

SEAD SALZBURG

Creative Observation

Solo Project Report

Maria Teresa Tanzarella

2013/2014

choreographer: Roberto Olivan

extract of „A place to bury strangers“

mentor: Susan Quinn

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During my solo project work I felt like in a family. First because many people have been involved in it (some of them very dear to me), and then because the places connected to it are all quite familiar to me.

When I was looking for a solo and Susan suggested me to have a look at the work of Roberto Olivan¹ I had no doubts in choosing “A Place to Bury Strangers”. The piece (80min for five dancers) has been awarded with the prize “Ciutat de Barcelona 2013”, and got the nomination for the prize “Premis Butaca 2013” and “Premis Zirkólíka 2013”. It is a co-production of *Enclave Arts del Moviment* and *Mercat de les Flors*. The dramaturgy is by Roberto Magro and the original music is composed by Laurent Delforge. It was created in 2013 in Deltebre, the Spanish hometown of Roberto Olivan, where he founded the *Enclave Espai de Creació*, and where the *Festival Deltebre Dansa* takes place. I have been in the festival in 2012, therefore I have still very vivid in my memory the pictures of the town, the landscapes, the green building of the *Espai de Creació* and I could easily use them as a background of the piece, during my process of learning it and getting into it.

I chose the solo at the beginning of the piece, created by Felipe Salazar Hidalgo², because of the mysterious attraction I had towards it and because I already knew Felipe and I was sure he would have accepted to work with me. Since the solo was shorter than the minimum length required, I also wrote to Spela Vodeb³ (whom I also knew already) asking if I could learn her solo (in the end of the piece) as well, but, for different reasons, she turned my attention to the unison duet (danced by Spela and Sol Vazquez, whom I danced with in the *Festival Deltebre Dansa*) that comes right after Felipe’s solo. I had met Roberto Olivan during my first year in SEAD, and even if I did not take class with him, I felt connected with his work and fascinated to have the chance to dive deeper into it. I wrote to him to ask the permission to learn the material of his piece, and I was glad to hear that he was very happy about it and willing to see my process through video. Hence, my solo is the synthesis of four different people, who created it and supported me in different ways during my learning time. I thought that the fact that I knew all these people quite well would have made it easier for me to enter into their bodies and physicalities and intentions. Even if it did create a strong connection, I discovered that this thought was wrong.

¹ See end for biography

² See end for biography

³ See end for biography

Decrypting the video, getting possession of the material

The first phase of my work consisted in learning the steps from the video. I had two videos of the premiere of the full piece, shot from different angles. As an additional help for the first part, I got a video of Magi Serra Foraste⁴ and his interpretation of the solo. This was very helpful, because seeing how another body was dealing with the same material I was studying made some things clearer. Everything happened very quickly; as soon as I chose the solo, Felipe told me that he would be coming to Salzburg and that he wished that I knew all the material by then: this meant that I had only two weeks to roughly know everything. Considering that I also had classes in those weeks, as usual, it has been a tiring time of fast and intense early-morning or late-evening rehearsals.

Despite the short term, the process of learning from a video, I discovered, is slow and complicated and requires a lot of patience and repetition. It seemed that the more I was refining my eyes for details, the more the work was becoming slower. In my bubble of solitude and concentration, I was spending long time watching the same few seconds of video, always rewinding in the attempt to grasp as much as possible. Trajectories, directions, impulses, sequences, I wanted to master everything.

During the work I confronted myself with the issue of technique. My previous choices about the solo were oriented towards a more “theatrical - performative” kind of solos. When Susan suggested me more “dancy – technical” solos, I didn’t immediately understand the reason. While working, though, I found out the challenge: how can I still create a thick and tasty performance, how can I give life to a character, when this is not the main focus, when I still have to be precisely busy with technique? I started to reflect on what the role of technique is and how to think technique. I remembered Paul Virilio talking about dancers “ who were so arrogant, so proud that their work was technically perfect but emotionally dreadful. [...] I'm tempted to say that the great dancers I've just mentioned, those that I find so horrifying, are combatants; they have gestures and a way of revolving around themselves that resemble warriors, martial artists; they have a strength, an arrogance, a pride which makes them both perfect and dreadful. “⁵ I did not want to become this. My mission is to fiercely fight against this and to try to prove that it is possible to use technique as a support instead of as an emotionally empty cage.

