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## IT'S ABOUT PEOPLE 2024: IN SERVICE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND DIGNITY

*The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of Europe's Sciences  
and Arts Leaders and Scholars*

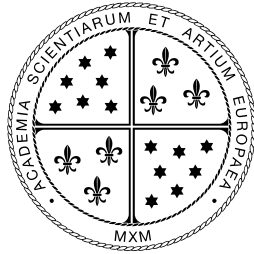


Proceedings book with peer review  
**DANCE BETWEEN TRADITION  
AND INNOVATION**

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ALMA MATER

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— PRESS —

**The 12th Annual Conference of Europe`s Sciences and Arts Leaders and Scholars  
IT`S ABOUT PEOPLE 2024: IN SERVICE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND DIGNITY**

**PROCEEDINGS BOOK WITH PEER REVIEW – DANCE BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION**

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ALMA MATER  
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The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of Europe's Sciences and Arts Leaders and Scholars

**IT'S ABOUT PEOPLE 2024:  
In Service of Sustainability and Dignity**  
Proceedings book with peer review  
Dance between Tradition and Innovation

Editor: Prof Dr Svebor Sečak

Maribor, 8–13 March 2024



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## PREFACE

This year, at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference *It's About People* the Alma Mater Europaea Dance Academy organised its own dance section for the fifth time. The title of the section was *Dance between Tradition and Innovation*. We had two sessions of the dance section and thus two moderators, myself and my colleague, assistant professor Rosana Hribar, the head of the Contemporary department at our Academy.

In the first part of the dance section, we further explored dance and digital technology, a topic we addressed in previous conferences held in 2021 and 2022 and expanded our investigation to AI as well as dance and dance education between tradition and innovation. In the second part we discussed contemporary dance and flamenco and thus researched the relationship between dance as art and culture.

We opened the session with our distinguished guest and invited speaker Dr Alice Siu, Senior Research Scholar at Stanford University, Associate Director of Stanford's Deliberative Democracy Lab who gave us a presentation together with Mrs. Tatjana Christelbauer, founder and Director of the Agency for Cultural Diplomacy in Vienna on the topic: *Coppélia's Book: Deliberation, Truth, Trust & Hope*. This presentation endeavoured to explore the intricate relationship between tradition and innovation in the domain of dance arts, bolstered by the transformative capabilities of AI tools, with a focus on ethical considerations.

The next speaker was Dr Simona Somacescu from the National University of Theatre and Cinematographic Art, Bucharest, Romania with her presentation *The Ballet Performance Between Tradition and Innovation* which you can read further on in this proceedings book. She analysed both the specific structure of classical ballets, the socio-cultural context of the 19th century, which represented the peak of their creation, as well as their universal value that crossed the centuries until now, even in the conditions of the augmentation of the choreographic vision with effects specific to modern technology multimedia.

The following speaker was Dr Simona Noja-Nebyla with a presentation titled *Classical Ballet as a System of Systems* which you can also find in this proceedings book. Drawing upon her extensive experience as a ballerina, pedagogue, ballet school director, and researcher, she delved into the intricate interplay between tradition and innovation within the realm of ballet education against the backdrop of the 21st century underscoring the urgency of redefining the purpose of ballet education.

The two last speakers in the first session were our current MA student Ana Germ who presented her paper titled *The Challenges of Ballet Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* printed in this book and our former MA student Jerneja Omahen Razpotnik who presented her text titled *Important Educational Aspects in Teaching and Learning Dance Art*. The paper aimed to shed light on the role of dance in education, how and why it is placed in the system in the way we witness it in modern times and what the role of dance art is in the general education of children and adolescents.

In the second session of the dance section papers on contemporary dance and Flamenco were presented by several authors. The first presentation was given by our former BA student Johanna Rebecca Greiner titled *Forming an Individual Path with Traces of Contemporary Dance* which is printed in this proceedings book, just as is the presentation of the second speaker Juan Carlos Lerida, PhD candidate from the Institut del teatre Barcelona titled *Flamenco Dance Improvisation: An Expanded Perspective*. Two more speakers presented their work: Ana Pandur, lecturer at the Alma Mater Europaea Dance Academy gave us an insight into *The Evolution of the Universal Body of Flamenco in a Room of One's Own* and María de los Ángeles Cenizo Salvago, a dance pedagogue who presented her paper titled *Contemporaneity in Flamenco Dance*.

As the editor of this edition, I have selected five papers to be published for this year's proceedings book.



Professor Svebor Sečak, PhD,  
Dean of the Alma Mater Europaea Dance Academy



# THE CHALLENGES OF BALLET EDUCATION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Ana Germ, MA student

Alma Mater Europaea University, Dance Academy, Slovenia

## ABSTRACT

*While concepts like holism, inclusion, integration, awareness and reflection are long known concepts and approaches of teachers in the contemporary dance field, ballet education seems to still struggle with the traditional – autocratic, teacher-centered ways of teaching. Although various teachers use individual methods, the command style after Muska Mosston`s and Sara Ashworth`s (2002) taxonomy seems to still be mostly used among ballet teachers, especially in former socialist countries which according to their socialist and conservative ideology have long been following traditional forms and narrative repertoires. Nowadays, ballet companies around the globe require versatile ballet dancers with the capacities to adapt to different styles and working methods (improvisation, creative tasks, co-authorship). Accordingly, ballet teachers need to develop and apply teaching methods that prepare the dancer in the ballet classroom for the evolving modes of performance and choreographic practices in the field. Additionally, ballet's negative reputation of dance teachers who (subconsciously) physically or mentally damaged their students by following the teaching patterns and practices of their former teachers needs to be transformed through specific and reflective pedagogical, physiological and psychological knowledge for teaching and learning in the 21st century. Contemporary times require continuous learning abilities (an independent learner) and request contemporary teaching-learning approaches where the focus turns to the *how* instead of *what* the students will learn. The teacher therefore has to use different modes, approaches and teaching styles to create situations in the class for different kinds of learners, personalities and interests (Theory of Multiple Intelligences).*

**Keywords:** ballet education, ballet teachers, teaching methods, traditional, contemporary teaching-learning approaches

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Experiencing on my own how ballet teaching can bear about great love of dance and at the same time be psycho-physically abusive, I always found that the decision to teach ballet holds huge responsibilities. Teaching ballet is namely far more than demonstrating dance technique, correcting mistakes and preparing students to perform choreographies in accordance with the classical ballet heritage<sup>1</sup>. Teaching ballet means to possess practical as well as theoretical knowledge of the field, to be devoted to the art of ballet as well as to the needs of the students; it means constant learning, creating and problem-solving; it means planning, designing and analysing curriculums, achievements of students as reflecting on your own work; it means to strive for progress in ballet education as in a wider educational frame.

Throughout my ballet education, I came across various ballet teachers with more or less pedagogical and anatomical (kinesiological) knowledge, but the acquisition of technique was always in the foreground as the authoritarian, teacher-centered principles in class. Later, during my studies of modern and contemporary dance, I came across concepts like holism, inclusion, integration, awareness and reflection. Additional dance techniques, somatic practices and especially alternative attitudes, approaches and methods in dance education have broaden my horizon significantly. As I started to teach ballet in a music school in Slovenia by myself, I have tried to implement acquired concepts from the contemporary dance field into my teaching approaches, methods and styles, but I felt often discouraged or uncomfortable being confronted with colleagues which loyally defend traditional ways of teaching. Additional curses of safe technique practices, the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) curses including the Progressive Ballet Technique (PBT) and nevertheless the now being acquired Master's degree (dance pedagogy) program of Alma Mater Europaea in Slovenia have given me confidence, new insights and hope for future generations of ballet teachers to become more open-minded, versatile and educated in methodological approaches, psychology and kinesiology of dance. I believe that the most important acknowledgment in a teacher's career is the awareness that one will never know enough or everything and that the field is constantly changing and reinventing itself – so should we and so we need to facilitate and guide our pupils – to become independent learners.

I will focus therefore in this paper on the *how* instead of *what* the students should learn in a ballet classroom and what are accordingly the responsibilities of a ballet teacher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – which methods, approaches and teaching styles should a teacher use to create situations in the class for different kinds of learners, always on the background of acquiring knowledge and skills in a psycho-physically safe manner.

I will first introduce ballet's negative reputation and identify the traps of traditional – autocratic, teacher-centered ways of teaching. I will meet the *midway model* proposed by Jacqueline Smith-Autard (2002) which integrates the traditional teaching approach and process-oriented education and therefore presents currently the best model for dance education intertwining professional and educational aspects. I will further introduce general approaches to dance pedagogy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as proposed by Anu Sööt and Ele Viskus (2014) who identified seven main themes and teaching methods in contemporary dance pedagogy.

In the third chapter, I will briefly introduce the benefits of the use of various teaching styles (Spectrum of Teaching Styles – STS) after Muska Mosston and Sara Ashworth (2002) through Elizabeth Gibbons who applied these styles to teaching dance in 2007 and Paula Salosaari (2001) who proposed ways to integrate styles (mainly divergent production) already in the ballet studio.

In the fourth chapter, I will identify fields of responsibilities of a ballet teacher in 21<sup>st</sup> century among which I would like to emphasize injury prevention, safe methodology and safe practice according to Julia Buckroyd (2000, 2004), Justin Howse (2000) and further authors which we discussed in *Safe Practice Seminar* by Dr Svebor Sečak (2022). And to finally meet a comprehensive art of dance curriculum, I will refer once again to Smith-Autard (2002) who accordingly to David Best (1992), Graham McFee (1992, 2004) and David Carr (1999) advocates that dance education should lead to artistic, aesthetic and cultural education and encompass a wider educational frame.

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1 In accordance with ballet's conventions and traditions, classical ballet's vocabulary and technique.

## 2 GENERAL APPROACHES IN BALLET EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

### 2.1. Outdated methods

Classical ballet with its strong tradition depends on tight adherence to rules and is still very present in vocational ballet schools with the aim to produce professional ballet dancers regardless of the ways in which this is being achieved and regardless of the fact that ballet has long evolved past the tradition implementing modern and contemporary tendencies in the field. Although various teachers use individual methods, the *command style* after Mosston's and Ashworth's (2002) taxonomy seems to still be mostly used in former socialist countries which according to their regime and conservative ideology preserved traditional forms and repertoires over the conceptual modernization of the West (Kunst in Kowal 2017, 280). In contemporary times, however, ballet became a transnational art with traditional as well as innovative repertoires – nineteenth-century classics are performed along with contemporary choreographers' works (Sečák 2020). Companies around the globe therefore require versatile (ballet) dancers with the capacities to adapt to different styles and working methods (Salossari 2001, 15).

On the other hand, the non-autocratic, dialogical approach (Socratic method) encourages the student to think for themselves, become self-analytic, develop self-awareness, self-discipline, self-reflection, creativity and become responsible for themselves (Brownhill, ed. Jarvis 2002; Buckroyd 2000). The concern with this method is that students do not learn enough content wise or lack in efficiency for future employment (Buckroyd 2000, 70). Therefore, we have to acknowledge that there is no *right* way of teaching, but that there are different approaches to teaching with different functions. A non-autocratic approach may help to foster early independence and confidence in a student which is of benefit in an individualistic and competitive society. In other situations, an authoritative approach is needed for a proper execution and implementation of steps. Finally, the teacher needs to adapt and use different methods (modes, approaches, styles) to create situations in the class for different kinds of learners, personalities and interests (Theory of Multiple Intelligences). Accordingly, Smith-Autard proposed in 2002 the use of open-ended, problem-solving learning methods in addition to the traditional direct teaching method – the *midway model* which develops dance technical skills and creativity in a balanced way. It already integrates general developmental trends in contemporary pedagogy such as holism, inclusion and reflection and invites the use of various teaching styles. In 2014, Anu Sööt and Ele Viskus identified seven essential aims and teaching methods in contemporary dance pedagogy among which the holistic model, somatic approach, self-regulation and reflection stand out as well. I will therefore introduce these approaches in the following sections of this paper.

### 2.2. Holistic approach

The holistic approach rejects Cartesian dualism (philosophical approach of Rene Descartes) which claims that a man has two entities, the mind and the body. Holistic approach addresses a person as a whole and integrates physical, intellectual and emotional channels as well as social, aesthetic, creative, and spiritual dimensions (Sööt and Viskus 2014, 290-291). The holistic model is one of the key aspects of contemporary dance education after Sööt and Viskus (2014): "Dance is rather a means of gaining one's aim and not an aim in itself" (299). Or as Judith Lynne Hanna explains (2001): "The outcome of dance education may be better dancing or increased knowledge about dance" (78). In other words, the teacher needs to be aware that the majority of pupils enrolled in a ballet education will not become professional dancers, so the training should stand alone as a positive and creative experience that contributes to the development of the student as a person in every way (Buckroyd 2000, 70). It should support individual's general life skills like work habits, self-discipline, creativity, risk-taking and make cross-curricular, interdisciplinary connections to other subjects and artistic fields in which the pupils can be or are engaged in.

