

# Traces and Echoes: a methodology for the making of embodied performance

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## Introduction

This research is an investigation on how movement practice embedded in the creative process from the very beginning can have a radical effect on the resulting performance.

My exploration of the consequences of the use of movement as an integral part of the creative process has been conducted specifically through one major performance making project, and four other different performances that allowed me to further research and systematize a personal method of practice that I called “Traces and echoes”.

To contextualize my research, I conducted an historical overview of the possible sources of movement practice as part of actor training and of performance making. I complemented my investigation with the analysis of the creative processes of three contemporary theatre makers, coming from very different theatrical backgrounds, but sharing a strong physical awareness in their creative and rehearsal processes: Kellie Hughes, Lluís Homar and Andrés Corchero.

My investigation has been conducted both on a theoretical and on a practical level to develop and organize a personal method. In my practical investigation over the course of three years, I proceeded organising the exercises I had been devising and using already over many years, and I tested them in five different performances I worked on. In this thesis I analyse one performance in particular, *The empty square/space in the bright light*, because I completed the structure of my method through its creation. I worked on this particular performance with students, both dancers and actors, in a standard four weeks rehearsal time frame where the entire dramaturgical structure and composition depended on the findings and the use of my method.

One big concern I always felt especially in traditional acting training and in some theatre productions, is that often movement is only relegated to the final part of the rehearsal process as though it was a costume that the actors could wear in the last moments of the rehearsals to enhance their performances. This misinterpretation of movement practice leads most of the time to a systematized approach where actors are asked to learn and repeat codified gestures rather than being guided through a process where movement is an integral part of the understanding and the

interpreting work. Furthermore, the possibility of movement being also a way for analysing and then working on the actual content of a performance, opens up the possibility of using it as a tool in the rehearsal process not only for actors but for directors as well. Movement practice becomes part of a working process that can allow actors and directors to go beyond the sole creation of characters, and actually use it to analyse and possibly create the entire dramatic material. Personally, I find this process fascinating because it allows both the performers and the directors to have a vision *from the inside and from the outside* of the worked material, meaning that the dramatic material can be embodied in the rehearsal process and then reworked also stepping away and composing the dramaturgical structure starting from what has been discovered and developed in the creative context. Being inside and outside the creative process can also coincide through the use of movement practice. The idea of embodying a creative process is clear if we look at other art forms, for example “painting”. In my creative method I would like to work towards the reproduction in the final performance of an effect similar to painting, where the traces left by the actors are the visual result of an artistic work that often happens through movement and therefore is a physical realization. In painting the result is a visible image but it also conveys the intensity, and therefore the physical effort with which it has been done, thus giving at the same time the portrait of the artistic idea and the trace of the work itself. As an audience we can both see a painting or a performance, and feel the intentions and or emotions behind the traces.

The embodiment of the work, which I call being inside, is a journey of exploration that requires also an outside vision to analyse, select and compose. This outside look on the work can happen afterwards as a secondary creative moment from the director’s point of view, but also at the same time from the performers as they move. I try to keep an awareness of what is happening also through the physical exploration, and I teach the performers working with me how to be completely immersed in the physical exploration with constant attention to what their bodies are creating. This is at the same time the journey that they are doing in space, the physical and emotional traces and echoes they create, the perspective of their ensemble creations in relation to a possible audience. This idea of “outside” is also implicit in Derrida’s concept of the “*de hors texte*” which could be read as an aesthetic detached position, but it is a re-writing process that doesn’t deny the classic organization of the text, but through deconstruction it displaces meaning. Similarly, in the performance making that I propose, the chosen artistic material is worked from the inside, embodying it, and the outside, analysing and composing it, both processes often

happening at the same time. This way the content and the meaning are always disseminated throughout the performance because they are taken out of the typical hierarchy of oppositions and of chronological reconstruction.

In her book *Liminal Acts* Susan Broadhurst wants to define what she identifies as a new style in contemporary performances, often movement based, which she calls “liminal performances”. She researches alternative systems of analysis and discusses the writings of Derrida, amongst other philosophers, to come to the conclusion that his deconstructive discourse is fundamental to understand these new products:

The idea of ground from which concepts are generated or produced is replaced in deconstruction by that of ‘inscription’, which contextualizes and therefore heteroglizes unitary concepts. Therefore, inscription is seen as a strategy of ‘accounting’, with the aim of ‘overturning and displacing the conceptual order’. (Broadhurst, 1999: 48)

Exploring movement as a creative tool in the rehearsal process can be historically traced back to Jacques Copeau. For this reason, I researched the use of movement practice in the rehearsal process looking first at its historical journey, drawn by the curiosity of the possibility of identifying its roots before the term “physical theatre” was invented and used. I then looked at my own personal creative method in relation to the techniques I studied, and finally I applied my method in the creation process of a movement-based performance.

In the theoretical part of my thesis’ research, I proceeded with an outward trajectory from the identification of the possible historical roots of movement practice in actor training, and possibly also of movement-based performances. These nowadays are often labelled as “physical theatre” performances, but looking closer this definition became too generic and simplistic, considering the differences and particularities of the many performances it might describe but also of the different movement techniques used in these creations. What these performances might have in common, I argue, is not a particular style or a definite movement technique, but a creative process where movement is embedded from the start. For this reason, from now on I will refer to them as “movement-based performances” putting the focus on the creative process and not on the final result. There is indeed in many examples of the so-called “physical theatre”, or “physical theatres” as proposed by John Keefe and Simon Murray (2007 and 2016) in their extensive research on this theme, a recurrent tendency of breaking away from a chronological and logical narrative system. This is certainly present also in contemporary works of companies like *Complicite* and *Frantic Assembly* where the meaning is often created through a juxtaposition of images and

movement sequences or through the multiplication of dramatic moments in time. This way of proceeding in the dramaturgical construction, according to my research, comes from the integral use of movement in the rehearsal process and might be the common point of these types of movement-based performances along with the use of three common principles: body, space, ensemble.

This research wants to bring to light how movement practice could and should be used as a creative tool. Furthermore, when we speak of movement, we are not talking only of the body of the actors but also of two other elements: space and ensemble. The actors move in space and their movements speak with space and depend on space; these movements can also happen in a group and be worked and designed as an ensemble. These three elements (body, space, ensemble) are interconnected; not only should they be at the core of every performance making; they should also be used during the analysis and creation of the performance.