⁴ The dancer who is currently replacing Felipe in some tour dates

⁵ Virilio, Paul. „Falling into the World: Gravitational Space”. *Sight Fall – The Time of Light*. Ed. Laurence Louppe, Daniel Dobbles and Daniel Williams. *Skywritings*, 2008. Web. 12 April 2014 <http://skywritings.blogspot.co.at/2008/12/sight-fall-time-of-light.html>

A new body

Felipe worked with me in Salzburg (another familiar place) for three weeks. I felt lucky to have him on a daily basis for so long; we took our time with no rush. In the beginning I was a bit disappointed by the idea of working with somebody I already knew, I saw it as a missed chance to meet someone new and enrich my network, but then I enjoyed the pros and cons of working with a close friend (not rarely we had fights, and not rarely they were adducing personal issues of our lives before and outside the solo project). On the other hand, neither Spela nor Sol could meet me to work on the duet, but Felipe (on Spela's idea) coached me and helped me a lot, while Spela wrote me feedbacks on the videos I was sending her and had some Skype sessions with me.

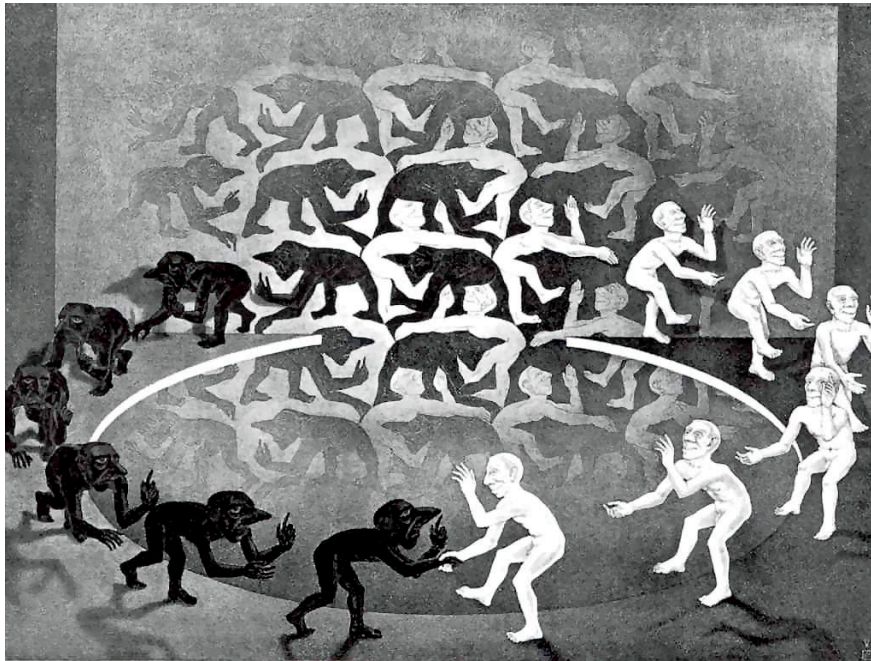
With Felipe the operation of inserting new information on what was already there began. I had to constantly remind myself to stay open and to let go of the previous information that had already become habit. We went through all the material, searching for connections, transitions, developments that were real in my body (for example I do not repeat a movement a certain number of times because this is what I counted in the video, but rather because I am applying and following the original idea of gradual development within my own body). Then we went through it again paying attention to the details, and then one more time talking about musicality, dynamics and music cues. Before using the real music track, we had another one that Felipe used when he was creating the solo and that, according to him, could give me the right intention, feeling and timing. Afterwards, we listened to the music many times, trying to locate moments I could connect to, where it was fixed and where I could freely play, where I had to speed up in order to slow down somewhere else.

We tried to avoid a flat performance and for Felipe it was important that I achieved a development throughout the whole piece and each individual movement. He wanted me to go through the same process he went through, so he first made me learn the solo how it was in the premiere of the piece (how it is in the video) and then, on top of it, he taught me the developed version, in which some movements became more complex, some faster and some others more extended. Moreover he was aiming to an even more refined version of the solo and to use me to correct all the mistakes and uncertainty that he had while performing, finding the best way to make it work, instead.