### 3.3. Inclusive approach – differentiation

Although classical ballet still requires strict physical predispositions (specific bodily structures, proportions and abilities) like slim posture, small head, long neck, long arms, long and straight legs,

straight back, narrow hips, a pronounced arch of the foot, natural "turn-out" in the hip joint, long Achilles tendon, ect. (Warren 1989 in Sečak 2022); the majority of pupils enrolled in ballet programmes do not meet all of these physical requirements<sup>2</sup>. As Howse (1992 in Sečak 2022) advocates: „There is no reason why most, if not all children, cannot, if they so wish, attend dance classes and learn at least a rudimentary technique, so that they can gain pleasure and enjoyment for the rest of their lives“ (Howse 1992, 44 in Sečak 2022).

For the inclusion of all learners into the learning process, a teacher needs to recognize the individuality of each young person and create an environment and atmosphere that emphasizes learning, self-confidence and mutual respect (Buckroyd 2000). The individual characteristics, the varied anatomical and physical abilities of students need to be considered in accordance with safe teaching methods and injury prevention. Affective teaching therefore requires differentiation which deals with different levels of prior knowledge, different abilities and physical predispositions within the same class. Differentiation in a dance class mainly means that a teacher conceives an exercise in a manner that it can be performed on different levels. As proposed by Elizabeth Gibbons (2007) within the inclusive teaching style, students can be asked to decide by themselves on which level of difficulty they will enter a task or activity which implies accommodation of individual differences and greater individualization (129-130). The degree of difficulty may involve flexibility, balance, strength, endurance, speed, agility, precision, rhythmic ability, projection or application of qualitative feature (efforts) (Ibid, 135). In this way, the principle of differentiation enables continued participation and has a positive effect on children's personal development.

#### 2.4. Reflective approach

The focus on *how* and *why* instead of *what* the students will learn has brought out the importance of reflection and discussion in class and requests of a dance teacher far broader pedagogical and psychological knowledge. Stinson pointed out that "[...] being fully alive and present, problem solving, making connections, seeing relationships, collaboration, are more important than any dance content we teach" (in Sööt and Viskus 2014, 292). This has to be emphasised especially when former great dancers start to teach without any pedagogical and psychological knowledge. Their great passion, confidence in themselves and their high ambitions can lead to physical or mental damages of their students (Sims and Erwin 2012 in Sööt and Viskus 2014, 295). Similar problems occur with teachers who were not that excellent dancers, but have the need to prove themselves through their pupils. Even after taking courses in pedagogy, many teachers tend to follow the teaching patterns and practices of their former teachers, which shows how personal dance experiences need to be reflected through analytical perspectives in higher education pedagogy to be positively transformed to contemporary teaching and learning approaches (ibid). Through my experiences, the practical teaching performances, superiors' observations and colleagues' feedback at the beginning of a teacher's career can be of great help. I further believe, that enough room for self-analysis and reflection in Slovenian dance educational programs is provided through conference reports, performances, evaluations, exams, competitions, discussions with students and parents as long as one is susceptible to change and willing to accept constructive critique and feedback.

#### 2.5. Somatic approach

The idea of somatic approach is to lead students to their bodies and to teach them to become aware of their abilities and features (Sööt and Viskus 2014, 293). Self-awareness and self-perception connect the body and the brain and thereby as well as the holistic approach, defy the long-established Cartesian dualism – the concept of disembodied knowing shifts to embodied knowing. Somatic practices like yoga, *Pilates*, *Alexander's* technique, *Feldenkrais'* method, etc. include listening to one's own body, support cognitive readiness and receptivity and can therefore improve dance skills significantly (Sööt and Viskus 2014, 293, 297). Through being aware of one's senses and feelings during moving, the somatic approach relates further to philosophical and spiritual concepts such as

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2 Except prestigious vocational schools as the Vaganova Ballet Academy or the Paris Opera Ballet School which may afford to select students with precise physical requirements.

mindfulness, 'personal growth' and self-spirituality. The somatic approach changes the relationship between the teacher and the learner and therefore invites the use of various teaching styles (Shapiro 1998 in Sööt and Viskus 2014, 291). Referring to thoughts and emotions that are expressed in dance (Hanna 2015, 17), embodied knowledge is connected further to the education of aesthetic experience within dance (Chapell 2007 in Sööt and Viskus 2014, 294).

### 3. VARIOUS TEACHING STYLES

To apply to different needs, personalities, interests and learning methods, the teacher has to use different methods, approaches and styles to create situations in the class for different kinds of learners (Theory of Multiple Intelligences). To accomplish that, the teacher needs to use a variety of teaching styles which will vary depending on the function of the exercise and its appropriateness in the circumstances (Hirst 1993). The first who formulated *The Spectrum of Teaching Styles* (STS) for the development of a variety of educational goals and different needs of students was Muska Mosston in 1967 (Zeng 2012, 65). Together with Sara Ashworth (2002), they developed their theory upon the notion that all teaching behaviour is dependent on series of decisions – gradually shifting decision-making from the teacher making maximum decisions (Style A – Command) to the learner making maximum decisions (Style K – Self-Teaching). They indicated that with the use of different teaching styles we can stimulate five different developmental channels: physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and ethical (Zeng 2012, 65-68).

In styles A-E – reproduction (replication) cluster, the learner is asked to perform and practice. He is mobile along three development channels – physical, social, emotional; whereas the fourth one – the cognitive channel is being limited (Mosston & Ashworth 2002, 210-211). The cognitive domain along with the creative competences comes into the fore in the production cluster of the styles F – K. In the productive teaching styles, the teacher guides, initiates and assists the student in discovering and acquiring new knowledge, skills and experiences. The student progressively moves between the decisions made by the teacher, from style F to independent decisions in style J and complete independence in style K. The student gains competences like analysing, understanding, selecting, judging (Mosston & Ashworth 2002, 55).

One important aspect of the *Spectrum* is its non-versus approach, meaning that no one teaching-learning approach is better than another (Zeng 2012, 65-68): "The fundamental issue in teaching is not which style is better or best, but rather which style is appropriate for reaching the aims of a given episode. Every style has a place in the multiple realities of teaching and learning!" (Mosston & Ashworth 1994, 7 in Salosaari 2001, 37). When a teacher is aware of the possibilities, he can shift the teaching style according to the present objectives of teaching, either during a teaching episode or in the course of several episodes (Salosaari 2001, 37).

Elizabeth Gibbons (2007) transformed the *Spectrum* along with practical tips and application suggestions for the field of dance. She promotes it as an amazing pedagogical tool which can help all dance teachers from different levels and forms to address diverse issues in a dance class (ibid): "A versatile teacher should develop mobility along the Spectrum, applying teaching strategies appropriate to the task at hand" (2007, 184).

Paula Salosaari claimed further in her research *Multiple Embodiment in Classical Ballet* (2001) that there is still a gap between traditional ballet methods (modes) of teaching and contemporary (choreographic) demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and therefore proposed ways to integrate styles (mainly divergent production) already in the ballet studio (2001, 20). While Mosston and Ashworth's model (1994, 2002) considered skills in sport and gymnastics, Salosaari explained her interest in qualitative content of dance as art by opening out the formal content in ballet with the help of structural images (ibid.).<sup>3</sup>

3 I elaborated further about the implementation of the Spectrum in ballet class in my seminar paper within pedagogy: Teaching Styles applied to Ballet for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Implementation and reflective writing (2023).



## 4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF A BALLET TEACHER

As Best has argued in *The rationality of feeling* (1992), arts can encourage destructive as well as constructive attitudes – this aspect of the arts for him reveals the immense and unavoidable responsibility of teachers. A ballet teacher should not only master his art and craft (technique, composition, history of dance), but provide a positive atmosphere, psycho-physically safe environment for learners to develop their skills to their highest possible extent without injuries or mental distress. As already mentioned, special caution is advised with charismatic ballet dancers who start to teach without any additional anatomical and pedagogical knowledge. In their desire and ambition to produce professional dancers, they do not accurately consider physical predispositions and abilities of their pupils. Hence, Buckroyd (2000) advises, it is necessary that ballet teachers are educated in areas such as dance medicine, anatomy, psychology, fitness and nutrition (71). A lot of research in sports, dance medicine and science has been done in recent years and provides us with increased knowledge about safe dance technique, injury management and prevention in addition to safe execution of specific ballet steps (ibid; Salosaari 2001). Teachers therefore have to constantly revise and extend their knowledge in these areas, take into account the physical predispositions and capabilities of their students, explain the reasons for extra practices, warm-up and warm-down (Buckroyd 2000, 71) as to carefully plan the methodological introduction of ballet steps. Even if certain discrepancies with the traditional rules of conduct occur (Salosaari 2001, 18), the primary concern of educators has to be the long-term psycho-physical health of their students.

Being aware that the majority of pupils will not progress to a professional engagement, the training should stand alone as a positive and creative experience (Buckroyd 2000, 70). The teacher should provide an optimum emotional environment for learning, providing a supportive atmosphere of safety and trust with the use of positive forms of speech, recognition of achievement and effort, specific, focused and particular feedback (ibid., 73). Alongside support goes the necessity for the teacher to provide a calm, good-tempered, friendly, tolerant and compassionate presence (ibid., 74). Teachers should also facilitate student's autonomy and responsibility for their training as they should become independent learners (ibid., 117).

### 4.1. Injury prevention – safe practice

Despite the efforts that schools put into the prevention of injuries by taking care of extrinsic causes of injury, e. g. warming-up and stretching of children, good quality floors and adequate temperature, it is the intrinsic causes that can often be linked to the causes of injury (Buckroyd 2000; Howse 1992, 2005; McCormack 2000, 2001 in Sečak 2022). The category of internal causes embraces ways of eating, psychological awareness and physical stability and condition which includes physical predispositions and individual abilities. As Buckroyd (2000) points out, most of the time injuries are the result of poor training and incorrect execution of exercises and steps. Therefore, the teachers are increasingly responsible for teaching students how individual movements are performed (Buckroyd 2000) and to introduce the steps gradually – according to the level of difficulty and pace i. e. to apply a proper ballet methodology. The teacher should know about psychological and physical development of children to prepare suitable ballet exercises and training structures according to the abilities of children in certain age. With access to new knowledge and methods, the teacher is becoming more and more responsible for correctly teaching pupils to perform movements and taking care of their healthy psycho-physical development.

Nevertheless, not only teachers, students and dancers themselves have to take on responsibility for their health, training and injury prevention (Buckroyd 2000, 117). The teacher is there to facilitate and guide, to point out the most common faults in execution of exercises and steps. These are according to Howse (1992, 2005 in Sečak 2022) and McCormack (2000, 2001 in Sečak 2022): excessive turn-out, pinching shoulder blades together, incorrect joint alignments and incorrect pelvis position (tucking under or sticking out). Teachers have to notice and be aware of children's inborn abnormalities that can hinder a professional dancing career like *scoliosis* and abnormal bone growth that should be communicated with pupils and their parents to prevent further damages or disappoint-



ments. Desfor (2003 in Sečák 2022) and various preventive practices (like *PBT*<sup>4</sup>, kinesiology<sup>5</sup>, somatic practices) warn of a special body feature – extreme joint mobility or hypermobility which at first glance, appears as an advantage in ballet. While correct dance training can have positive benefits for someone with hypermobility, forcing the turn-out or even forcing hyperextension in students who do not naturally possess it, can lead to serious health consequences, including *hallux valgus*, *Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (hEDS)*, damage to the knees and hips (Desfor 2003 in Sečák 2022; Stanforth 2023). **Therefore, even if ballet aesthetics are keen of the hyperextended look, it has to be treated with great care.**

#### 4.2. Wider educational frame

As already elaborated on, the traditional, classical ballet training emphasizes the technical dance training, but today the goal of dance training can no longer be simply that of acquisition of dance technical skills. As Smith-Autard (2002) explains, a comprehensive art of dance curriculum should expose students to a range of techniques and styles so that they can adapt according to the requirements of a dance piece they are learning or to know how to select the character and movement material for their own compositions. Through mutual performing, creating, responding and reflecting in a dance class, pupils acquire competences in three central concepts of dance: creating, performing and appreciating (ibid.). Smith-Autard (2002) integrated these concepts in her *midway model* as the conceptual basis for artistic, aesthetic and cultural education. As dance teachers we are therefore responsible for students' progress as dancers (their technique and performance), as dance-makers (support creativity and choreography), and as appreciators of dance as an art form (showing previous and present accomplishments in the field; facilitate analytical, reflective and evaluative processes) (Adshead 1989; Smith-Autard 2002). A dance teacher therefore needs to master and apply formal content of ballet as choreographic principles and processes, somatic practices, dance history, cultures, and philosophy (Gilbert, 2005 in Sööt and Viskus 2014, 291-292). Many ballet teaching institutions have already recognised, there is a much greater need for a wider range in training that should be added to the programmes and curriculums: contemporary dance classes, somatic practices, physical preparation (*Pilates*, *PBT*, kinesiology practices), etc. A wider educational frame further encompasses interdisciplinarity in education, meaning to weave connections between subjects and disciplines, giving rise to new insights and cognitions: "Interdisciplinarity removes boundaries between disciplines and supports the principle that knowledge is interconnected, providing horizontal and vertical integration of knowledge, content and skills" (daCi 2024). The art of dance is closely related to other art forms, especially to music and the visual arts as the set, costume and light design as well as to video dance. Innovative usage of technology in the creative process and performances require from pupils and teachers a willingness to introduce and to acquire new means and devices (Sööt and Viskus 2014, 298). Teachers can therefore stimulate collaborations, make connections with other subjects and teachers, as to present numerous contemporary dance productions where written texts, poetry, fine arts and new technologies are put side to side with the art of dance and form a comprehensive stage or outdoor performance.