Nowadays, many experiments are conducted in this direction by different theatre practitioners. We could think of the director Robert Wilson who constantly remodels the architecture of space, and when directing, invites the actors to think of the space not as something that is just present but a place that needs to be inhabited:

When analyzing a Wilson work, in addition to space, one must also pay close attention to all aspects of visual perception: balance, shape, form, light, color, movement, dynamics, and the expression embedded in structure. To see is to see relationships, to grasp a Wilson work is to grasp the forms that structure space. (Holmberg, 1996: 80)

The definition of these elements as forms/materials that can be used to devise a performance or to work on a given text exploring creative possibilities, started at the beginning of the last century in correspondence with the rise of the central figure of the director. In 1899 Adolphe Appia puts at the very beginning of his book *Die Music und die Inszenierung (Music and Staging)* a quotation by Friedrich Schiller: "When music reaches its noblest power, it becomes form." Both Appia and Wilson are examples of directorial control that could be related to the theories of Richard Wagner, but they give space to the actor as the central element for the creation in the rehearsal process.

The role of the director in theatre practice is connected to the transition between one mode of theatre and another. One interesting historiographical point is to recognize the changes in theatre practices that happened because of this transition and, moreover, what are the events that have been triggered by it, and that are

directly related to it. One change is certainly the affirmation and development of the concept and use of the *mise en scène* (staging), and one event triggered by this transition is the awareness of the importance of the actor's movements and displacements in space.

Throughout the twentieth century there are two major strands: on one side a slow change from the usual concept of directing previously seen only as an interpretative art at the service of a text, and on the other a shift of emphasis from the theatre conceived primarily as an aesthetic manifestation towards a more socially-motivated conception of the theatre's role. For my study it is particularly interesting to look at the events produced by the first strand. One of the consequences is the realization and organization of the role played by the actors in the performance; a second one is the fact that the actors started to take an important place also in the creative process of the performance. These two developments are connected with the necessity of an actor training and the consequent planning and organization of it, which lead in many cases to the awareness and study of the body of the actor and its movements. Movement practice as well as spatial awareness is a direct consequence of the theorization of the possibility of the autonomy of the performance making over the text. Everything started revolving especially around the role of the actor and the function that space had started to acquire.

In the work and the writings of Gordon Craig the first elements of this trajectory appear. This new vision of theatre is shared by Adolphe Appia as well as many other influential figures of the twentieth century. Even though at first these visions seem to suggest that the director should be in a privileged position compared to the other elements of the theatre practice, in their works, it is evident that everything revolves especially around the role of the actor and the function that space has acquired in connection to it.

The place that the actor comes to occupy in theatre thinking and also in the actual performance making represents the point of departure for this research, because when talking about movement it is obvious that the central element researched is the body and therefore the actor who owns it. For this reason, the idea of a "total theatre" as theorised by Richard Wagner (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) is perhaps not so relevant to this study because of his idea of a unity in which music, poetry and action, intended as dance and gesture, would merge in a form of reunion where they would coexist. In this ideal coexistence of art forms, the director is seen as a central figure responsible for the creation because of the implicit role of connecting and bringing the elements together. In my performance-making method of creation and



therefore in my research and analysis of the past, I intend to focus on the creative role of the actors/performers from the moment of the creation.

The body becomes central in the practices theorised and performed by Jacques Copeau and Rudolf Laban, each of whom gave freedom to the creativity of the performers in the rehearsal process. The experiments of Copeau and Laban remain central in the systematization of many aspects of the actor's work, particularly in the actor's training, an aspect that before had never really been taken into consideration. In contrast with Craig's theories on the *Übermarionette*, they both praised the importance of the human body. According to them it is only through the presence of the actor on stage that the audience can connect and relate to the performance. This presence is the actual body inhabiting the space which, according to Laban dictates also the rhythmical structure of the performance:

Space-rhythm is created by the related use of directions resulting in spatial forms and shapes. (Laban, 2011: 121).

This theatre renovation has the idealistic aspect of a theatre reinvention, specifically for three aspects: the awareness and analysis of the actor's movements, the organization of space and the notion of the ensemble.

The role of the actor is integral to the concept and the use of the theatrical space as it is also demonstrated by the work and the creations of Etienne Decroux. In his works and research, space in connection with movement becomes fundamental in the creation process.

Therefore, theoretically my investigation took me to the roots of movement practice and I concentrated on the researches of Etienne Decroux, Jacques Copeau and Rudolf Laban. In my practice work, I also decided to start from these practitioners and worked on the reconstruction of their exercises, moving afterwards to more personal interpretations and adaptations of those.

In my practical research, the study and analysis of body, space and ensemble, have been directed towards their intrinsic creative possibilities and lead me to the systematisation of a performance-making method: "Traces and Echoes".

In the chapter dedicated to my method I describe and explain my own exercises based on movement, space and ensemble. Working with these elements in a dramatic rehearsal process allowed me to work in a liminal zone between different modes of

expressions matching Broadhurst's definition: "liminal performance can be described as being located at the edge of what is possible". (Broadhurst, 1999:12)

Even though in my method I give relevance to non-linguistic modes of signification, language is still my thinking and imagination source, and I like to compare the creative work that I do with the work of a writer, because of the endless creative possibilities that allow me to go beyond the mere description of the text of a play into the construction and deconstruction of the narrative and of the notion of time itself inside it. I would like to quote Susan Sontag talking about the power of words and how they are filled with concepts as though they were spaces. Words, according to Sontag, go beyond the simplistic role of description, opening a whole world of significance:

Words mean. Words point. They are arrows. Arrows stuck in the rough hide of reality. And the more portentous, more general the word, the more they also resemble rooms or tunnels. They can expand, or cave in. They can come to be filled with a bad smell. They will often remind us of other rooms, where we'd rather dwell or where we think we are already living. They can be spaces we lose the art or the wisdom of inhabiting. (Sontag, 2007: 145)

I believe that in a creative process and in any theatrical situation, movement practice, in the wider meaning I give to it, can have the same evocative and deconstructing power of words.

## An historical overview

“The study of the past doesn’t teach us anything but reminds us of everything. However, we insist on forgetting.”