Felipe's way to guide me was very clear also because he used many different images and references to give me the idea of the movement. He used the terms hydraulic power, aerobic and anaerobic movement⁶, he often reminded me about the fundamental opposition between head and pelvis, he

⁶ Web. 9 April 2014 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anaerobic_exercise

showed me videos of drunken box kung fu ⁷ and drawings of Escher ⁸



and he gave names to the movements such as “the pine”, “the squirrel”, “the anemones”, “the ballet”.

We paid particular attention to those movements and little tricks that I could not do because they were too difficult, or I was not strong enough, or just because my body is different than his. First we found other solutions, movements that look the same or are based on the same principle, and then we trained them how they were supposed to be, to still try to make them happen. And, with my big surprise, they did happen. When Felipe had already left, after many rehearsals in which I only used the modified versions, I got curious to try again the real movement and I managed (the full version, or almost, at least the best I could do)! But this did not just come out of the blue. As a matter of fact Felipe created a warm up for me made of gradual exercises, that could help me for some movements of the solo, and of workout exercises to make me build a body as close as possible to his. This was very helpful both to become stronger by building the specific muscles that I needed and to understand better some difficult parts. I discovered how it is possible to learn something by training not exactly that something (and training something related to it, instead), therefore I practiced this warm up almost everyday with that “sense of duty and sacrifice”⁹ of us dancers. I do not know if it really made me strong, but I am sure it helped me also for the classes: I felt more centred and in balance in ballet, for example. I experienced “[...]a possible demonstration of *what the body is*: the original locus of event

Web. 9 April 2014 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aerobic_exercise

⁷ Web. 9 April 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIrt1IJr2Go>

⁸ Web. 9 April 2014 <http://www.writedesignonline.com/Prompts/Escher-Encounter.jpg>

⁹ Anderson Davies, Victoria. „Traces of technique: Soldiers, dancers and basic training”. *Movement Research: Performance Journal*. Aug. 2008

and transformation. [...] This <<originary>> transformability must not be understood as a simple fluidity, though [...] On the contrary, the transformability implies an inherent resistance, a *resistability*, in which resides the gravity of experience.”¹⁰ I experienced a body that is marked not by what it is, but for its potential to change.

It was difficult to find the best way to share my energy between the classes and the rehearsals. Of course I wanted to give my best to both, but also I had to make the most of the time with Felipe. I struggled trying not to get too tired from the classes (in order to be 100% productive in the rehearsals), but still being active and present. The solo project absorbed me so much that I had hard time in finding motivation and getting inspired to do anything else; I desired to have more time to invest in the solo. In general, I enjoyed the whole solo project because of the great feeling of having something to dive into on a daily basis, something to build my own practice on. The work was long and complex, but it made me happy to organize it and schedule it on my own.

Transitions

While Felipe’s solo is like an *ouverture* of the piece, a gradual introduction, the piece actually starts with Spela’s and Sol’s duet.

The piece is mainly about those people that were not accepted in their society because of being a bit different, crazy or rebellious. ”It seems very clear to me that the current social structure that is being imposed upon us is directed towards the formation of a certain type of individual, tameable and functional. Another group of people (unfortunately a minority group) reinforce their vision, thoughts and creativity, becoming authentic, unique, imaginative and somehow revolutionary. Some of them, at times, due to this visionary essence, become the explorers of society finding alternative ways of thinking, organization and global justice. These are the individuals who are usually labelled as outsiders, foreigners, the <<strange>>, the <<rare>>, [...] Then what do we do with this group of <<explorers>> when they die if we don’t contemplate them as collective members (dignity and memory are what remains when we are gone, and they give value and make people and their actions exist)? Is there any sense of respect towards those who seem forgotten? Where do we bury these

¹⁰ Manchev, Boyan. „Transformability: Performing Society and the Contemporary Conditions of Dance“ *Defining the Undefinable. European Dance Houses: A Recent Reality*. IDEE – Initiatives in Dance through European Exchange, Theater der Zeit Insert, April 2006: 19-20

strangers?”¹¹ writes Roberto Olivan.