## 5 CONCLUSION

I hope to have shown through this paper how ballet teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot longer be simply that of teaching ballet steps with demonstrating and correcting but rather a conscious guidance in a world of different possibilities on the background of acquiring dance technical and compositional knowledge and skills. I agree with Smith-Autard (2002) in terms of the *midway model* that we as teachers have to be aware of the wide field of professions that our students will engage in and have the responsibility to guide them safely (mentally and physically) to become reflective, independent and creative individuals – to develop holistically. As passionate and devoted educators,

4 The Progressive Ballet Technique is a program developed by Marie Walton-Mahon which focuses on core stability, weight distribution, and alignment (PBT).

5 Adaptation through different physical exercises – to improve cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength and power; to increase neuromuscular control and balance; to increase functional range of motion and reduce the risk of injury (Wikipedia).

we take on a huge responsibility – to provide the best in dance instruction and to promote dance as an art form of importance (in education). As for the first, it is necessary for teachers to acquire knowledge from pedagogy and psychology (learning theories, child development theories, classroom management, etc.), anatomy, kinesiology, nutrition and fitness, psychology and awareness (analytical and reflective perspectives), fundamental methodology (various methodologies) and to apply various teaching styles and methods to motivate and engage different kinds of learners (Theory of Multiple Intelligences).

For the second, dance as an art form, it is important for teachers to poses and convey knowledge about the artistic, aesthetic and cultural principles, features and criteria of classical ballet as of other dance genres or fusions of genres. Therefore, secondary and tertiary education for ballet teachers should become mandatory and provide future teachers beside the knowledge of formal content with increased knowledge of dance history with philosophical, cultural, sociological and anthropological insights. In the period of globalization with numerous innovative and hybrid artistic dance forms (ballet as a transnational art), a ballet teacher needs to be aware of aesthetic and philosophical trends in the field and correspondingly apply or explain current choreographic principles and processes (Sečák 2020; Salossari 2001). Therefore, it is advisable that teachers continuously engage in education during their active career and constantly strive to revise, improve and upgrade their pedagogical and artistic knowledge to provide the best in dance education.

To conclude my paper, I outline once more the responsibilities of a ballet teacher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

1. Teachers have to be aware that most of their students will not engage in a professional dancing career and therefore provide an inclusive and holistic educational frame for all students.
2. A teacher should acknowledge awareness and reflection – analyse the situations in class with their students as on their own.
3. A teacher should use different methods (modes, approaches, styles) to create situations in the class for different kinds of learners – apply to different needs, personalities and interests.
4. A versatile teacher should develop mobility along the *Spectrum* (Mosston and Ashworth's model) and applying teaching strategies appropriate to the task at hand.
5. A teacher should lead the students toward artistic, aesthetic and cultural education in accordance with Smith-Autard's *midway model*.
6. A teacher should know basic anatomy and kinesiology to prevent injuries – to guide students safely (mentally and physically) to the educational aims and goals.
7. An up-to date teacher needs to be abreast with changes in choreographic practices and working methods (improvisation, creative tasks, co-authorship) in the field.
8. Teachers need to be continuously engaged in education to follow developments in the field of dance pedagogy, classroom management strategies, interdisciplinarity; to follow new choreographic principles and processes, aesthetic and philosophical trends and the usage of new technology in the field as to finally engage in curriculum development processes to promote dance as an art form of importance (in education).

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## SHORT BIOGRAPHY

**Ana Germ** studied classical ballet at the Secondary School of Music and Ballet in Maribor and continued her studies in the field of modern and contemporary dance at the Konservatorium Wien Privatuniversität in Vienna, where she graduated in 2011. Her professional experience as a dancer ranges from classical engagements at SNG Maribor and modern projects including work of Edward Clug. Since 2012, she has been teaching dance and ballet at the Music School Slavka Osterca Ljutomer. She is currently completing Graduate Master's in Dance Pedagogy at Dance Academy, Alma Mater Europaea University.

## CLASSICAL BALLET AS A SYSTEM OF SYSTEMS

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper delves into the intricate interplay between tradition and innovation within the realm of ballet education against the backdrop of the 21st century. Drawing upon the author's extensive experience as a ballerina, pedagogue, ballet school director, and researcher, the narrative unfolds through the lens of her doctoral thesis. The thesis underscores the imperative to broaden the academic foundations for investigating ballet, positioning it as a dynamic field bridging art, science, and lifestyle. Advocating for a systemic approach, the paper explores the embodiment of diverse concepts from philosophy, mathematics, physics, neuroscience, and psychology. Examples include the utilization of social psychology's field theory (Lewin) as a study framework and the incorporation of the threshold concept of transformational learning (Land, Meyer, and Baillie) for identifying pivotal points.*

*Invaluable tools such as integrating specific ballet repertoire into the ordinary movement repertoire (Calvo-Merino), leveraging experiential learning (Kolb-Kolb), and examining perception, mental representation, and movement control processes (Schack) shed light on understanding deficiencies at the canonical level. Additionally, principles from mathematical functions deepen awareness of the intrinsic structure of ballet systems and their extrinsic potential to interconnect with other systems. This paper underscores the urgency of redefining the purpose of ballet education.*

**Keywords:** *tradition and innovation, ballet education, social psychology, transformational learning*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

For almost five decades in the ballet community, as a student, principal dancer, teacher, director, and lately as a researcher, I have considered living in the big ballet family to be a privilege and my life purpose to pass on further to the next generations my filtered gained knowledge and experience. Rooted in my Ph.D. action research with the tested results during the pilot project Noja-Nebyla STAGE Education (2020-2022), this paper offers insights into the ballet canon from the perspective of a systemic approach.

As Howard Gardner suggested "creativity includes the additional category of asking new questions..." (Gardner 1999, 119) and addressing them might help in discovering new opportunities. Questions such as: Why studying ballet is worthwhile in the 21st century? What is or could be the purpose of ballet education in the 21st century? How changes can be implemented change in a resisting ballet community? proved to support consistently the development of research.

The ballet community must resume its clearly defined roles at a time when neither the working environment nor the social status of professional dancers is yet sufficiently shaped and integrated, for its real versatility, in the education process. This is why the spirit of innovation should guide professional development, including "structures and processes used in ethical ways, with ethical role models and experiences that are personally engaging to students and teachers" (Krechevsky 2020, 2).

Ballet has been an institution of art since 1661, but it faces similar challenges as the whole education system. "Although it was the favourite pastime of kings, and thereby reflects the grand manner of royal courts, ballet has flourished under egalitarian, totalitarian, and democratic regimes. [...] So it is misleading, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, to define ballet in narrow cultural terms. Yet the aesthetic sets apart; there, we need to address the roots of what we accept today as classical" (Paskevaska 2005, 14).

On 18 December 2004, IOTPD<sup>1</sup> initiated The aDVANCE Project, where participants from 15 countries came together to launch an international research study with legal conclusions to support the transition of dancers. The observations resulting from the process, contained in the Monaco Declaration, recognize that: "major challenges remain [...] We know of no other occupation that requires such extensive training, which is held in such esteem as a contribution to culture and pays so little [...] The inadequacy of transition support not only creates significant challenges for individual dancers but also imposes a social cost in the form of wasted human capital" (Baumol et al. 2004).

Some of the research problems outlined above aim to explore the multifaceted aspects of ballet as a profession, an art form, and an educational discipline. This study investigates the challenges and opportunities within each of these themes, seeking to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ballet phenomenon and its impact on individuals involved in this field.

## 1.1 Purpose and goals

The purpose of this paper was to extract from the bigger frame of the Ph.D. action research only those themes connected directly with the ballet canon, more precisely, what aspects of the ballet canon we do not know yet enough about.

## 1.2 Methods

During the action research and the running of the pilot project with the 24 dancers coming from 8 countries, it has been observed that the didactical approach practiced over time in teaching ballet conducted the system towards an entropic state which left the ballet community with a variety of unanswered questions. One particular question sparked the curiosity the most: "...what if many of these ideas, central though they might be to particular disciplines or professions, hardly ever come up in significant ways in the lives most learners are likely to live? Are they truly worth learning?" (Perkins 2014, 10).

If we honestly address this question, in regard to how many graduates of well-recognized schools enter a ballet or a dance company, we must admit that the whole education of eight intensive years cannot have the only purpose of serving exclusively for a ballet career. Further on, the whole ed-

1 <http://www.iotpd.org/about>

education system undergoes strong and undefined changes: "Achieving excellence in education this century requires a focus on developing citizen-learners of all ages who can navigate the complexities of an uncertain world toward creating a more just, humane, and sustainable future. [...] How can schools accomplish this goal? By reframing their purpose: the cultivation of citizen-learners" (Krechevsky 2020, 2).

What knowledge is truly worth learning in ballet and for which purposes such an education is useful, are there major themes that ballet education can and must confront in the 21st century. How the ballet community addresses them today, will determine the future of ballet in general, believes the author of this paper. This paper offers insights into one aspect of the research, which refers to the complexity of the ballet canon as a system of systems. Knowing profoundly, the ballet canon may reveal some unexpected solutions to old themes of education still looking for the answers.

The above-mentioned inquiries inspired the undertaken of an epistemological approach, which revealed gaps in the perception of the ballet dancer's body and ambiguity in the interpretation at the ballet canon level. It showed also the need to expand the academic foundation for researching the broad sphere of ballet beyond a didactical approach. It opened up the necessity to consider it rather as an open field between art, science, and lifestyle.

## 2 RESULTS

### 2.1 Lewin's Field Theory in Ballet Education

The integration of Kurt Lewin's Field Theory within the 21<sup>st</sup> century ballet education signifies an exploration of the dynamic interplay between individual and environmental factors in shaping a diverse range of educational objectives. When applied to ballet education, this theoretical framework allows for an expansive understanding of self-awareness and the integration of intrinsic and extrinsic elements within the ballet canon. Ballet, a discipline characterized by long-standing, rigorous standards, faces significant challenges when adapting to change.

An examination of the ballet learning environment necessitates an understanding of both internal (e.g., dancers' motivations, skills, and emotions) and external factors (e.g., teaching methodologies, studio conditions, and societal influences), thereby, reshaping the educational context. Dancers are not only "machines for making beauty"<sup>2</sup> (Guillot 1969, 7). "But it is precisely the models of ballet dancers throughout the history of dance that prove the opposite. Even if the accuracy of the characteristic movements in space and time can be compared to a mechanism of great precision, they represent something deeper that needs to be understood and explored" (Noja-Nebyla 2023, 102-103).

### 2.2 Experiential Learning Theory Developed by David Kolb

There is a connection between Kurt Lewin's Field Theory and the Experiential Learning Theory developed by David Kolb (and expanded upon by Alice Kolb). It lies in their shared emphasis on the dynamic nature of learning and the importance of interaction between the individual and their environment. Both theories propose that learning is a process shaped by the individual's experiences and their context. David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory presents a model of learning as a four-stage cycle: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. This model suggests that effective learning occurs when a person progresses through this cycle, experiencing a situation, reflecting on it, forming abstract concepts based on the reflection, and then applying these concepts in new situations. Learning is seen as a process grounded in experience, where knowledge is constructed through experience transformation.