These are the words of Andrea Camilleri, famous Italian novelist but also a theatre director, playwright and, especially, an historian deeply in love with history. <sup>1</sup>

Theatre is the privileged place where we are allowed to start each time everything all over again. This is the singularity of an art form that has in itself an almost exclusive ephemeral quality, which is not so much due to the theatrical essence of the “here and now”, as to the interrelation of all the phenomena that work together to create the performance. This implies that when talking about theatre, it is inevitable to encounter the problem of defining and delimiting the phenomena considered and also the historical time in which we are looking at them. In a theatre analysis, there are therefore several elements to be considered. The theatre practice is in fact realized in the dynamic connection of several elements of different genre: the text, the performance, the spatial organization, the modes of production, the actors’ interpretation, and the function given to the audience. Every element can be subject to an independent analysis.

The famous French critic Francisque Sarcey, active from the second half of the nineteenth century, in the introductory essay in the first volume of his writings *Quarante ans de théâtre* (1900), compares theatre to an onion and therefore to a vegetable organism consisting of several layers that form an organic and complete being.

The theatre practitioners that worked in the historical moment across the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century involved with the theatre reform across Europe, try to reorganize the different phenomena. They wanted to establish a hierarchy of elements in order to create a feeling of harmony and at the same time wanted to create a sense of unity and unison that would also embrace the presence of the audience.

When talking about theatre, we are always undoubtedly facing a double paradigm as David Roesner writes in his book *Musicality in Theatre, Music as Model, Method and Metaphor in Theatre-Making*:

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<sup>1</sup> “Lo studio del passato non insegna nulla ma ci ricorda tutto. Però noi ci ostiniamo a dimenticare.” Andrea Camilleri in an interview to “Repubblica” 25<sup>th</sup> April 2019. My translation from Italian into English

But while theatre has always had the tendency and capacity to encompass, interact with and be influenced by other, 'purer' art forms, such as music, literature, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture and photography, there seems to have been a continuous tension between two paradigms: the notion of separate, distinct artforms on the one hand, and the thrust towards close relations, cross-fertilization, synthesis and even amalgamation of different artistic practices and techniques on the other, which reoccur under different names and ideological and aesthetic premises throughout history. (Roesner, 2014:7-8)

The idea of unity and balance of all the elements of the theatre practice is also at the core of the theatre revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century. But it is often disguised under the necessity of putting the written play at the top of the pyramid in terms of importance. The necessity of creating a sense of unity on stage helped to affirm the necessity of the central role of the director and through this role the entire pyramid went down. The director in fact became the author of the performance: the possibility of interpreting a text made it necessary for choices to be made and these choices inevitably meant also a use of the theatrical elements that was, to say the least, new. All the elements were considered important to tell the story, but the story needed to be told in a way that could help the audience to go beyond reality, to see a vision that can only be reached through an alternative and constructed use of all the elements and especially space and movements. Georges Pitoëff, member of the famous Cartel des Quatre (with Charles Dullin, Louis Jouvet and Gaston Baty) that dominated the theatre scene in France in the 1930s, wrote in his introduction to the 1943 edition of Henri Gouhier's book *L'essence du théâtre*:

Le metteur en scène a introduit la composition, l'unité qui caractérise l'œuvre d'art, là où le hasard régnait en maître. À ce titre-là il est un créateur, comme tout autre artiste. [...] Je n'ai sur la mise en scène aucune idée préconçue. Chaque nouvelle pièce à monter, je m'efforce de l'aborder avec un esprit absolument vierge. C'est la pièce elle-même qui m'inspirera les éléments qui serviront à sa mise en scène. (Pitoëff in Gouhier, 1943 : iv-v)<sup>2</sup>

Surely in his text Pitoëff expresses the idea that the main role of the director is to aid the author's thought to be revealed more perfectly to the spectator, but at the same time he says also how central for him is the staging when it comes to create a performance. In his adaptations and performances, Pitoëff was the incarnation of an independent director asserting the absolute autonomy of staging as an art form:

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<sup>2</sup> "The director introduces the composition, the unity that characterizes the work of art, where chance used to reign supreme. As such he is a creator, like any other artist... I have no preconceived ideas on the staging. I try to approach every new piece with an absolutely virgin spirit. It is the play itself that will inspire me with the elements that will be used in its staging". My translation from French into English.

Pitoëff not only proclaimed the director's autonomy, he practiced it. When he accepted a play from a living author it was on the express understanding that he alone would decide how to stage it. But Pitoëff was not claiming an irresponsible freedom to do just as he fancied: it was a creative autonomy that hinged on certain obligations. (Whitton, 1987: 99)

He was at the same time a decorator, painter, costume designer, lighting designer and actor. He considered the act of *mise en scène* (staging) as a poetic act.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century in France the term *mise en scène* (staging) starts to appear more and more with an emerging new meaning and intention. This could be seen as a phase of development leading to the growing presence of a figure capable of conducting and overseeing the staging: the director. This could also be the beginning of changes in the structure of the theatre production, leading to the birth of a new figure that embodies both artistic and directorial duties. Through the entire nineteenth century, including the times and experiments of André Antoine we could see signs of what will definitely become a theatre renovation across the end of this century and the beginning of the next, the twentieth century. Nonetheless, this historical overview doesn't want to deny the complexity of the multiple traditions of theatre practices across Europe at the time. In order to maintain focus and coherence it will concentrate mainly on the French tradition in its constant dialogue with other possible traditions. It is important though to circumscribe our research to specific theatre aspects due to the ephemeral and multiple nature of theatre.

The word theatre has many sloppy meanings. In most of the world, the theatre has no exact place in society, no clear purpose, it only exists in fragments [...] (Brook, 1990: 31)

The History of Theatre in general is always the story of different encounters, multiple aspects, different points of view, different moments, pluralities and singularities. The historical hypothesis here proposed is a connection between the development, at the beginning of the twentieth century, of the importance of movement practice in the actor's training to the changes of the notion of *mise-en-scène* (staging) in theatre. The twentieth century is considered the golden age of the *mise-en-scène*, born in the last twenty years of the previous century.

*Mise-en-scène* nowadays could be translated with the word "staging", especially in an everyday use, but staging only describes the design aspect of the theatre production. The word *mise-en-scène* refers also to the vision of the director, and the role that every element plays within the performance.

## 1. *Mise-en-scène* (staging)

This research reflects on the advent of the *mise-en-scène* and on the effect it had on the way the performance was created. It identifies in the advent of the notion of space in theatre, a clear element of change and difference in the use and knowledge of movement practice in the creative process. 'Space' is a word that can be split at least in two ways indicating two meanings: the stage that the actors walk and act on, and the spatial organization of the performance.