In particular, the solo is built on a character that is a little bit loony or strange (and that therefore can not find a place in society), lost in his own world which he knows very well, but that still surprises him. Roberto calls him “utopic foreigner” inspired by Robin Hood. I tried to extend this feeling also to the duet part, in order to connect it with the solo part and to make my whole performance coherent (from this the ending of my performance derives, too). Felipe and me (with Spela’s help) focused on finding a transition between the two parts, both in a concrete way (what to do, which artistic choices to make) and on the level of intentions. The same attention was devoted to finding how I could transform a duet into a solo. In the duet Spela and Sol always move around the centre, circularly in and out like the image on a kaleidoscope, passing very close to each other, sliding next to each other almost without ever touching each other. Of course this could not happen with me alone on stage and for this reason we decided to use the help of light and to experiment with looks. This made it a little bit harder for me, since the two girls constantly create a centre in between them, while I had to adjust the movement to a fixed centre and see where to travel more in space and where not. Movement wise, I followed almost always Spela’s role, with the exception of a couple of moments when I felt Sol’s role was important and carried the essence of that moment. I tried to become the best mixture of them two.

Even if Felipe always told me to find a way to “say what I have to say in the way I would say it”, referring to my issue of fitting my body into a male quality, to understand the logic of moving of female bodies was clearly a little easier. The duet is mainly about the raw physicality of being myself, courageously and trusting. The focus is on the energy; the dancers keep on going through continuous giving of energy and strength. A burst of accents, speed, sharpness, rhythm. It was challenging for me to keep the power and the lines precise as knives as I get more and more tired. I discovered that sharpness is also about the clear movement that shines all the way through, when I really do it and I do just that without adjustments. I tried to reach out from the centre but being relaxed, comfortable and in pleasure.

One of the biggest difficulties (in the part of the solo as well) consisted in transposing the video in the real space finding the right directions. The piece has four fronts (the audience is sitting all around), and the system used by Felipe based on naming the fronts “South” “East” “North” “West” did not help me. He referred to each movement not using directions such as “to the front” or “to the left”, but rather saying what happens where (“this movement happens in the north-east corner towards the south”). I

¹¹ Roberto Olivan in the text he gave to the dancers at the beginning of the creation process

was often very confused and lost in space and wondered why this was so complicated for me. I needed to spend a lot of time in creating my own system to understand positions and compass points. The piece has a structure, like a subdivision in chapters:

- PREAMBLE
- PERFECT TIMING
- MOMENTS THAT ARE WORTH WHILE
- KILLING GHOSTS
- POINT OF REFERENCE: OTHER PERSPECTIVES OVER THE SAME
- BY THE MOUTH THE FISH DIES AND KILLS
- VOYAGE TO NOWHERE
- DANCE WITH THE THINGS OF LIFE
- OPEN PORES
- THE WITH AND THE CHAFF
- TIME ENDS
- SMOKE. WATER
- THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING
- TESTAMENT¹²

and I aim to go through it in my performance, as if to transfer the sensation of the whole piece into the extract I am dancing.

“Slowly the emphasis has moved from creation to presentation”¹³

In the last part of the process I went back to the video to apply to it all the information that I got from Felipe and to “rework the work” alone.

From the very beginning, even when I was still feeling not ready, Felipe pushed me to start doing runs of the whole solo. It was fantastic to check how to manage the energy, to practice using mistakes for the interpretation and to learn how to perform and not comment (Felipe often told me that my insecurity led me to judge what I was doing in the same time I was doing it).

¹² Roberto Olivan in the text he gave to the dancers at the beginning of the creation process

¹³ Hillaert, Wouter. „Welcome to the age of the public”. *Audiences or communities?: Between policies, marketing and true desires*. Ed. APAP – Advancing Performing Arts Project. Salzburg: Szene Salzburg, 2013, pp. 69-77

I also started to have rehearsals with audience. My question then was: at what point does dance come to a level that it can be shared? Dance creates presence giving it shape, duration and visibility. And if the object of vision participates actively to the vision itself, then my dance had to be willing to present itself, in order to be seen. Having an audience was fundamental. I thought of William Burroughs when he spoke about “creative observation”, saying that “Nothing exists until or unless it is observed. An artist is making something exist by observing it. And his hope for other people is that they will also make it exist by observing it.”¹⁴ Having more fronts needs practice and Felipe recommended me to “flirt” with the audience and to invite all the four sides into my movement. I needed to be ready to face the arrogance of the small distance. I wanted to move for the purpose of looking at the people, now here to this side, then there to the other side. “It is the spectator who makes the pictures.”, Paul Virilio once quoted Marcel Duchamp¹⁵. “He will be shown a strange, unusual spectacle, a mystery whose meaning he must seek out. He will thus be compelled to exchange the position of passive spectator for that of scientific investigator or experimenter.”¹⁶