### 2.3. Application of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory in Ballet Education: Enhancing Talent Identification and Comprehensive Development

Exploring the application of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory within the context of ballet education emphasizes its potential to revolutionize talent scouting and the identification of

<sup>2</sup> "des machines à fabriquer de la beauté"

diverse strengths in dancers. Traditional methods of talent identification in ballet primarily focus on physical attributes, rhythm, musicality, and spatial orientation, often with the sole aim of preparing students for professional ballet careers. However, this approach overlooks the existence and significance of varied intelligences that could prove beneficial both within the ballet profession and in broader career contexts.

The realm of ballet education has long adhered to conventional methods of talent identification, typically through aptitude tests that assess physical and performance-related abilities. This traditional approach, while effective in selecting candidates with specific physical and artistic skills, fails to recognize and cultivate a broader spectrum of intelligences that dancers may possess. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences posits that individuals have a variety of cognitive abilities beyond the traditional scope of intelligence measurement. This paper argues that incorporating Gardner's theory into ballet education could significantly enhance talent scouting and provide a more holistic approach to dancer development.

#### **2.4. Applying the Threshold Concept of Transformational Learning in Ballet Education: Enhancing Understanding and Artistic Development**

The threshold concept, which refers to transformative educational experiences that lead to significant shifts in learners' perception and understanding, has the potential to profoundly influence the way ballet is taught and learned. This paper discusses how the threshold concept can redefine perceptions of ballet, encourage a holistic approach, overcome technical and artistic plateaus, enhance self-reflection and critique, prepare students for professional careers, and foster innovation and creativity.

Ballet education traditionally focuses on the technical mastery of movements and adherence to classical forms. However, this approach often overlooks the potential for transformative learning experiences that can lead to a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of ballet as an art form. The threshold concept of transformational learning offers a framework for exploring these transformative experiences in ballet education. This paper examines how this concept can be integrated into ballet pedagogy to enhance both the understanding and artistic development of students.

#### **2.5. The Cognitive-Perceptual Perspective in Dance Learning (Thomas Schack)**

This paper presents a cognitive-perceptual perspective on dance learning, as discussed in Thomas Schack's study *Constitutive Elements and Architecture of Dance*. Schack, a sports scientist and leader of the Research Group in Neurocognition and Action at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, provides a scientific understanding of dance from a cognitive-perceptual viewpoint. He emphasizes the functional role of dance in the evolution and development of culture and its impact on everyday life. The paper explores Schack's insights into the learning processes of dance, focusing on perceptual information, mental representation, muscle and reflex control, and the significance of these elements in the effective teaching and learning of dance movements.

Dance has been an integral part of human culture for over a million years, playing a significant role in ontogenesis and daily life. Teaching dance skills involves a complex interplay of technical and aesthetic preparation, detailed work on movement, and mental and emotional states (Bläsing 2019). However, the teaching and learning process in classical dance often encounters incongruences between teachers and students, attributed to communication clarity, understanding levels, and teaching-learning compatibility, sometimes influenced by age differences.

Schack highlights various methods for constructing dance learning abilities, such as perceptual information, mental representation of movement elements in long-term memory (the "movement memory bank"), and control of muscles and reflexes in the motor system (Bläsing 2019). This scientific approach is valuable for dance pedagogy as a testing tool in teaching each dance element, ensuring its correct and enduring anchoring in the movement memory bank post the cognitive-perceptual threshold. A structured approach for testing learning stages in dance may involve:

- Precise observation of movement elements, with the necessary attention to observation or focus change.
- Addressing learning errors often due to inaccurate mental representation. The correctness of mental representation can be tested through movement repetition with and without mirrors,



verbal description of stages without movement, and mental description in a resting position with eyes closed.

- Identifying issues related to reflex control, which can be organized using somatic therapy tests (for ex: body-mind centering).
- Testing muscle control through physical exercises (coordination, strength, stability, flexibility, endurance, etc.)

Schack elucidates the role of mental representation in dance as an intermediary between perception and movement execution, enabling dancers to select and combine effective information resources under time pressure. Mental representation aids in adapting behavioural potentials to environmental conditions and shaping interaction forms in dance (Bläsing 2019).

## 2.6 Movement Repertoires in Dance: A Cognitive-Neuroscience Perspective (B.Calvo-Merino)

The concept of movement repertoires in dance from a cognitive neuroscience perspective, drawing on the work of Beatriz Calvo-Merino examines the neural mechanisms activated in the brain through the observation or practice of dance and discusses the notion of repertoire in both general and dance-specific contexts. Calvo-Merino's research highlights the shared and unique aspects of dancers' movement repertoires and the interplay between action and perception in dance. Dance, as a subject of cognitive and neuropsychological research, offers insights into the neural processes underlying human movement and perception. Beatriz Calvo-Merino's work emphasizes the importance of movement repertoires in understanding these processes. The Oxford Dictionary defines a repertoire as "a body of known or regularly performed pieces or dances" (Bläsing 2019), while in cognitive neuroscience, it refers to a summary or storage of all motor knowledge acquired throughout life.

Calvo-Merino asserts that dancers possess a common movement repertoire (e.g. walking, running) shared with all humans, in addition to a specific repertoire unique to classical dance. This specialized repertoire enriches dancers with additional movement possibilities, making them unique in their bodily movements (Bläsing 2019). Individual motor repertoires comprise both common actions shared by the human population and specific or personal actions shared only by individuals trained in the same field.

Furthermore, Calvo-Merino identifies a common space between observers and performers of dance. This space is a continuum between the sense of action (dancing) and the sense of perception (seeing), where the two senses merge. The congruence between visual and motor responses of mirror neurons highlights a unique aspect of how dancers perceive and execute movement. Historically, action and perception were considered independent processes in the human brain, but recent cognitive neuroscience research challenges this view.

## 2.7. The Mathematical Function Principle in Ballet Education: An Integrated Approach to Understanding the Ballet Canon

This paper explores the application of the mathematical function principle to deepen the understanding of the ballet canon through an integrated approach to ballet education. The mathematical function, a fundamental concept in various fields of study, has not been extensively applied in ballet, particularly in defining the values of the canon in terms of the system and the relationship between the conceptual-theoretical and physical-practical systems. How the mathematical function can be utilized to integrate pure information into knowledge within the realm of ballet education, transforming initial conceptual values (domain) through function images into behaviour in the physical-practical system (co-domain) has been researched in the PhD thesis of the author. The mathematical function is a relationship that associates each element of one set with exactly one element of another set. It defines a relationship between an independent variable (unknown value in an equation) – the cause (domain) – and a dependent variable – the effect (co-domain). In ballet education, this principle has not been traditionally applied, leaving a gap in the systematic understanding and definition of the ballet canon.

To apply the mathematical function principle in ballet education, the following steps are necessary:

- Defining the two sets (domains) that need to be related (A and B) and the values in each set (respectively, domain and co-domain) to be associated;



- Establishing the correspondence law (the rule by which the association occurs);
- Understanding that the function image remains within the co-domain regardless of the integration result.

The process of integrating pure information (the term is used to avoid confusion between information and knowledge; knowledge is the embodiment of returned information) into knowledge can be defined as the transformation of an initial value (from the domain) through its association with a specific value in the co-domain. This process occurs in two directions: as embodiment into behaviour (from the conceptual system to the practical system) and as a return in the form of the function image (from the practical system to the conceptual system) as a result of the integration process. The function image represents the acquired knowledge following this process.

## 2.8. Relational Capacity Within the Systemic Framework in Ballet Education

This paper explores the concept of relational capacity within the systemic framework of ballet education, focusing on wholeness rather than its isolated elements. By emphasizing the relationships of forces within the system, the process through which pure information is embodied into behaviour and then returned as enhanced value becomes more visible.

## 3 DISCUSSION

Lewin's Field Theory, which posits that behaviour is a function of both the person and the environment, is instrumental in understanding and adapting to these forces. Contemporary neuroscience research underscores the extensive positive impacts of dance learning, highlighting the necessity of recognizing internal and external forces in ballet education, traditionally overlooked in conventional teaching methods.

The integration of technology in ballet education is another crucial aspect. Embracing technological advancements, such as virtual classes, online resources, and digital choreography tools, acknowledges the significant influence of technological forces on the educational landscape. This approach not only fosters individual creativity but also enhances visibility in a discipline where creativity implementation is often challenging.

Social dynamics within ballet education are also pivotal. The 21<sup>st</sup> century focuses on diversity and inclusivity within the learning environment, recognizing diverse backgrounds, body types, and dance styles and fosters a positive and inclusive social atmosphere. This also includes a modernized perception of the body, moving away from the outdated 19<sup>th</sup> century standards.

Dynamic teaching strategies in ballet education reflect the evolving demands on educators. A more dynamic, adaptable approach, as encouraged by Lewin's Field Theory, involves adjusting teaching strategies based on the interactions between instructors, students, and the evolving dance landscape.

Cultural and global influences are increasingly shaping ballet education. Personalized learning paths represent a significant innovation; acknowledging individual differences among dancers and accommodating these variations aligns with Lewin's theory, which recognizes that individuals respond uniquely to their environment. Personalized paths allow dancers to explore specific interests or skills within the broader ballet framework.

### 3.1 Emphasis on Interaction and Environment

Both Lewin's and Kolb's theories highlight the significance of the environment and experiences in shaping learning and behaviour. While Lewin's theory focuses on the interaction between the individual and their psychological environment, Kolb's theory underscores the role of concrete experiences in the external environment as a starting point for learning. Kolb's model portrays learning as a continuous cycle involving active engagement with experiences. Both theories advocate for a holistic understanding of the learning process. Lewin's theory integrates both internal psychological factors and external environmental influences, while Kolb's model encompasses the full cycle of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, and applying.

### 3.2. Application of Gardner's theory in ballet education

The application of Gardner's theory in ballet education allows for the recognition and nurturing of diverse intelligences. For example, narrative intelligence could pave the way for dancers to excel as ballet critics, while logical-mathematical intelligence might lead to successful careers in management or administration within the arts sector. By acknowledging and developing these varied intelligences, ballet education can prepare dancers for a range of career opportunities, both within and beyond the traditional confines of professional ballet.

The traditional focus on physical aptitude alone limits the potential of dancers who may excel in other areas. The inclusion of Gardner's theory in ballet education broadens the criteria for talent identification, enabling educators to discover and foster both visible and hidden talents in students. This approach is particularly beneficial in supporting dancers during career transitions, providing them with a diverse skill set that enhances their adaptability and resilience in a dynamic professional landscape.

In conclusion, the incorporation of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory into ballet education represents a significant shift in the way talents are scouted and developed. This approach offers a more comprehensive and inclusive framework for identifying and nurturing the diverse strengths of ballet students. By expanding the scope of talent identification beyond traditional physical criteria, ballet educators can better prepare dancers for a wide range of career opportunities, both within the ballet world and in other professional realms. This paradigm shift has the potential to transform ballet education, making it more adaptable, inclusive, and reflective of the multifaceted nature of intelligence.

### 3.3. The Threshold Concept in Ballet Education

The Application of the Threshold Concept in Ballet Education involves several key aspects:

- Redefining perceptions of ballet: The threshold concept can help students move beyond preconceived notions about ballet, leading to a more nuanced understanding that integrates technique, artistic expression, and cultural significance.
- Embracing a holistic approach: Ballet education can be transformed by encouraging students to view ballet holistically, integrating physical technique with emotional expression and personal storytelling.
- Overcoming technical and artistic plateaus: The threshold concept can be instrumental in helping students overcome plateaus in their learning by promoting a shift in mindset and perspective, leading to breakthroughs in both technique and artistic expression.
- Enhancing self-reflection and critique: Transformational learning fosters critical self-reflection and the ability to evaluate one's progress and challenges, skills that are essential for artistic growth in ballet.
- Preparation for professional careers: Applying the threshold concept in ballet education can prepare students for the diverse demands of professional performance, including the emotional and physical challenges and the need for adaptability and resilience.
- Fostering innovation and creativity: By encouraging students to transcend traditional boundaries, the threshold concept can inspire creativity and innovation, leading to new interpretations, contemporary forms, and unique choreographic styles.

The integration of the threshold concept of transformational learning into ballet education has the potential to revolutionize the way ballet is taught and learned.

### 3.4. Thomas Schack's Studies

His studies confirm that physical exercise combined with mental training and simulation leads to superior performance results in dancers. He explains dancers' ability to implement movements effortlessly due to their capacity to anticipate movement effects as a *necessary future model* (Bläsing 2019). This mental model, constructed on hierarchical levels of representation and action regulation, plays a central role in implementing and controlling actions. Schack's insights into sensorimotor control levels and mental representation provide a deeper understanding of cognitive processes

in dancers and observers, relating to Husserl's phenomenological approach to anticipation and intentionality. The investigation of cognitive processes in dancers and dance observers through event segmentation theory is a helpful tool in understanding how the memory of a dance works.