The so-called rediscovery of the body in the European theatre in the twentieth century is due to the idea that the corporal language has an independent expressive power and has an original value for its intrinsic relationship with nature. This attention towards the actors' body led to many experiments and theories, especially in the actors' training. This was evident in Stanislavskij exercises as well as Mejerchol'd or Copeau experiments.

Theatre training is essentially a twentieth-century phenomenon. Up until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the vast majority of theatre performers learnt "on the job" and through apprenticeship. The modernist project created a momentum that drove theatre practice towards method, form, style and experiment, and in doing so created a need and a desire for a modern approach to training and to professionalization... The professionalization of the actor's body was paradoxically achieved in part through its removal from the theatrical context of the theatre company, in which the age-old model of the apprenticeship had thrived for so long. The other pressure came from changes in the nature of the theatre being performed. New plays in new styles demanded actors with new skills and new abilities. (Evans, 2019: 5-6)

The hypothesis analysed here is that the affirmation of the *mise-en-scène* at the end of the nineteenth century is also a seed that led to the physical awareness as we know it today and to the possibility of using movement as a research and creative tool inside a rehearsal process no matter what the style of the performance would be.

## 2. *Mise-en-scène*: Naturalism and Jacques Copeau

By creating the Théâtre Libre in March 1887, André Antoine promoted himself as the first director of modern times and set the question of the *mise en scène* at the centre of any theatre investigation. The director became from now on aware of his specific role in the process of theatre-making, a role that helped with time to give more importance to the theatrical process and more independence from the text.

The attention on the *mise-en-scène* lead at first to a form of theatre that became quite popular: Naturalism. Naturalism in general represents a return to nature, not in a bucolic spirit, but through the construction of a system of investigation based on experience and analysis in order to tell through the characters, everyone's real story "l'histoire vrai de chacun" (Zola, 1880: p.115). Not inventing anything, starting from real documents, organizing and representing them in a logical order, analysing them in order to make the experience intelligible to all, these are the central points of Naturalism and this in every field of knowledge, in every artistic expression and also in theatre. To find theatrical experiments that go in the direction indicated by Zola we have to look at Antoine's staging experiments. The opening of the Théâtre Libre by Antoine in Paris in 1887 marks the beginning of the independent theatrical movement and introduces the idea that change and innovation in dramatic writing and theatre can come from the practice, from the work on the staging of the performance. Antoine believes in the possibility of bringing together an audience interested in the vision of a different theatre and for this reason creates a total new theatre space. The way he independently organized the production and the distribution of his theatre marks already the beginning of modern theatre. Antoine focuses on the production of performances that include a research on the *mise-en-scène* and on the work of the actors as an ensemble. Antoine publishes on the newspaper *Le Temps* the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1888 a letter to the critic Sarcey where he writes how and why he was impressed by the vision of the shows of the Meiningen company.

Do you know where the difference comes from? It is because their representation, unlike ours, is not composed of elements picked up by hazard. (Antoine, 1979: 91)<sup>3</sup>

Antoine, who had always been interested in theatre, had assisted, when he was still working as an employee in the Gas Company, to the adaptation of the *Pot-Bouille* by Zola and was negatively impressed by the contrast between the communicative force of the writing and the flat result of the theatrical version. His idea was that the theatrical representation failed because it was inadequate for both the new writing

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<sup>3</sup> "Savez-vous d'où vient la difference? C'est que leur figuration n'est pas, comme la nôtre, composée d'éléments ramassés au hasard, d'ouvriers embauchés pour les répétitions générales, mal habillés et peu exercés à porter des costumes bizarres ou gênants, surtout lorsqu'ils sont exacts. L'immobilité est recommandée Presque toujours au personnel de nos théâtres tandis que là-bas, les comparses des Meiningen doivent jouer et mimer leur personage. N'entendez pas par là qu'ils forcent et que l'attention est détournée des protagonistes; non, le tableau reste complet et, de quelque côté que se porte le regard, il s'accroche toujours à un détail dans la situation ou le caractère. C'est d'une puissance incomparable à certains instants". My translation from French into English.

techniques and the new contents. In the naturalist sphere there was a clear claim for a reform that would also include the materiality of the scene and wouldn't stop only at the inclusion of new themes within a theatre structure now firmly schematised. The work undertaken by Antoine was therefore necessary in this theatrical context so linked to the representation of the bourgeois theatre. To build an authentic theatrical form, Antoine moved completely away from the structures of traditional theatre:

From the outset, he described his as a *vrai théâtre* – a professional theatre which for the moment had no money to pay its actors and, bypassing the commercial theatres of the Boulevard, insisted on comparing its achievements with those of the two state-subsidized houses, the Théâtre Français and the Odéon. (Chothia, 1991: 4)

For Antoine the way in which the characters were inserted in the context of the staging he built was essential. The environment in which the scenes took place assumed a capital importance because it expressed the essence of the play, and this is evident if one looks at the way in which he was always trying to remain faithful to the intentions of the author of the work represented. This exactitude became more and more impressive but also too important in the delicate balance of the staging of a play. As Estelle Rivier explains in her article *L'excès dans la représentation scénographique* (Excessiveness in the art of scenography) since Antoine was looking for an exact representation of the place implicit in the action, he tended to give an importance to the historical plausibility of the representation regardless of the real dramatic necessity for it.

In the same years, working on the staging of the Wagnerian opera, Adolphe Appia had just outlined a first theory of the *mise en scène* defined by him as the art of projecting into space what the playwright could only conceive in time. This way Appia starts to separate the practical transposition of the play on stage from the text itself.

