obvious reminder and doing it all the time.

O.P.: Do you think, it would be easier to approach in the same way, if you did not have your experience?

H.T.: Yes, that is what I have been thinking sometimes, how would I feel if I would not have this history in my body. I do not know. But in a way, when we were talking after some class that people are demanding so much from themselves. So I was thinking at that point, yeah, I [am like that], because I know so many things that are not... or I could do this more, and this part more there, and think about this. Because I have the idea of what I should do, and I know that I am not doing those things at all, that is why I feel so bad and I am demanding so much. But in a way, there were also some of those, who have not done ballet and they seem demanding as well. So maybe some of these things are not related much to the history.

O.P.: Continuing with the eyes closed and self-massage session topics, do you remember, how was that to work with the touch? We did not work too much with the touch, but do you think it continues the perspective?

H.T.: Yes, it goes with the eyes-closed [exercises]. and working with the feeling, sensing things, rather than just doing the forms. In a way, what I am supposed to do, but in a nice way, it puts the attention there. Other person feels nicer than me, my own thought. [laughs] But then, it always when you work like that, with touching, it is a thing as well that you just need to do and do, repeat many times, as a toucher as well, so that you are faster to react and you know that you are not in the way to make the combination. [...] And, in a way, maybe doing really simple things as well, just standing, lifting a leg very slowly. Then you have the time to feel everything, and the toucher just gives the touch, maybe you can think, few parts that you can touch. But it is always the same with working like that, eyes closed, and maybe not even the eyes closed, just giving the touch.

[...]

O.P.: How would you say this [touch] informs you? In what way would it be potentially helpful?

H.T.: For me, when you have the information, in you already, then the touch brings it... But, again, the thing that I was wondering, that if I would not know anything about dance, what kind of feeling would the touch give me then? It is different, but, of course, you can give the information without saying it out loud, but just by doing something. And it depends on the touch, what kind of information it gives. If it is "move it there", or lengthening, or the elbow there... [laughs]
[...]

O.P.: Do you think the experience of this kind of classes changed your perspective on how you can make a ballet class? For example, would you change some view on the memories that you have had? At least, for me there was one thing of an obvious finding, as a practitioner, is that I started to take ballet music easier. For a while, it was for me a traumatic experience to listen to it, and then after we started to do more of this [classes], I started to approach it as something nice, in the sense that it did not carry any negative connotations for me anymore. Do you think you started to approach something differently?

H.T.: Maybe not in the way that I can put my finger on it [...] ...but answering the previous question, about the previous experiences. I have had really nice ballet experiences as well, years ago already, after the most active ballet period, I have had different kinds of really nice classes and teachers, different ways to approach ballet, for example, through breathing, breathing through every movement. I do not remember if I had a ballet class with the eyes closed, maybe it was one main way to do now. But it was in a way a personal journey, how do I approach practicing ballet and how do I approach myself. And why am I doing, what do I get out of it. And also, maybe, putting question marks, not questioning, but putting question marks. [...] One goal for myself was to find the enjoyment from that, like what are those things that are positive things and how I can find them during the class.
[...]

O.P.: What do you think about the dynamics in the most active parts [of the class]? How did you feel about the allegro part, coming from the concentrated work at the bar, when you try to sense, but then you just continue to the

middle and see that now there is this space? Because I think, we did not experiment too much, we did some jumps with the closed eyes [...]

H.T.: Well, I remember I was thinking that I would like to continue the eyes closed work sometimes, especially when we did with Mari [Kopponen] a lot of that and, probably, did some pirouettes with the eyes closed as well, we kind of joked about it. But it would be nice to continue that as well. Maybe, not the pirouettes, but something a bit easier in the middle.

O.P.: Yeah, at least, jumps we did try with...

H.T.: Yeah, so you do not have the bar, but you can [be] more in the space. [...]

O.P.: What do you think about the improvisation parts that we tried?

H.T.: Yes, it is nice to do a ballet impro, and maybe I would like to do even more. But then I remember, I had somehow some difficulties with that and maybe... we had some steps, did not we?