### 3.5. Calvo-Merino

Calvo-Merino succinctly characterizes these studies, stating "it seems that we encode external motor events through our own motor repertoire" (Bläsing 2019, 195). From an evolutionary perspective, the interplay between the perception and action systems of movement suggests that our brain's future development will be significantly influenced by these mechanisms.

The cognitive neuroscience perspective on dance provides new insights into classical ballet education, influencing its artistic goals, understanding and acquisition of the canon, and opening up unexpected portals to new areas of human thought and cognition. These findings underscore the interconnectedness of how dance is observed and practiced, offering a richer understanding of the cognitive processes involved in dance and its broader implications for human cognition and learning.

### 3.6. Application of the Mathematical Function Principle in Ballet Education

The Application of the Mathematical Function Principle in ballet education offers a novel approach to understanding and defining the ballet canon. By relating pure information with embodied knowledge, this principle facilitates the transformation of conceptual understandings into practical applications within ballet. The process of integrating information through mathematical functions bridges the gap between theoretical concepts and practical execution in ballet, enhancing the systemic understanding of the art form. This approach provides a structured framework for educators and learners in ballet, contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced appreciation at the systemic level of the ballet canon.

### 3.7. The ballet continuum matrix

In the *ballet continuum matrix* the elements of body, space, time, environment, and movement are treated relationally, transdisciplinary, and contextually forming a coherent and dynamic whole. This approach allows the integration and contextualization of the dancer's body within a broader whole, transforming the perception of ballet identity from both internal and external perspectives. The traditional approach to ballet education often focuses on separate system elements, such as the body, space, time, and movement, without fully considering their interrelationships. This paper proposes a shift in focus to the system's relational forces, enhancing the quality of processes within ballet education and utilizing the power of the whole system with the assembled parts.

The internal system relationships view the perception of the dancer's body as recontextualized and integrated within a broader matrix, moving beyond subjective, ideal, or transactional views. The body becomes an integral part of a dynamic matrix with its correspondence laws, producing knowledge in the context of its application. This perspective frees the body from preconceptions, allowing it to become a valuable producer of aesthetic movement knowledge. The external system relationships explore the potential for transdisciplinary relationships between various knowledge systems, including philosophical, artistic, scientific, and somatic knowledge. The integration of these systems can lead to a deeper theoretical understanding and reciprocal interventions in disciplinary epistemologies.

The Whole as a synthesis of rational and empirical knowledge, following Kant's idea, considers the alignment of all participating factors in ballet pedagogy towards a coherent whole a necessity. The definition and relationship between the theoretical conceptual system and the practical ballet system imply unity under a single idea, gaining coherence through the rational and intuitive definition of parts. In the dynamic field of relational forces, aesthetic knowledge is nurtured. Within one's body during dance, in connection with space, time, environment, and movement, unity is experienced as a fusion, in the spirit of Ruth St. Denis's concept (of the physical, emotional, and spiritual fusion).

The essence of ballet education involves continuous awareness and relational alignment of internal and external spaces, rhythms, and movement concepts. This essence is multivalent and transcendental, following Husserl's phenomenological approach to investigating the essence of things.

The relational capacity within the systemic framework in ballet education offers a comprehensive approach to understanding and teaching ballet. By focusing on the relational dynamics of the system and integrating various knowledge systems, ballet education becomes a source of creativity and deep understanding. This approach aligns with the long-standing tradition of ballet in synthesizing diverse elements, such as mathematical principles, geometric space, and artistic techniques, into a unified and expressive art form.

## 4 CONCLUSION

Covering the entire ballet phenomenon, from the first steps of scouting talents, ballet education, and active career until career transition, this paper sees the ballet canon as a system of systems that synthesizes existing theoretical and practical models from their beginnings to those still valid in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The research aimed to analyse and optimize classical ballet education, explore the potential for cognitive and emotional development through ballet, and extend it to other knowledge domains. The research process, designed and conducted by combining theoretical knowledge with the author's stage and pedagogical experiences, led to the extrapolation of knowledge further than just art.

Regarded from a systemic perspective, the ballet canon possesses the coordinates of a new academic educational model, called the *ballet continuum matrix*, which serves to outline new benefits for everyone practicing ballet and expands its value in the profession, beyond the profession in the social space, and in university research as an autonomous academic discipline. This study aims to bring its modest contribution in this direction, similar to the function of a guiding lighthouse in navigating the turbulent waters of the digital age.

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## SHORT BIO

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## FORMING AN INDIVIDUAL PATH WITH TRACES OF CONTEMPORARY DANCE

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### ABSTRACT

*Considering the importance of following one's own path, while bearing reference to the bigger picture in an academic education, this article summarizes the research made for the diploma thesis *Built from Traces*, which included the theoretical and practical work with selected traces of contemporary dance. The chosen traces were the expressionist dance, Flying Low technique, the Humphrey / Limón tradition, contact improvisation and the Judson Dance Theatre. The author looked at the connection of her work as a choreographer and dancer in connection to past and present creators. Because of the ongoing scientific progress there is an undeniable historical context for each new artwork, that adds on to the tradition of passing on knowledge from person to person. Therefore, even though contemporary dance has an innovative and reformative nature, it is a collection of knowledge and principles that exists throughout history in form of techniques, appearing in certain periods and approaches to bodies.*

*With each creation phase of the graduation piece *Underneath the Clouds* the author elaborated different methods and approaches to the moving body aiming to transform them into unique shapes and forms. The result of the research was that using the selected traces of contemporary dance to create *Underneath the Clouds* did not lead to new forms in a unique movement language, but to the expression of a personal matter through the forms of merged traces of contemporary dance. The research revealed that through a consistent and conscious work with certain techniques and approaches to the moving body one can express their individual concerns in a sustainable and dignified way. Hence, allow personal experiences to shape and inform an academic process.*

**Keywords:** traces of contemporary dance, individual path, choreographer, dancer, movement language

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This article summarizes the research of the author, done for her graduation thesis *Built from Traces* (2023) resulting in the dance piece *Underneath the Clouds* (2023). Starting with a short introduction in the research matter, the use of terminology is defined and the questions guiding the research are deduced. In the main part the four phases of physical exploration are described and seen in relation to the theoretical research of the selected traces of contemporary dance of the expressionist dance, Flying Low technique, the Humphrey / Limón tradition, contact improvisation and the Judson Dance Theatre.

Forming an individual path using the selected traces of contemporary dance, with her thesis, the author is still bearing reference to the bigger picture of an academic education. An academic path guides students through the history and context of their department as well as a broad variety of methods and approaches used in the field. In her case, studying contemporary dance, this is the history of dance, choreology, pedagogy, choreographic practices, dance techniques, etc. Finalizing her studies last year she created her own dance piece and conducted her own research in the field of contemporary dance. At first it seemed like there were infinite possibilities to approach this task. Therefore, to set a focus and select a theme she turned inwards to discover, what, out of all the subject matter, was resonating with her and could serve as a base for the physical and theoretical exploration. She was greatly inspired by the practice of improvisation, because there is no shape, no set movement language that the body has to merge into, the form of expression is free. On the other hand, she was curious, if over the years of studying she had developed her own movement language. Overall, as the nature of the contemporary dance is an inventive and transformative one, there was longing to create something original (Greiner 2023a, 23).

Contemporary dance as such originated when "[the 'great moderns'] invented their own corporeality, outside of any model ..." (Louppe 2010, 38), however "[t]oday [...] the dancer works much more with a gamut of pathways [...] that has already been traced ..." (2010, 38). Starting her process with recording her improvisations and relearning the filmed movements (phase 1), the author began to realize that her body was reproducing shapes she had learned in the dance technique classes. It seemed like she was the ground someone had left their footprints on.

So, what are those traces of contemporary dance? Is not the "the essence of dance language [...] something that is always disappearing" (Kopač 2013, 52)

In the beginning and middle of the 20th century, parallel with the uprising of modern dance, a wave of new dance notation systems emerged, three were recognized and are still in use, even though none became a standardized universal language. The Laban system, Benesh system and Eshkol-Wachman system stand next to the autobiographical recording of dance, which was practiced initially by the contemporary dance pioneer Isadora Duncan. Nevertheless, in the 20th century also the recording with modern tools like film and photography arose. (Kopač 2013, 48-49) Those records that are still available today build an important base for the history of dance and are traces of dance. However, looking at the four ways of recording movement mentioned by Kopač, as there are: just the one of movement (choreology), the one of thoughts (philosophy), the one of feelings (psychology) and the one of movement of specific body parts (physiology) it becomes clear that there are also other traces. Next to the record of the movement there is also the one of thoughts and feelings (Kopač 2013, 47). This brings up two kinds of traces of dance, one kind being material or physical, like notations, videos, critiques, reports and interviews, records that stay and can be touched but also the memory of the physical body of a dancer and the other kind that is more on the metaphysical plane and consists of feelings, sensations and memories. It is important to point out that the traces of dance do not only lie in the records of movement, but also in the passing on from generation to generation and not to forget in the participation and witnessing of dance performances. (Greiner 2023a, 4)

Following this realization the author was able to select the traces of contemporary dance that built the base for her further research. After the second and third phase of physical research, that focused on creating a spatial composition and transmitting the movement material from phase one (Greiner 2023a, 24), as well as conducting a research of her teachers movement practice and their teachers practice back until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Greiner 2023a, 6-8), the author concluded that the selected traces her work was based on are: the expressionist dance, Flying Low technique, the



Humphrey / Limón tradition, contact improvisation and the Judson Dance Theatre. From this point, aiming at transforming the forms and shapes of the selected traces into her individual path, she was able to enunciate the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the selected traces of the expressionist dance, Flying Low, the Humphrey / Limón tradition, the contact improvisation and the Judson Dance Theatre?
2. Which of the selected traces do I, as the choreographer versus as a dancer implement in *Underneath the Clouds*?
3. To what extent are the selected traces recognizable through shapes and forms or the approach towards the body and detectable in my movement language developed for *Underneath the Clouds*?
4. To what extent did the selected traces, through their correlation, transform – manifesting in newly found forms and shapes?
5. What happens in the transmission of the movement language developed for *Underneath the Clouds*? Is it going to influence its clarification of form, making the selected traces stand out or rather in a way of transforming the selected traces into newly found forms?" (Greiner 2023a, 2).

## 2 THE FOUR WORK PHASES AND THE SELECTED TRACES OF CONTEMPORARY DANCE

Conducted in four phases, the physical exploration can be analysed as a whole process, but also regarding each phase. The work was recorded on video and also through notes and sketches forming a rehearsal diary. Additionally, the dancers were interviewed and the work was accompanied by three mentors with their feedback (Andreja Kopač, Irena Tomažin Zagoričnik and Milan Tomášik) (Greiner 2023a, 24–47). In this chapter the process of each phase in connection with the selected traces of contemporary dance is described. The first phase will be considered as the phase where the author worked with the selected traces as a dancer. Continuing with her work as a choreographer that will be seen through the work of the second phase. Through the work of the third phase, the result of transmitting the movement language developed for *Underneath the Clouds* will be analysed. With the fourth phase the question to what extent the selected traces transformed through the process will be answered.

### 1.1 Phase 1 – working with the selected traces as a dancer

**Table 1: Phase 1**

Phase	Research Task/ Method	Description	Inspiration
Phase 1 12.9. - 24.10.2022 at Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy	Preformation	A solo work, developing a 3 min long choreography through learning recorded improvisations.	Trisha Brown Deborah Hay

Source: Greiner 2023a, 25.

**"Process:"**

[...] The aim was to find a way of creating while [or with the aid of improvisation, as well as comparing the improvised creation with a creation of fixed shapes. The basic steps taken after a time of exploration were recording improvisations with different moods for 30 seconds, six times in the same setting. Then learning the improvised material and creating a fixed choreography from it[...]. (Greiner 2023a, 25)

The inspiration for the creation of the solo *Preformation* in this phase derived from Trisha Brown and Deborah Hay, founding members of the Judson Dance Theatre (JDT), for their approach to dance is creating from the inside out. While Brown works with physical research and the accumulation method (Burt 2005, 18), Hay bases her work on her method of the cellular consciousness (Foster 1986, 5-14). Following her roots that lie in the expressionist dance (Greiner 2023a, 6–7), the author also chose to create the movement from within basing the recorded improvisation on the mood of the



moment (see "Process" above). Therefore, focused on expressing the inner state, she relied on her regular movement patterns, allowing her to take a look at how the selected traces, that had influenced her daily training, manifest through their shapes in her body. While learning the improvised material, the author was able to identify patterns and principles of techniques like the spiralling out of the floor, which is considered a flying low principle or the curve and swing of the torso that is inherent to the Humphrey / Limón Tradition, which found its way to her through the Shifting Roots – Alegado Movement Language (AML is an evolution of the Limón technique founded by Joe Alegado) (ibid., 46–47).