This same comprehension of theatre practice was present in Jacques Copeau. For him *mise en scène* means paying particular attention to the scenic aspect and the requirements of the performance; however, in full respect of the text. At the beginning for him the stage elements are indispensable factors of conjunction between character and audience, even the actor is no longer a solo interpreter but the part of a whole. Copeau with his theatrical research helps to define in a modern way the meaning and importance of the *mise en scène*: the ensemble of technical elements that make possible the transition from the world of the ideas and the written text to the concrete life of the scene. In 1905 already, Copeau in his role of



theatre critic from the pages of the *Ermitage*, questions the role of journalism itself in a theatrical context that sees the succession of different theatrical movements, all, according to him, equally ephemeral (Copeau, 1988: p.19). Copeau proclaimed himself an anti-naturalist because he “considered art as an ideal realm, quite distinct from life; a place of transcendence, encouraging a different kind of illusionism to the grubby depiction of the everyday that was the alleged role of naturalism.” (Milling and Ley, 2001: p.55). Theatre-making for Copeau from the very beginning of his dramatic approach is inseparable from the scene: the theatrical space. Even though Copeau always recognized the primacy of the text, he felt that the text needed at the same time a theatricalization through a performative process (Copeau,1988: 56-65). Copeau’s work was very much connected to the present necessities of creation: the rehearsals, the training, his research and experiments. He declared that he did not believe in the efficacy of aesthetic formulas; therefore, he dedicated his life to practical researches. He was aware of the risks connected to this type of work; how hard it would be to leave a permanent trace without some supporting theoretical publications:

I still don’t resign myself, to have produced only perishable, ephemeral things, which some of my contemporaries only would remember by attaching the distortions, the failures or the exaggerations of their own. (Copeau, 1974 : 8) <sup>4</sup>

Copeau in his research for simplicity and purity on stage was always aiming at a functional suggestion that could reach a metaphorical level. A lyrical effect not far from Symbolism in the use of the decor, even though Copeau never looked for a recurrent particular style in the choices of plays and texts for his performances.

In his writings on theatre, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke outlines a theatre analysis for some aspects similar to Copeau. It is interesting, on a theoretical level, to compare their writings and theories. They both praised a theatre that could manifest the encounter of materiality and poetry. In their writings on theatre there is undoubtedly a similar tension. Both Rilke and Copeau praised a theatre where a "fundamental feeling" should dominate the scene from the beginning to the end (Rilke, 1995). It is interesting that Rilke, being a poet, would at times even propose not to use the words in favour of the gesture, the movement and the visual element.

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<sup>4</sup> “Je ne me résigne pas encore, à n'avoir produit que des choses périssables, éphémères, dont quelques-uns de mes contemporains seulement se souviendraient en leur attachant les déformations, les défaillances ou les exagérations de leur propre mémoire”. My translation from French into English.

It was indeed a recurrent need in theatre at the time: finding the capacity of expressing the intensity of the inexpressible, of the non-said. Rilke sees in this capacity the possibility of an art form to play a strong effect on the audience and to give a feeling of reuniting, bringing every single one in the common rhythm hidden behind the word. Rilke and Copeau were both hoping for the scene to produce a unifying effect on the audience. Copeau also shared Rilke's ideas that the theatre scene doesn't need only an audience but a community. When Copeau decided to reform the theatre, he set himself different tasks.

Copeau opened Le Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in 1913 in a renovated Parisian variety hall on the Left Bank. Copeau's aim was to set up an ensemble company of actors able to create a new theatre that explicitly rejected the old star system, and that also brought a sense of theatrical poetry and moral purpose to the stage. (Evans in Britton, 2013: 112)

Copeau opened his theatre workshops to everyone who wanted to discover and experiment the possibilities of theatre practice. Therefore, Copeau's work, through his workshops, company and theatre, was also to educate and help to create a community ready to understand and share his works.

### 3. Craig and Appia

In 1915 Copeau decided to visit other theatre artists whose activities he felt were similar and connected to his own: Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia are two of them.

When he was invalided out of the French auxiliary forces in April 1915, Copeau decided to make use of his time by visiting those people whose work he saw as complementary to his own ideas and aspirations. (Evans, 2006: 14)

Appia and Craig, are two independent theatre practitioners that separately and through different paths, laid the theoretical foundations of the anti-illusionist scenic practices of contemporary theatre. They both aimed to change the theatre radically, hoping for major changes, especially in the *mise-en-scène*. They considered different aspects of the theatre experience and production because they wanted to move away from the specialization of theatres dedicated to different classified genres and the star system that was destroying the drama's artistic integrity.

#### 4. Craig: the three-dimensional scene and body

Craig was a man of the theatre, and in his writings on theatre tried to determine the meaning of theatricality. In this light many pages are dedicated to the notion and use of set design and space. Both elements, according to Craig, need to move away from the mere desire of naturalistic reconstruction, and they have to become an integral part of the dramatic scene. Theatricality, for him, has essentially a visual nature. He substitutes the idea with the moving image in a structured and constructed space, and prefers the impression produced by the play of the forms to the actual words. Space, for him, has to be a synthesis of scenic movement and *mise-en-scène*.

By means of your scene you will be able to mould the movements of the actor. (Craig, 2009: 13)

Craig's greatest legacy is his work on the scene and particularly on set design. He conceived the theatre mainly in visual terms and was trying to achieve the ideal of a set that could move with the actors to create a score of atmospheres. His visions collected in the book *On the Art of the Theatre* don't try to give solutions and set methods to respond to the necessity that the theatre would be an art of revelation and not of imitation.

The Art of the Theatre is neither acting nor the play, it is not scene nor dance, but it consists of all the elements of which these things are composed: action, which is the very spirit of acting; words, which are the body of the lay; line and color, which are the very heart of the scene; rhythm, which is the very essence of dance. One is no more important than the other, no more than one color is more important to a painter than another, or one note more important than another to a musician. In one respect, perhaps, action is the most valuable part, Action bears the same relation to the Art of the Theatre as drawing does to painting, and melody does to music. The Art of the Theatre has sprung from action – movement – dance. (Craig, 2009: 73)

He praised for a form of total theatre where all the different phenomena contributing to the performance wouldn't have any autonomy and could be set and organized, even the actor's body. Craig saw the possibility of this control of the body in the work of Etienne Decroux. In 1945, in fact, Craig visited his school and was impressed with his work of reinvention of the body. Decroux at the time, in France, had already started his research on a new art form that he called "Corporeal mime" where the main accent was on the body of the actors and on the capacity of embodying and expressing a dramatic situation solely through movements, but drastically moving away from the codified gestures of pantomime. Decroux

represents one of the first attempts to practically experiment with the findings and ideas by Craig, Appia and Copeau to create a completely new approach to acting:

This love of purity comes from an amalgam of Copeau's and Craig's doctrines taken one step further and identifies Decroux as modernist and formalist [...] (Leabhart, 2007:15)

## 5. Appia: the rhythmic space

Appia is also considered one of the founders of modern theatre and could be described as a choreographer of lights and space for his work with the elements of the scenography. He dedicates his studies and his most important writings to the scene, but according to him, theatre should be a synthesis of elements - text, acting, scenery, lighting, music - and not a synthesis of separate art forms.