O.P.: We did, yeah.

H.T.: Yeah. There was something, even though they were really simple, the steps, but still, I did not get them into my body in the way that I could just concentrate and they would go automatically. [...] And then, of course, there is a possibility to do then just whatever you want, but my head is just like: "Yeah, the steps! Agrh!". So, in a way, even if I am used to do a lot of impro and it can go wherever, if something happens to the original task, then, yes, it happens. but, maybe, there is still something in that ballet class frame, that keeps it more [stiff] with the task. [...] And, maybe, just repeating the impro [more often] would allow me to do it more easily. [...]

O.P.: [...] for example, when I wake up and think- "okay, today I have a possibility to come to this class", what are thinking of that class? Is it because

I want to feel through the body, or to check my emotional state? Do you think, you had some sort of motivation like that?

H.T.: I do not know if I had. Maybe I was just going through that journey, checking how that feels today. I think, I had same kind of things many days. Maybe, just a question mark, how does it go today, how do I feel today with these things. I do not know the answer yet, it might be different ways every time.

O.P.: That is somehow great to hear.

H.T.: Yeah. Maybe I do not know, if I have any... or do I have any? Or what are my expectations, if I go to some class? I have not thought in this, maybe, analyzing way, but that is a good question! For the future, as well. To scan through, what are my expectations. And, of course, it affects how I feel during the class and after the class. If I have totally opposite expectations, it might be really different, the whole experience. So, yeah, it is a good question.

[...]

O.P.: How did it feel to be with different groups every time?

H.T.: Interesting. [...] Maybe, if it would have been the same group, or the same way... If I would be the only one who has done something and the other are like, the first time ever, if it would be like that the whole time, maybe it would have been boring at some point. But, I think, it was really interesting to have all these kinds of different people and groups. It is really nice to have people, who have not done anything, to ask questions about some things that [have become] so obvious for yourself, that you take them as obvious things. In that way teaching beginners in anything is good to bring things here, in front of your eyes. Different people asking different kinds of questions and doing differently, and, of course, when you see someone doing something, there is also a lot of information that you can just [...] get. And then also working with people who have done a lot already and all of the touching kind of things, which we could not do with the beginners, probably. Or maybe it would be interesting as well! I am always saying something and then- ooh, but you can always try! [laughs] [...] And then we, just doing things, just for the sake of doing, and without thinking of anything, where to put your hand or

thought or... just do. One way to get the feeling of dancing is not to think so much. And maybe there are automatic things that you do not need to think anymore, and then you do not think anything at all, and just, yeah, go. So, it is nice to have these different kinds of...

O.P.: Yeah, extremes of where you can go.

H.T.: Yeah.

[...]

H.T.: In general, it was nice to have this opportunity to do this personal journey. Of course, you could continue it wherever, but now there is a thought, that it would be nice to have the experience to, maybe, go the eyes closed through the whole class and then the question what that would mean. Because you need in some way, for safety reasons, the visual, not to bump into people and walls. But, yeah, the question of what would that mean and how you could go with that until the end of the class, all of the way. And what are the other ways that you could use. And then I remember thinking, why do the people go to the ballet class? And, especially with the beginners, what gets them to go there, what is the thing they are expecting. And then, there is always the question how would you meet the expectations and what are the optimal things to do... to get the nice feeling out of the whole thing. Having still "this is ballet" and meeting the expectations and the limits of people. But that is, again, an eternal question. With every different kind of dance class or dance group. Basic things. [laughs]

O.P.: Now, and especially after this talk, I think that is a big pedagogical question, why people come to do something. And it is, basically, just because you do invite, just because there is an opportunity for that. [...] People just come because you facilitate that. So, generally it makes sense to be a pedagogue and do something. [laughs]

H.T.: Yeah.

O.P.: Just because you have something to offer.

H.T.: Yeah, and especially with the classes that, for example, I had with the adult groups. They speak so differently from the young groups. Like, we come here because we want to forget about the everyday life and have some experiences and enjoy moving and doing this together.

[...]