Then due to its spontaneous and impulsive character some of the movement sequences like "leg" and "jumps" can also be compared with the movement language of Trisha Brown (as a basis for comparison see for *Watermotor* by Babette Mangold 1978). It is the seemingly random succession of movements and the constantly falling and off-balance moments" (Greiner 2023a, 47).

Aside from the author's form of physical expression, there was also the process of rehearsing that a dancer goes through. Learning the prerecorded material meant to retrace each movement and repeat it many times. In the beginning she went for the basic structure, then more and more paid attention to the initiation points of the movement and then added the details. Structurally she was following the buildup of the AML class (ibid., 47).

## 1.2 Phase 2 – working with the selected traces as a choreographer

**Table 2: Phase 2**

Phase	Research Task/ Method	Description	Inspiration
Phase 2 08.11. - 02.12.2022 at Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy	Inside the Bubble	A research with three dancers concerning the space in between the bodies as well as the meaning of closeness and touch.	Contact Improvisation Ralf Jaroschinski Dóra Furulyás Flying Low Deborah Hay

Source: Greiner 2023a, 30.

### "Process:"

The four-week long process was started with a pure phase of research, [...] inspired by [...] the Contact Improvisation workshop with Ralf Jaroschinski taken in 2019 at the CobosMika SEED's Formation in Palamós, Spain. [...] The idea was to go from a simple mechanism of a chain reaction to a more and more complex intertwining of the bodies. [...] Parallel to the creation process there were classes in contemporary dance technique happening at the BCDA with Milan Újvári. He teaches Flying Low originated by David Zambrano. The classes consisted of the typical floor work and the transitioning from up to down, including the running in a circle and spiraling in. Since the initial idea was to create a circular performance space the running in a circle and spiraling seemed to be the perfect introduction for the work. [...] (ibid., 31–32).

Progressing from phase one, *Inside the Bubble* is a group composition with three dancers. Its base lies in the spatial concept of a circular performance space and the exploration of the space between the performers (ibid., 31). The movement material for this short choreography derived from an initial research phase assuring each dancer formed their part according to their skills. Another layer important in choreographic work, the dramaturgy of the piece, resulted from the use of space. The author's idea was to go from distance and an open space to closeness and finally the bodies touching (ibid., 50).

It turned out that through establishing a connection, but without touch, the three bodies were constantly spiralling around each other changing in level and size of the movement. Being reminded of the Flying Low principles that work a lot with the natural spirals of the body (Zambrano 2023) I started to implement also concrete patterns of the practice like running in a circle while always facing one front." (ibid.).

The choreographic structure of *Inside the Bubble* based on a spatial concept later on evolved into key structures of the final piece *Underneath the Clouds*. For example, the structure called "flower", became the leitmotiv that the author developed throughout the piece and four movement sequences from the solo *Preformation* became the theme, appearing in different variations (ibid., 52).

### 1.3 Phase 3 – transmission of the movement language developed for Underneath the Clouds

**Table 3: Phase 3**

Phase	Research Task/ Method	Description	Inspiration
Phase 3 13.02. - 01.06.2023 at Alma Mater Europaea Dance -Academy	Built from Traces	With five dancers, passing on material plus working on physical qualities. The solo "Preformation" as base for a fixed movement material and "Inside the bubble" as base for the structure.	Deborah Hay Trisha Brown Contact Improvisation Dejan Srhoj Flying Low Rosana Hribar Irena Tomažin Zagoričnik

Source: Greiner 2023a, 34.

**"Process:"**

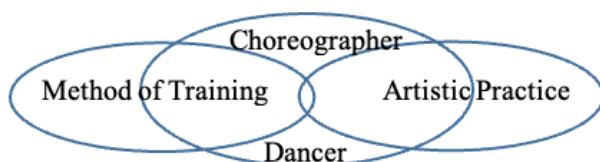
The phase started with introducing the dancers Daša Resnik, Rea Vogrin, Lija Mozetič and Jelena Radoičić to the materials, step by step, teaching them the short sequences of the solo *Preformation* as well as the structure of the trio *Inside the Bubble*. Then the spatial and choreographic structure of the former trio was expanded and adapted to become a quintet. Aside from that the process also consisted of exercises tuning into the space and partnering to get a feeling for the connection between the dancers. Additionally, there was small research on movement qualities resulting from embodying objects." (ibid., 35)

As this third phase is a transition phase, introducing the four dancers, who would perform the final piece with the author, to the movement language and spatial structures it is best suited to analyse the effect of the transmission. It has to be said, that in this phase the author was not just working as a choreographer with the dancers, she was also passing on principles and skills to them that were of importance for the work on the choreography of *Underneath the Clouds* (ibid., 51).

I guided the dancers in achieving more presence and awareness of the space and their bodies similarly like Dejan Srhoj does in his project *Choreographing Differences* that consists of his work with a layperson group every Friday night for seven years now transmitting principles like the ones of Deborah Hay and Steve Paxton (Greiner 2023b). While of course it would not be helpful if the choreographer had to teach basic movement technique and spatial principles to the dancers, I assume that with every new piece and therefore newly found movement material and physical qualities the choreographer has to introduce the dancers to them and transmit her focus of the work. Therefore, it is helpful for the choreographer to also have a knowledge of pedagogical skills. (Greiner 2023a, 51)

One of the main questions in the beginning of the book *Dance Techniques 2010 - Tanzplan Germany*, "[w]hat is the relationship between artistic production / process and technique?" (Diehl and Lampert 2014, 10) is also the core question of this work. As stated by Diehl and Lampert the method of practice influences the artistic practice, since a certain training comes with a way of working and therefor influences also the approach to a creation process. Nowadays, there is no strict school to follow, the contemporary dance, honouring it's name, evolves with each teacher on basis of their "personal background, evolving cultural situations, as well as by the crossover and fusion of material and methods." (Diehl and Lampert 2014, 12)." (Greiner 2023a, 51).

**Figure 1: Connection of artistic productions and dance techniques**



Source: Greiner 2023a, 51.

Methods of training of the dancer influences the artistic practice of the choreographer since it determines the skills of the dancer, while also the choreographer influences the method of training of the dancer with her artistic practice, since some new skills could be developed throughout the creation

process [Figure1]. Transferring this mechanism on [the third] phase [...], the dancers entered the process with a certain set of skills and knowledge like mine, being students at the AMEU, so actually I did not have to teach them anything new. However, with the connection of the movement material *Preformation* into the structure of *Inside the Bubble* and the emphasis on the physical quality rather than on the forms and shape of the body it was necessary to establish a shared understanding for presence, following Deborah Hay's practice, resulting in the dancer being absolutely in the moment leading to the "willingness to be seen" (Foster 1986, 9), as well as for the physical quality with which the movement is executed. (Greiner 2023a, 52).

Concerning the physical work, it has to be said that since all the contemporary dance techniques derive from the biomechanics of the human body, they likely share similar manifestations in form and shape. Nevertheless, building the movement language for *Underneath the Clouds*, the author executed them with consciousness towards their origin and transmitted the movements to her fellow dancers with reference to their roots. "For example, the running used in the three circles [...], [she] learned in a Flying Low class with Milán Újvári, so when practicing the running for the composition [she] would explain the principles, like being grounded and making use of the spiral" (Greiner 2023a, 55).

As a result, the movement language of *Underneath the Clouds* consists of defined shapes that build sequences like a sentence in a text. The shapes, like words can be interchanged, repeated or pronounced in another way. Through the transmission the shapes were clarified and deepened in their quality. (ibid., 57). Through the implementation of the movement language in the spatial structures, danced by the five dancers its origins remained apparent, however the whole composition gained an original meaning, that will be discussed in the next sub-chapter.

#### 1.4 Phase 4 – the transformation of the selected traces into an individual path

**Table 4: Phase 4**

Phase	Research Task/ Method	Description	Inspiration
Phase 4 01.09. - 10.10.2023	Underneath the Clouds	Composition and Rehearsing of a 20 min piece using the outcome of the work of the first three phases.	Dejan Srhoj Trisha Brown The clouds and the wind

Source: Greiner 2023a, 43.

##### "Process:"

Working on the materials of *Preformation*, *Inside the Bubble* and the qualities in the prior phases, a lot of material was at my disposal. First of all, I narrowed down the "text" used for creating the composition, meaning I decided on four of the six movement sequences created for *Preformation* that build the group work and left the two others for my solo work. [...] After the selection of the "text", a last phase of experimentation and exploration started creating many different variations of the movement sequences changing their tempo, size, spacing as well as the physical quality they are executed with. Additionally, the formation of the dancers in space was explored. Starting with the creation of the duet, continuing into the trio and finally establishing the quintet, that also includes simultaneous trios, duets or solos. The rehearsals were twice visited by the musician Vita Kobal, who created a soundtrack especially for *Underneath the Clouds*. (Greiner 2023a, 44)

During the process of creating *Underneath the Clouds* it soon became clear, that it was not just the piece that was created out of selected traces of contemporary dance, but also in the piece itself traces were left and rediscovered. With setting a clear geometrical structure, of the three circles that build the figure eight with ring, into space, its manifestation is naturally leaving traces that are constantly rediscovered by the dancing bodies. (ibid., 55)

The process of creating *Underneath the Clouds*, as a study of creating a movement language out of the selected traces, that manifested in the authors dancing body, revealed another layer through the interrelation of several bodies in space. What now seems obvious, was only detected in the last phase. The dancers, all female, relating to each other through the circular spatial structure and shared movement language, are a reflection of the authors relation to the two women who raised her (ibid., 62). This content of the dance piece was detected by a friend visiting the rehearsal as an outside eye, as well as by a mentor (ibid., 65).

So, it turns out that the three circles (figure eight shape with ring) resemble, my mother, aunt and me, while the choreography resembles our connection, with all the struggles and support. With the entering of the fourth and fifth dancer in the second part of the piece the relationships and bonds are extended into a further net of female connections, including the other women that surround us. (ibid., 62).

This shows that the transformation of the selected traces did not happen on a physical level, but more on the level of expression. The selected traces coming together in *Underneath the Clouds* are the means to express an original and personal matter.

### 3 CONCLUSION

The research started from the point, where the author was wondering what shapes her movement language consisted of. Through the four phases the exploration expanded from working on shapes, to working on shapes in space then into the transmission of the movement language and finally the performance of *Underneath the Clouds*. In the first three phases the theoretical research of the selected traces of contemporary dance informed the work to a great extent. The last phase, however, was more about the traces that were created by the dancers momentarily in space. In the result, the dance piece *Underneath the Clouds*, there are moments where the selected traces are detectable, and one can say this is a spiralling out of the floor like it is practiced in Flying Low. Or, here the torso is curved and swung like in an AML class, however the movement material became more than just shapes in space. Using all the knowledge gained throughout her studies and especially the one gained from the selected traces, the author was able to transform each trace by setting it into a new context, the one of *Underneath the Clouds*. That means the creation did not lead to new forms and a unique movement language, but to the expression of a personal matter.

To conclude the research demonstrates that through a consistent and conscious work with certain techniques and approaches to the moving body one can express their individual concerns in a sustainable and dignified way. Thus, personal experiences to a certain extent can shape and inform an academic process.

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## SHORT BIO

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## BALLET PERFORMANCE BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION

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### ABSTRACT

*The theme of this paper was inspired by my students, more specifically by the question they raised in one of the courses I teach: why do contemporary choreographers such as Mats Ek, Mathew Bourne, Jean Christoph Maillot, and Akram Kahn choose to recreate shows from the classical ballet repertoire? Indeed, the question is justified if we remember that the 20<sup>th</sup> century began with the birth of modern dance, by taking up an opposition to classical ballet and its tradition of over three centuries. Surprisingly, at the end of the same century, great established contemporary dance choreographers are reviving the titles of classical ballets in a modern version. This phenomenon, we might say, brings the question: what is it that fascinates these creators, and audiences alike, about these choreographic creations, for surely there is no lack of inspiration here?*

*The paper analyses the specific structure of classical ballets, the socio-cultural context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which represents the peak of their creation, as well as their universal value that crosses the centuries until now, even in the conditions of the augmentation of the choreographic vision with effects specific to modern technology multimedia.*

**Keywords:** contemporary choreographers, classical ballet, socio-cultural context

## 1 CLASSICAL BALLET TRADITION

The theme of the paper relates to the question raised by my students who asked me why choreographers such as Mats Ek, Mathew Bourne, Jean Christoph Maillot and Akram Kahn choose to revive the titles of classical ballets. Their question is justified if we consider that the 20<sup>th</sup> century began with the birth of modern dance that took up an opposition to classical ballet and its tradition of over three centuries. Surprisingly, at the end of the same century, great established contemporary dance choreographers are reviving the titles of classical ballets in a modern version. This phenomenon, we might say, poses the question: what is it that fascinates these creators, and audiences alike, about these choreographic creations, definitely it is not lack of inspiration.