The drama (by which I mean all works written for actual production on the stage) is the most complex of all arts because of the great number of medias the dramatist must use in order to communicate. (Appia, 1962: 10)

By means of dramatic representation, music is transported into space and there achieves a material form – in the *mise en scène* – thus satisfying its need for a tangible form, not just illusively in time alone, but quite actually in space, a need it has sought to fill in other ways, to the detriment of its very essence. (Appia, 1962: 18)

This synthesis, he believes, should be organized with harmony. Appia has integrated a sense of musicality into his idea of theatricality:

In every work of art there must be a harmonious relationship between feeling and form, a perfect balance between the idea which the artist wishes to express and the means he uses to express it. (Appia, 1962: 10)

The painted decoration must be substituted – still according to Appia – with a constructed device consisting of stairs and platforms, giving to the movements of the actor all their power of expression. This would help to overcome the contradiction between all the different visual elements present in the theatre phenomenon: the actor is a three-dimensional element; the scene is perpendicular and the ground is horizontal. For Appia ultimately the element that could help to achieve unity and therefore harmony could be music: if theatre is made of movement, music, precisely, is movement. Music is movement in two ways: because it carries and expresses the

emotions, and because it unfolds in time. Appia seeks to integrate a sense of musicality into process and performance:

But music, this all powerful medium, if it is thus to express the life of the soul, must give to the form which it receives from the soul a time pattern very different from that of daily life, so that, in order fully to appreciate its expressiveness, we must lose ourselves so completely in that time pattern that our entire personal life is transposed to respond to the emotions of the drama. For this divergence from the pattern of ordinary life, we accept readily enough as long as it affects only time and does not lead to alterations in the visible scene so marked that we cannot accept them, as long as the resultant expression finds its supreme justification in our own hearts. (Appia, 1962: 16)

The shifting point of the *mise en scène* is a three-dimensional scene that creates the impression of movement, expressed in the space from a succession of forms. This way the space is alive and can resonate with music. Appia talks a lot about the interaction between musicality and space. The link between musicality and space for him is the actor and his movement potential. He seeks to redefine the actor's role in the context of a new art form, thus introducing the idea of spatial rhythm. He talks of three aspects: objectifying the actors' task; music's role in their processes of expression, and the concrete impact this has on the training of actors. Marvin Carlson summarizes the change in attitude towards the actor that is expressed in Appia's writings:

Thus the symbolist vision of the ideal actor, what Craig called the Über-marionette, is clearly required in Appia's theatre. By means of music "the living human body throws off the accident of personality and becomes purely an instrument for human expression." [...] Clearly the actor as an original artist is demoted in this system, subordinated to the artistic ensemble expressed in the master score (the partiture), and controlled by music. (Carlson, 1996: 295)

Appia asks that the actor's actions be precisely set and scored in the music and claims the consequence of this to be that "the living body discards its arbitrary veil of individuality and becomes an instrument consecrated to human expression" (Carlson, 1996: 295). Therefore, Appia seeks by the means of musicality, to give a form to acting, in order to prevent arbitrariness and hence become another instrument in the global rhythm of the production.

Meeting with Craig and Appia sparked in Copeau many ideas that he then sought to integrate into his creative process and in his school.

Craig showed Copeau his drawings, designs, masks, marionettes, and talked with him – in English and broken French – about giving artists thorough practical as well as theoretical training in all the theatre crafts. (Leigh, 1979: 12)

Nonetheless, Copeau didn't share all their thoughts and ideas; especially when it concerned Craig's vision of the role of the actor in the performance. Whilst he was certainly in accordance with Appia's idea of the primary role of the actor their views were still very different because Appia was in praise of music as the element that could act as a conductor inside the performance, bringing all the elements together. Therefore, he was looking for something operating from the outside, something external to the body of the actors, whilst Copeau was in search of a total state of awareness for the actors.

Copeau shared Craig's recognition of the important role of the director and designer in the creation of a new artistic vision for the theatre; where he differed with Craig was over the role of the actor within this vision. While Craig's disenchantment with conventional acting led him towards reconfigurations of the actor as a kind of marionette to the will of the director, Copeau was convinced that the actor must remain a central part of the theatre event and its creation. (Evans, 2006: 15)

## 6. Jacques Copeau and Rudolf Laban: space as a creative tool

It is interesting to introduce also Laban's researches in relation to Copeau's findings on movement and space. Even though they never interacted with each other, they approached and analysed similar problems coming from different contexts and practices. They changed the history of performance in many ways. Copeau tried to define and Laban tried to describe and organize, what an actor could do in space. Their legacy crossed the borders of their respective countries and influenced many theatre and dance practitioners across different styles and genres. In their writings there is undoubtedly a similar interest: Copeau and Laban were both hoping for a renovation of the scene that would start from a renewed practice that considered also the body of the actor and the performative space.

### a. Copeau

Copeau in his attempt to renew theatre spoke of the use of space. He wanted minimal use of stage machinery and lighting. The actors had to be in the position where they could concentrate and where their theatrical actions could resonate and be amplified by the space around them. Theatre for Copeau becomes one if every

element works at the service of the performance and its transmission to the audience. In order to do so space takes a special role. In Copeau's new theatre vision and research, space is considered and used as an expressive element. He gave particular importance to the analysis of space as a working tool for actors especially working as an ensemble. When Copeau decided to reform the theatre, he set himself different tasks both theoretical and practical. In his attempt for a radical theatre renovation, he advocated the return to a bare stage. Once the space was empty from all the unnecessary decorations and settings the actors could start using the space itself as a performance element.

Copeau researched the possibility of using the performative space differently, in connection with the actors' movements, but inside a theatre context. He wanted to incorporate and internalize the sense of rhythm, the rhythm of the play, a rhythm different in every text. It was indeed a recurrent need in theatre at the time: finding the capacity of representing a play with a strong sense of unity through an ensemble work that included also the use of technical elements like scenography, lighting and costumes. The final goal was that theatre would be an art form that could have a strong effect on the audience through a work of reuniting, bringing every single element of the performance in the common rhythm hidden behind the words of the play or any other form of text.