Felipe instructed me on the three levels of looking used in the piece: the reading look (animal looking into the sand or child playing), the talking look (noticing that there is someone and directly referring to him/her) and the far away look (out of the space, beyond the audience, forgetting that the people are there). Only with an audience I could practice how to play with these levels. And yes, “Seeing is an art, not painting, not forming, not sculpting, not carving, not constructing. The first art is seeing. Seeing is collective. Seeing is never done alone.”¹⁷

My theatrical object is a reality that has been created, it is there and it calls for reactions. And exactly the reactions of my very diverse audiences, their feedbacks and associations put the finishing touches to my work. The images that they suggested me (phoenix, warrior, something female, a series of foldings, cowboy) contributed to the final adjustments, too.

Considering all this, the real dancing, the finalization of all the months of precision and try-outs can finally happen for me only on the day of the performance. That moment, on top of all what I have been through, will constitute the clarity; everything will find its sense.

¹⁴ Burroughs, William. *Paintings and Guns*. New York: Hanuman Books, 1992

¹⁵ Conversation between Paul Virilio and Hans-Ulrich Obrist. Paris, 1991. Web. 24 April 2014.
<http://www.ljudmila.org/scca/urbanaria/txt/e/virilio.htm>

¹⁶ Ranci re, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso Books, 2009

¹⁷ Conversation between Paul Virilio and Hans-Ulrich Obrist. Paris, 1991. Web. 24 April 2014.
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Web. 9 April 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIrt1IJr2Go>

Web. 9 April 2014 <http://www.writedesignonline.com/Prompts/Escher-Encounter.jpg>

Biographies

Spanish by origin, Roberto Olivan studied at the Institut del Teatre in Barcelona and P.A.R.T.S. (Performing Arts Research and Training Studios) in Belgium. He performed under the direction of renowned directors such as Robert Wilson, Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker, Josse de Pauw and Tom Jansen. In 2001 he formed his own company, the Enclave Arts del Moviment. He has created works for the National University of Arts – KNUA (Korean National University of Arts, South Korea), the Ensemble Walpurgis (Belgium), the De Helling Musiektheater (Holland), the Vertigo Dance Company (Israel), the Iceland Dance Company (Iceland), the Galician Choreographic Centre (Spain), E.S.A.C. (Ecole Supérieure des Arts du Cirque, Belgium) and obtained co-productions from CAER (Centre for Performing Arts of Reus) and Mercat de les Flors in Barcelona among others. He has been awarded with different prizes and he's teaching to company and academies all over the world.

Born in Costa Rica, Felipe Salazar Hidalgo graduated as an actor from the Taller Nacional de Teatro (Costa Rica, 2002) and as a dancer from the National Conservatory of Costa Rica El Barco (2005) and from Salzburg Experimental Academy of Dance (Austria, 2008). In 2008 he was awarded by ImpulsTanz with the DanceWEB scholarship. He choreographed pieces during his education (in SEAD and El Barco) and afterwards (in festivals such as the International Mesopotamia Circus and Arts Festival, and in Toihaus Theatre in Salzburg). His last works as a dancer have been with the choreographers Roberto Olivan, Jens Van Daele, Kitt Johnson, Hubert Lepka.

Born in Slovenia, Spela Vodeb pursues her career as a freelancer dancer. She graduated at SEAD Salzburg. As a member of the Bodhi Project she performed pieces from Roberto Olivan, Matej Kejzar, Oleg Soulimenko, Milli Bitterli and Keren Levi. In the years 2010-2012 she was a member of Editta Braun Company („Schluss mit Kunst“, „Planet Luvos“) and was developing choreographic work with Tomaz Simatovic („Islands in the fog“, „The Entertainer“). Since 2010 she collaborates intensively with Roberto Olivan as a dancer and assistant. She is a member of his company Enclave Arts del Moviment and is performing in his latest work „A Place to Bury Strangers“. Spela explores her physical expression through dance and inviting forms such as circus (Cyr wheel and Hand to hand), as aesthetics that enrich her knowledge of performing qualities. Since 2013 she is a member of the company ATEMPO CIRC, creator of the last performance „DEAL“. Since 2013 she is intensively cooperating with the singer and composer Nihan Devecioglu.