Let us first analyse the choreographic model, the peak of which history records in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Nightmare*, the painting of the Swiss painter Henry Fuseli from 1781, perhaps best represents the Romanticism era, an artistic movement that began at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and lasted until the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is an era that introduces new aesthetic categories such as the sublime, the grotesque, the macabre and the fantastic; it cultivates states such as sensitivity, imagination, originality, fantasy and mystery. It is a period in which Europe is torn apart by the Napoleonic wars, and artists offer in their creations an escape from this traumatic reality through dreaming, in a nocturnal or exotic setting. Their sources of inspiration are: tradition, folklore, the historical past of the people, especially of the Middle Ages, which gives the artistic movement a patriotic national character. Particular importance is attached to feelings, especially love, and inner feelings, which are harmonized with the natural landscape. The romantic characters are always dominated by imagination and intense feelings. The main structural feature is antithesis. The following paragraphs look at how these characteristics translate into a classical ballet performance.

What Jean-Georges Noverre wrote in his famous book *Letters on dancing and ballets* (1760) will materialize only after a century in the performances created by Marius Petipa, and no less, by his famous collaborators. Today, we would classify this kind of a performance as a blockbuster: over 130 performers on stage, an orchestra of at least 100 players, sets made of wooden, pulleys with which the dancers fly over the stage, dozens of costumes, hand-painted backdrops for each tableau, scenic effects, lighting, etc.

The structure of the performance included: a prologue – 3 or 4 acts – and an epilogue; the acts were in turn made up of *tableaux* and the *tableaux* contained choreographic structures and *mise-en-scène*, which made the unfolding of the dramatic action intelligible. The duration of such a performance was up to 5 hours, with intermissions. Unlike today, when audiences watch a performance for aesthetic, cultural reasons, in those days watching a performance was primarily an act of socializing, an opportunity to meet people of the same social standing in public. It must not be forgotten that classical ballet was originally a form of entertainment specific to the aristocratic class, the nobility.

The libretto was always inspired by myths, legends and folk tales, which makes it part of the artistic movement of Romanticism. The dramatic action unfolded on two levels: real and dreamlike. The choreographic score, created in a codified and standardized language, according to the principles of classicism, was hierarchical: ensemble, soloists and first soloists, with specific choreographic structures.

With the premiere of ballet *Giselle*, the primacy of the male ballet dancer was dethroned, and the ballerina took over his place. From that moment on, the role of the man in the choreographic score was gradually reduced to that of a *porteur*, the only opportunity to stand out was being in the popular stage dances, which were integrated into the structure of the classical ballet performance.

The spatial unfolding of the ensemble dances related to the point of vanish, which creates a 3-D perception of the performance, we would say today. Last but not least, the dancers who were part of the ensemble, participated directly in the *mise-en-scène*, to the performance of the dramatic action.

The relationship between music and dance was one of subordination. Specific to the creation of these ballets was precisely the musical score, composed according to the ballet master's instructions. Even Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, who brought the symphonic character of the musical score to ballet, adapted to these requirements.

## 1.1 Composition of ballets

After radiographing this choreographic type, the initial question returns with even more force: what is it about the composition of these ballets, created two centuries ago, that makes modern approaches so interesting? The phenomenon itself is not specific to choreographic art, but it can be argued that it was rather the theatre directors of the 1970s and the 1980s who initiated it, and applied it to the staging of operas, such as Peter Brook, Oskaras Korsunovas, Thomas Ostermaier, Silviu Purcărete, Andrei Șerban and Petrică Ionesco, just to mention a few.

The answer can be found in the libretto's theme, inspired by myths, legends and folk tales. These in turn are structured on archetypes! Carl Gustav Jung (2014) described archetypes as forms through which instincts manifest themselves, and instincts are like biological patterns. They are patterns of behaviour shared by all humanity. Their characteristics are:

1. **Universality** - across space and time, across cultures and eras;
2. **Bipolarity** – each archetype has positive as well as negative complementary qualities;
3. **Powerful impact** – by coming into contact with the authentic energy of an archetype, we can experience a state of fascination, we feel that we are experiencing the image of something wonderful – spiritual, divine, luminous and beyond conscious, rational understanding;
4. **The absolute** – any archetype has such a great impact because it represents an essentialization of everything that is good or bad, gigantic or something extremely small.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are 3 types of approaches to classical ballet:

1. **Traditional** – which refers to the staging closest to the original version of the performance;
2. **Eclectic** – which uses a diversified artistic language in relation to the original version;
3. **Innovative** – in which the original ballet libretto is merely a pretext for proposing a new performance.

The most revealing example of this is Edward Clug's version of ballet *Sleeping Beauty*, named *Sleeping Beauty Dreams*, whose world premiere took place at the Ziff Opera House in Miami (USA) in 2018. The plot of his performance begins with the question: what exactly did Aurora dream about during the 100 years she slept? But the subject is only an aspect of this production. Even more unusual is the way this exploration is staged. It is an interplay between the real and the imaginary through a combination of live action, film and virtual reality. The integration of live action and pre-filmed action, either superimposed or as a repetition or addition to the phrase, are not new processes, but the results are stunning. The difference here consists in the live presentation of dancers and avatars, responding in real time to any action of the dancers on stage (with a backdrop or filmed projection), all in a digital world of images, film and music: it can be said that, in terms of technical means used, we are witnessing a marriage of the technical with the technics.

## 2 BALLET COPPELIA

In order to better understand this whole process of re-adaptation from different historical perspectives, this paper will analyse the staging of a classical ballet in relation to all three approaches. This ballet has been selected because it is less commented on, although in the history of the development of choreographic performance, it represents an important landmark, primarily because of the theme of its libretto. Ballet *Coppelia* or *The Daughter with the Enamel Eyes* was created in 1870 in the original choreography by Arthur Saint-Leon, with music composed by Leo Delibes, to a libretto written by Arthur Saint-Leon with Charles Nuitter, inspired by the novel *The Sandman* by E. T. A. Hoffmann. The story of this ballet is based on the archetype of the Magician, namely his Shadow, the negative side.

E. T. A. Hoffmann is considered both a pioneer of Romanticism and of fantastic, horror literature. In central and northern European folklore, the mythical Sandman lulls people to sleep and sprinkles magic sand over their eyes, to give them pleasant dreams. But the German author, E. T. A. Hoffmann, gave the story a macabre twist. Thus, his Man throws sand into the eyes of children who refuse to sleep. Their eyes fall out, and then he gathers them up, as food for his children.

This story, published in 1814, even inspired an extremely valuable essay by the renowned psycho-



analyst Sigmund Freud entitled *The Uncanny*, the theme of the eyes being interpreted as fear of castration. There are several performances and even art films created over the years after this novel, for example: the ballet created by Christian Spuck for the Stuttgart company in 2006, the modern opera composed by Anna Calvi directed by Robert Wilson in 2017 for the Düsseldorf theatre, or the Netflix art series in 2022, being only the most recent of these. It is worth mentioning that the libretto of the classical ballet took only a few elements of this horror story, turning the show into a comedy. The plot develops on Coppélius' relationship with Franz, who is in turn engaged to Swanilda, whom he manipulates into falling in love with the doll Coppelia, whom he created. Saint-Leon's original choreographic version fully respects the characteristics of the classical ballet performance and is now found in the repertoire of many ballet companies around the world in traditional staging directly inspired by it.

The first eclectic approach to this ballet can be found in French choreographer Roland Petit's 1976 version, created for the National Ballet of Marseille. Compared to the original version, Petit develops both dramatically and choreographically the character of Coppélius, played by himself, and his relationship with Coppelia, the doll he created. It is followed by another version in 1993, also by a French choreographer, Maguy Marin, for the Lyon Ballet. This time, the choreographer chooses to return to one of the characteristics of Romanticism, by setting the second act not in the puppet workshop, but in Coppélius' dream, who gets Franz drunk in order to steal his soul and transfer it to Coppelia.

In 2021, at the height of the COVID 19 pandemic, the Scottish Ballet company is offering an innovative version of ballet *Coppelia*. In this staging, the structure of the story remains the same, but the setting is like the Silicon Valley Innovation Centre. Coppélius is this time a tech guru with a huge ego preoccupied with developing a new model of a space rocket – in case we had any doubts, we are in Elon Musk territory. In his NuLife lab, he is creating Coppelia, an AI being that can exist in body form. This is where sceptical journalist Swanhilda comes in, both fascinated and intrigued by the lab's creations. Choreographically, much of the movement has the sleek ergonomics of a Jonathan Ive design. It is elegantly functional with some clever details. There is a Gangnam-inspired TikTok dance at a tech brotherhood party, and when Swanhilda heads to the lab, she finds not clichéd robot moves, but an oddly beautiful scene of AI robots creating Rorschach-like shapes, with extended limbs. In turn, composers Mikael Karlsson and Michael P. Atkinson use fragments of Delibes' music in a score that travels from electronic soundscape to full orchestra, connecting the drama with the cool aesthetic of the stage. The music and video are synthesized into a well-paced narrative that genuinely asks some relevant questions and boldly refuses to tie it all together with a neat bow and a romantic *pas de deux*. This version of *Coppelia* represents another successful step into the future of ballet.

### 3 CONCLUSION

If we were to draw a conclusion from the text above, a few ideas would certainly stand out. Firstly, only classical ballet performances are based on an archetype and can support modern approaches. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that there are also pragmatic reasons for reviving such a performance: the success of the work over the years, meaning that the title on the poster alone would fill the hall with ballet lovers and classical art lovers alike. It is indeed both a marketing and a target development strategy, here targeting young audiences tempted to watch a performance made with state-of-the-art technical means, they are familiar with.

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# FLAMENCO DANCE IMPROVISATION: AN EXPANDED PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

*This study looks at improvisation within flamenco, taking dance as its axis and approaching it from an expanded perspective. The objectives focus on examining the different uses of improvisation in flamenco dance and observing the different configurations that have been developed in recent decades. The methodology used was based on an empirical approach and participant observation to establish a content analysis based on the collection of bibliographical data and interviews.*

*Three main types of improvisation related to flamenco dance have been identified: improvisation in, with and from flamenco. Improvisation in flamenco is constructed through established structures and norms, with functional objectives and specific results. On the other hand, improvisation with flamenco involves recognizing established codes, and in turn reconfigures them through boundary displacements. However, improvisation from flamenco expands and blurs the boundaries by using a language that cuts across other artistic disciplines.*

*In conclusion, improvisation in flamenco employs predefined boundaries and structures, while improvising with flamenco allows one to explore within those structures and to redefine the margins. Finally, improvising from flamenco applies and expands an additional language transcending space and aesthetics. In short, improvising in flamenco conforms to the rules, improvising with flamenco plays with them, and improvising from flamenco uses them as further influences in a wider context.*

**Keywords:** improvisation, dance, flamenco, margins, structures, Lego

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This research arises from the need to reflect on the practices of improvisation in the field of flamenco that have been carried out over the last two decades, in order to analyze more precisely the concepts, practices and spaces that specifically connect flamenco dance and improvisation.

Currently, flamenco is defined and practiced in different ways (contemporary flamenco, traditional, experimental, fusion, among others), and, similarly, there are different approaches to defining and practicing improvisation (contact improvisation, instant composition, body expression, among others). Therefore, it is pertinent to explore the different modes of improvisation present in flamenco dance, to provide a focus for future broader studies and from different spheres, including pedagogical and creative ones.

My interest in investigating this topic in detail arose during an improvisation seminar organized by dancer Ladina Bucher in Zurich (Switzerland) between July 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> 2018. At this event, I was invited as a speaker and dancer, participating in a series of lectures and improvisations. This context of reflection and practice was fundamental to start identifying and defining the different approaches to improvisation in flamenco dance and to glimpse its usefulness, as well as its applications in various fields, such as composition, body expression, pedagogy, practical research, and artistic creation.

Therefore, the initial objectives focused on examining the different types of improvisation present in flamenco dance and observing the different configurations that have evolved, as well as the motifs and consequences that have had an impact both on stage spaces and on the choreographic gestures and aesthetics of flamenco itself.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study is based on an empirical approach, using my experience as both subject and object of study in my roles as a dance practitioner, pedagogue, choreographer, and dance researcher. It was extended through participant observation and content analysis from the collection and analysis of bibliographic, video and interview data.