In his work at the Vieux-Colombier in Paris and with Les Copiaus in Burgundy, he developed a model of the theatre ensemble that redefined the notion of the professional actor through its emphasis on continual training, physicality, rhythmic play, improvisation, collaboration and creativity. (Evans in Britton, 2013: 112)

In other words, theatre – according to Copeau – had to be renewed in order to bring back the focus on the play itself and to its transmission to the audience. He understood that the architectural organization of the stage as well as the physicality of the actor moving in space were important tools to be worked on in order to overcome their natural limitations. For Copeau the unity of the representation was possible thanks to the role that the actor could play in the *mise en scène*. Copeau was able, through his practical work with his actors, to transform the natural limitations of the space and the body into the opportunity for a richer vocabulary. He focused on studying and developing an ensemble work<sup>5</sup> for the actors, based on space

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<sup>5</sup> Copeau's formulation on the role of the *ensemble* owes a lot to the Riccobonis' French legacy. Recent studies have proved that the use of the word "ensemble" as well as its stage process was established by Antoine-François Riccoboni. In his "L'Art du Théâtre" (1750), he explained in fact the art of acting, the author's theory is not only based on his own stage practice, but this practice becomes a fundamental starting point and condition for his discussion of

awareness, to develop their interpretative capacities:

Although he tended to work from the outside, or the physical action first, he wanted to develop an accompanying state of intimate consciousness, particular to the movement accomplished. [...] Copeau sought to lead his students towards complete involvement, participation, and commitment to a stage action. (Leigh, 1979: 19)

and also, an articulated use of the body:

With his assistant Suzanne Bing, they tried and organized a series of exercises both for the physical and imagination training. "Exercises described by Mme Bing used isolated movements of parts of the body to express attitudes, working toward finding the essence of a character. (Leigh, 1979: 12)

In the notes left by his collaborator Suzanne Bing as well as in some of Copeau's writings, we can find a record of the exercises of the school. In the actors' training it is clear that Copeau introduced exercises aimed to develop a musical and rhythmic feeling. This education was intended to create ensemble compositions where the rhythm had to help the group to keep a sense of unity and coordination in their displacements on stage and in the dramatic development of their actions. This same rhythmic knowledge was applied in specific exercises based on classical stories like "Sleeping Beauty" where the group had to work together, passing by specific speed and tempo changes in the flow of the action, in the scene where all the characters fall asleep during the celebration at the dinner table.

One of Bing's exercises was to begin an action and then interrupt it with a brief movement. The students then worked to juxtapose two different tempos - the arms keeping the beat whilst the feet walked in a circle on the measure, accompanying themselves with the voice instead of music. Examples of everyday phenomena were found to illustrate different tempos: a sewing machine as quick, percussive, a lift as sustained. (Rudlin in Hodge, 2010: 55)

Musicality and rhythm for Copeau had to be trained and achieved with the work on the body of the actor, his physicality and interaction with space and with the other actors. He had a completely different approach than Appia's theories on music as the element that conducts the scenes. The rhythm was also at the centre of

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the actor's art, thus, anticipating the centrality of the practicality of the theatre event that will take hold much later. In particular, François' definition and explication of "*ensemble*" (il tutto insieme) has been the most consistent development of the fundamental principles of his father Luigi's theatrical reform as can be found in: Sica, Anna (2017), *L'arte massima. La rappresentativa nel novo stile*, Milano: Mimesis; Wiles, David (2020), *The Players' Advice to Hamlet. The Rhetorical Acting Method from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



Copeau's fascination with poetry and reading exercises.

In 1916 Copeau introduced what would now be called creative dramatics. Suzanne Bing began with warm-up rhythm games, tossing a ball in patterns, for example. Copeau read stories, such as La Fontaine's fable, The Cat and the Old Rat. The students then played and analyzed animal movement and rhythms, subsequently applying their animal characterizations to acting out the story. (Leigh, 1979: 13)

Copeau's interest in the actor's expressive possibility along with the innovative use of space, never became an independent research detached from the main purpose, which was for Copeau the renovation of theatre intended in a large sense. His experiments and exercises had to be ultimately at the service of creation, they had to be tools to be used in a rehearsal process. What Copeau wanted to avoid was a set system of creation because he didn't believe in the possibility of only one theatre style.

Similarly, Laban spent his life in studying the nature of human movement to define the movement and space dynamics involved in any type of performance:

The best way to acquire and develop the capacity of using movement as a means of expression on the stage is to perform simple movement scenes. (Laban, 2011: 120)

### [b. Laban](#)

Laban was a movement theoretician operating at the beginning of last century. He suggested that every performer, especially dancers and actors, need to know their bodies well in order to achieve a wide range of movement combinations, which would extend their performative possibilities. What is very interesting in his work is that his high analytical study of movement was not an end in itself, but a vehicle for research and consequently a manifestation of the performer's mental and emotional processes. In analysing movement sequences, he observes:

These sequences of movement actions create movement events of differing dynamic character. It is important to clarify the transitions between the single actions as only through them the whole tale of the movement event is told. Each sequence can be expressed by an endless variety of action moods arising from the particular mixture of effort qualities with which the actions and the transitions between them are performed. The movement event is realized through bodily actions. Bodily actions produce alterations of the position of the body, or of parts of it, in the space surrounding the body. Each of these alterations takes a certain time, and requires a certain amount of muscular energy. (Laban, 2011: 23)

On one side Laban's observations of human movement took him to theorize a wide range of movement combinations, which would extend one's performative possibilities, and on the other he was fascinated with the possibility of identifying the motivating impulse from which movement begins. For Laban that impulse is always a person in a specific situation:

Motion becomes movement in living beings, who possess an inner urge to use time and the changes that occur in time for their own purposes. (Laban, 2011: 89)

And from this idea he proposed to organize a structure for the actor training:

First the student should become fully conscious of the character of the person to be represented, the kind of values after which he or she strives, and the circumstances in which the striving occurs. Then, as part of his creative function as a performing artist, he must select the movements appropriate to the character, the values and the particular situation. This selection involves intensive work. Improvisation of the acted scene, however brilliant, is not enough, nor is it sufficient to memorize a seemingly effective movement combination. What is necessary is that the student should, so to speak, get under the skin of the character to be portrayed, should penetrate the various possibilities of rendering the scene, and should analyze everything in terms of movement. (Laban, 2011: 88)

Laban revealed the dynamics of movement (Eukinetics) and the dynamics of space and how movement and space work together in order to give the audience a kinaesthetic experience (Choreutics). The word "dynamics" relates especially to the forces that make movements occur and for Laban these forces always need to be described using a time, a weight and a space indication. He called these forces the basic efforts that help the actor to describe and define the quality of his movements and the intention behind them, allowing him to perform in different situations according to the type and style of theatre performance.