Importantly, my research was conducted from practical research perspectives, conducting improvisation sessions over several years in collaboration with other artists to gain a more complete picture of the different approaches that have been developed.

Both participant observation and content analysis were influenced by the frameworks I have developed as a dance professional over the past 15 years. These frameworks include:

- The activity *Tócame las palmas*, where I coordinated improvisations between flamenco artists as part of the artistic program, I organized in the Flamenco Empírico series at the Mercat de les Flors and CCCB in Barcelona between 2009 and 2015. Some of the reflections and debates in this regard are reflected in Carolane Sánchez's doctoral thesis and in her documentary *Mémoire(s): les corps flamenco empiriques*.
- *POSTABLAO*, a name I have been using since 2019 in Barcelona for improvisation meetings under altered flamenco tablao structures. This aesthetic alteration of the traditional structure aims to expand the possibilities of combinations, involving analogies with other artistic disciplines such as a film projectionist playing the role of cante by projecting filmed documents or an electronic synthesizer in the role of guitar, also allowing the audience to be part of the improvisation as part of the traditional structure.
- *IM FLAME*, scenic improvisations between flamenco and urban dance artists present in the program I curated at the Tanzhaus flamenco festival in Düsseldorf since 2021. This space seeks inter-generational and interdisciplinary exchange by broadening the context and mediation between a younger audience and flamenco.
- Improvisation practices as a practical and artistic research tool within the research flamenco laboratory, which I have been coordinating since 2017 in the research and innovation area of the Institut del Teatre, Barcelona. Reflections can be found reflected in a blog where the laboratory records its research processes.

It is important to mention the considerable scarcity of bibliographical material related to improvisation in flamenco dance that contributes relevant data to this study. However, reference is made to one of the first publications where the concept of improvisation linked to flamenco dance appears: the chapter *Reading Improvisation in Flamenco and Postmodern Dance* by Dr Michelle Heffner, included in a compilation on improvisation in dance: *Taken By Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader* (2003). In this book, Heffner analyses certain aspects such as authenticity, duende and the stereotypes that permeate both postmodern dance and flamenco. As a dancer and researcher, she also delves into the similarities and differences in the approach to improvisation in both dance styles.

### 3 IMPROVISATION IN, WITH AND FROM FLAMENCO

During the research process, I identified three main modes of improvisation related to flamenco which I called: improvisation *in* flamenco, improvisation *with* flamenco and improvisation *from* flamenco. Considering the rhythmic, spatial and temporal structures of flamenco, I found it relevant to use two terms to clarify my discourse: limit and margin. The former represents a real or imaginary line that divides two territories, while the latter alludes to the edge of something. Limit, therefore, could speak to us of division and centrality, while the latter refers to the periphery, an extra-boundary space that always expands at the edges or beyond them.

In flamenco improvisation, I observe that the margins are more restricted because the limits are generally more rigid at the level of form and content, as well as uses of time and space. As Heffner mentions (2003, 111) "*Even in the most spontaneous gathering of dancers who play palmas for one another as they trade solos, the codes for improvisation are strictly prescribed*".

The structures that propose the very act of improvising, for example, in a tablao, have certain objectives. These objectives can be agreed upon verbally between the participants: for example, agreeing on a tone that defines a flamenco palo, the clothing for that palo, whether or not to finish off a verse, whether to close a section with or without footwork, the number of verses sung, etc.

Also, sometimes, these objectives are recognized or identified by a previous trial-and-error learning. Generally, trial and error is understood thanks to an external confirmation or denial. For example, when the guitar player does not accompany you at a certain point in your dance, there is something in your dance that this person has not grasped (because of an absence of body code or choreographic gesture that differs from the one recognized in that context); therefore, you accept that it is perhaps not the right cue to share. You try to find out which is the right one, perhaps by confirmation from external body cue of approval. An *Olé* is often a confirmation identified as approval.

Other more subtle objectives also appear in flamenco improvisation: to create a bond of affection and acceptance with those who accompany you (vocals, guitar) or to see how the audience responds to a gesture that is usually rewarded with applause, a jaleo or laughter.

All this leads us to observe that improvisation *in* flamenco can tend to be constructed and supported by production perspectives. Searching for functionality and results.

On the other hand, improvisation *with* flamenco allows us to recognize the limits imposed by the structures and codes of flamenco language, but with the intention of repositioning and moving through the margins. For example, when improvising *with* flamenco, we continue to use and perceive, to a greater or lesser extent, the aesthetics of flamenco, even if the form or the sound, if it were a singer and guitarist, distances itself "a few millimeters" from how flamenco is represented according to the collective imagination (exotic and romantic). For example, in a flamenco improvisation, one could more or less use the structure of a farruca dance (introduction, lyrics of singer, zapateado/foot tapping, ending), but the movements and the aesthetics of the dancer are inspired by the representation of an animal. The difference then, with respect to improvisation *in* flamenco (which was mentioned earlier), where structure, concept and form go together in the same meaning, would be that, in flamenco improvisation, the structures and concepts would be used, but there would be a slight variation in the forms, but not in the movement. We could rely on the comparison that Heffner makes between postmodern improvisation and flamenco improvisation when she

says: "*Improvisation in flamenco enervates established codes, but rarely changes those codes. While structured improvisations in postmodern dance may be strictly organized, movement invention is often recognized as an important component of the improvisation*" (2003, 114-115).

Lastly, improvisation *from* flamenco tends to be constructed by blurring the limits and expanding the margins. It tries, on the one hand, to maintain languages that are transversal to other artistic disciplines and, on the other, to vary both forms and structures. Nevertheless, traces of flamenco are maintained because the dance continues to embrace referential bodily motifs (foot tapping, hand movements, etc.), but they are approached in different ways and using different techniques. For example, stomping with or without shoes horizontally against the wall while someone makes a crystal sound and accompanies a live voice that is equalized with an auto-tune effect, sometimes emulating the melismatic sound of a flamenco singer.

To help summarize, I take the example shared by guitarist Ulrich Gottwald *El Rizo* after his improvisation during the seminar in Zurich mentioned earlier. According to Ulrich, one way to understand the concept of improvisation would be to compare it to the pieces of a LEGO construction set. Even if the order of the pieces can be changed, they are still defined as LEGO pieces. In view of this, we could say that the first denomination, improvisation *in* flamenco, would be seen as constructed through established structures and rules, with functional objectives and specific results. The relationship between dance, song and guitar maintains internal codes that allow us to move within hierarchical, aesthetic, rhythmic and spatial limits. If we take LEGO as an example, we would be progressively assembling the pieces to build an object with a recognizable structure: for example, a castle, a house, a car, etc.

In contrast, improvisation *with* flamenco would involve recognizing established codes, but also reconfiguring them through slight shifts of boundaries. This would invite us to explore slight deviations from aesthetic, sound and gestural symbols. In other words, we would take LEGO pieces to build a castle by replacing the battlements of its towers with cars.

In the last category, improvisation *from* flamenco, we would not only use the pieces provided by LEGO, but we would also be creating new ones during the construction process. This would generate another type of object, comparable in dance to generating new aesthetics, rhythms, sonorities and gestures.

At present, we could point out that improvisation *in* flamenco continues to be practiced in spaces such as tablaos, theatres, official training schools, where expectations are fulfilled for both the sender and the receiver. Improvisation *with* flamenco appears to be practiced in other scenic and pedagogical contexts (site-specifics, non-conventional spaces, private training) trying to establish a first bridge with other disciplines. And improvisation *from* flamenco is carried out as an act of inclusion of other knowledge, innovation in formats and hybridization of forms within the living arts: reconfiguring new spectators and even requalifying new spaces or including new definitions of the artistic, as the Spanish pedagogue, Inma Garín Martínez, invites us to think in her article *Artes vivas: definición, polémicas y ejemplos* (Garín 2018, 2).

Before offering conclusions, I must point out that, although I have practiced in these three modes of improvisation within flamenco, my personal interest as an artist, pedagogue and researcher is focused on improvising from flamenco. It allows me to amplify my resources and, in turn, to share them with other people who have different abilities; therefore, identifying, questioning, sharing and amplifying our knowledge, while other meanings of the language and practice of flamenco unfold before me. Like the guitarist Ulrich explained, I am interested in building new tabs while using existing ones as I build the structures during an improvisation.

On a pedagogical level, I have for a long time been dissecting flamenco and have deciphered it into its essential elements. For example, I have come to define that the essentials of dancing flamenco can be summed up in percussing with the feet on the floor and moving the hands from the little finger. I have explored the possibilities of the body beyond the references and forms that flamenco language has given me. For example, I have observed that flamenco dance in its traditional format and due to a certain configuration of the space next to the musicians tends to use frontality with the spectators. So, I set out to experiment with how my flamenco body can move and emit in other directions in space. I have also practiced the idea of internal rhythm to expand my bodily relationship with the beat, observing the constant and existing pulse in sound spaces. This has allowed me to in-

habit silence and thereby expand the spaces not usually inhabited in flamenco. All these reflections resulting from my research over these years are reflected in pedagogical material that has been collected in the book *El método flamenco empírico* edited by the Spanish journalist Sara Esteller and included in the collection of pedagogical materials of the Institut del Teatre, Barcelona. In the method, there are eight axes that articulate my practice transversally: aesthetic experience, corporeality, the fantastic five, pulse-rhythm-compasses, states, zapateado, improvisation and composition.

I define the improvisation section in the following way:

I approach improvisation from three approaches: the one that pedagogically approaches a re-signification of flamenco gesture through spontaneity and abstraction; the one that proposes new relationships between bodies and physical spaces, sound spaces and silence; and the one that artistically affects through the hybridization between artistic disciplines. Therefore, when I improvise from flamenco, I try to use the language of flamenco as another language. As another reference within my artistic practices and interests.

This definition also speaks to how my margins in this moment move and expand in broad directions. A moment in which I am fully aware of my perceptions and in turn allows me to expand my abilities. For example, within an improvisation, I can use the flamenco palo of Soleá as a bodily state within my danced discourse. At the same time, I allow myself to use a type of corporeality, a use of space or the relationship to the sound that I identify within myself as Soleá. I do not need to rely solely on its musical structure (lyrics, meter, etc.) or on a bodily structure (markings, foot tapping choreography, etc.).

During an improvisation, when that state or another state appears, I accept what happens. I prepare myself to continue listening and responding to what is being proposed from the other bodies present (dance, music or other artistic disciplines), without the demands that the flamenco vocabulary itself can make on me. This practice has helped me, for example, to become more and more friendly in my communication with the zapateado. I don't make "sequences of foot tapping". I generate sounds.

I have to clarify that, currently, when I improvise from flamenco, I replace the word structure in my vocabulary with composition. Steve Paxton says in this regard: *"If we accept that there is such a thing as composition in improvisation or compositional improvisation, then we open the door to decision making; making individual decisions in a situation"* (Paxton, 2016, 64).

## 4 CONCLUSION

Study and continuous practice have allowed me to have an optimal relationship with the ingredients that make up flamenco, as well as with those that from which it is apparently not made or are not very representative of the form. For example, improvising with other music, or dancing with extreme slowness, or using laughter as a rhythmic element, among others. This attitude has progressively opened me towards an understanding of artistic acts far removed from an evaluation under binary concepts, those that divide things into only two options: to be one thing or the other.

In short, I have moved further and further away from the debate about whether something is flamenco or not. I understand flamenco beyond its formal, gestural, sonorous, conceptual limits. It is in the movement of its margins that I find the spaces for improvisation.

By way of a final conclusion, we could say that improvisation *in* flamenco employs stricter limits and structures, while improvisation *with* flamenco allows us to explore within those structures and redefine the margins. Finally, improvisation *from* flamenco applies and extends an additional language transcending space and aesthetics. In short, improvisation *in* flamenco conforms to the rules, improvisation *with* flamenco plays with them and improvisation *from* flamenco uses them as a further influence in a wider context.

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COMMUNICATION  
MANAGEMENT

EUROPEAN  
BUSINESS STUDIES  
PROJECT MANAGEMENT



PROJECT  
MANAGEMENT

PHYSIOTHERAPY



HEALTH SCIENCES  
Nursing, Public Health,  
Physiotherapy,  
Integrative Health Sciences,  
Autism



PHYSIOTHERAPY

NURSING



ARCHIVES  
MANAGEMENT



ARCHIVES AND  
RECORDS MANAGEMENT



ARCHIVAL SCIENCES

## ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

DANCE,  
CHOREOGRAPHY



DANCE STUDIES



WEB AND  
INFORMATION  
TECHNOLOGIES



WEB SCIENCE  
AND TECHNOLOGY



APPLIED ARTIFICIAL  
INTELLIGENCE