The elements of movement when arranged in sequences constitute rhythms. One can discern *space-rhythms*, *time-rhythms* and *weight-rhythms*. In reality these three forms of rhythm are always united, though one can occupy the foreground of an action. (Laban, 2011: 120)

Laban through his practical and theoretical research made clear that different movement's qualities can exist at the same time in life and on stage. An actor can go from a practical action to a stylized movement (e.g., like in a daydream situation).

The ordinary actions of everyday life, most clearly seen in working movements, constitute one stratum of the world of movement. A further stratum might be distinguished in the winks, nods and cries communicated during speech. Here conventional movements are substitutes for words. The dynamic arts of acting, singing and dancing represent a third stratum of effort expression. Movements performed in ballet have lost their connection with the primitive drives of man to such a degree that we relegate them to a realm akin to that of a dream state. In our dreams, movement is fantastical, though it may be linked to the forms of our everyday actions. (Laban, 2011: 85)

His analysis and articulation of movement is very useful for the actor, both physically and emotionally, to identify and play characters that are different from himself. This embodied work helps the actor in understanding internal impulses and in developing an expressive body. In this respect Laban was a pioneer of Movement Studies in the twentieth century. His work has influenced many dance and acting teachers, and his developed research has become part of many actors' training programs. Laban emphasized a holistic approach to the body of the actor, and he went beyond the body to include in its analysis also the space around it, the actor's kinesphere, and the relation of this to the general space in which the actor's body moves. The meaning of the movement depends on the actor's place in space, how the body in movement displays this space, but also how space changes when different parts of the body move creating new spaces.

Let us take the three dimensions of length, breadth and depth as our basic elements of orientation in space. The centre, front and back of our imaginary hall relates to the body's horizontal forward/backward dimension, the side walls to our horizontal left/right sideways dimension, and ceiling and floor to the vertical high/deep dimension. In Laban's terminology, these three dimensions represent the dimensional cross. The comprehensive study of logical spatial forms within the kinesphere and their link to the moving body is called choreutics. Some prefer to call it a study of Space Harmony. Our own bodies not only displace space, they also move in space and motion in space exists within us. (Newlove, 1993: 23)

His observation and study of space took him to the creation of a system of dimensional scales that ultimately construct geometrical figures or better correspond to geometrical figures that are always present as the potential directions of our movements. Furthermore, these geometrical figures also describe the resonance in space of a movement as well as all the potential movements and responses to movements as we inhabit the space.

The movements of our body follow rules corresponding to those of mineral crystallizations and structures of organic compounds. The shape which possibly offers the most natural and harmonious tracks for our movements is the icosahedron. (Laban, 1966: 114).

Laban's researches had a strong impact and influence on many art forms and traditions, certainly modern dance, but also movement practice for actors, especially if we look at the training established in the British conservatoires.

Laban's ability to link an analysis of the dynamics of movement (space, time, weight and flow) with the psychology of character made his ideas and practice particularly appealing for actor trainers and those interested in physically expressive theatre performance. The growth of interest in somatic practices during the twentieth century, particularly after the Second World War, represents a recognition of movement, the body and its cultural significances, as far more central to our sense of self than had previously been the case. (Evans, 2019: 3)

In the first half of the twentieth century, this new awareness leads also to the rethinking of the actor in relation to his role in the creative process in connection to his physical movements and displacements in space.

# My method: translating movement into meaning and meaning into movement.

## 1. Introduction

My creative process gives specific importance to the use of three elements: the performer's body, the space and the ensemble. I recognized them in my historical overview as recurrent elements in movement-based performance. The last element, i.e. the ensemble, comprises also the system of the collective working practice of the different phenomena involved in the making of the performance. I deduced my own creative method starting from these basic common elements of movement practice in performance making. The main focus is on the possibility of enabling performers and students to make an expressive and creative use of their movements and of the space itself. My method suggests that both movement and space are creative tools in a performance-making process.

An interesting critical perspective comes from the in-depth analysis of physical theatres by Simon Murray and John Keefe, authors of the books *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction* and *Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader*.

Their view confirms the existence of common recognizable basic elements in movement-based performances. Their research could be summarized as a journey into the plurality of the physical expressions in theatre, the different practices coming from multiple methods and techniques, and also the many forms of training and actor preparation. Their analysis starts from acknowledging the plurality as an inner quality in theatre in general:

The impulse to acknowledge and indeed celebrate complexity is not a perverse desire to complicate for the sake of complication, far rather a recognition that histories, influences and theatre makings are rarely ever simple and linear. (Keefe & Murray, 2016: 6)

The starting point to analyse theatre practice in its totality is for them plural. It is an art form based on the relationship between different phenomena involved in the making of the theatre event. According to Murray and Keefe, acknowledging this plurality allows bringing the attention to some possible common indicators also in what they call "physical theatres". These indicators are useful to describe the artistic

results of contemporary movement-based performances and to bring the attention to the importance of the collective working practice. The starting point for them is that theatre is at its core a collective event that would not exist without the plurality involved, including the audience. Talking about pluralities in “physical theatres” is, for Murray and Keefe, the way to articulate theories, histories and practices and to acknowledge the existence of “through-lines of principles of theatre itself; of embodied ideas that are in a dialectical relationship to the spoken word.” (Keefe & Murray, 2016: 7). The authors recognize a fundamental relevance to the relationship between “the physical-visual, scenographic, vocal-aural sign systems”, also to avoid the dualism and opposition movement/spoken words in the historical and critical analysis of “physical theatres”. This recognition of a plural essence in theatre practice, and specifically in movement practice, follows the assumption that theatre is practical and, therefore, experienced and experiential. I believe that the basic elements of body, space and ensemble, on which I have based my creative method, are at the roots of the systems mentioned by Murray and Keefe, “physical-visual, scenographic, vocal-aural”. Using these elements as tools for creation defines the practicality of theatre, specifically of movement-based performances, and determines the audience’s experience. The complexity of “physical theatres”, intended as a genre that comes from different practices and techniques which may result in different encounters and interchanges, contemplates the existence of specific systems of creation. In this respect Keefe and Murray use an interesting parallelism with football and mention three qualities required for success in a football match: Fantasia; Furbizia; Tecnica.

Fantasia: surprise, unpredictability, imagination, flair;  
Furbizia: cunning, slyness, bending the rules, trickery, gamesmanship;  
Tecnica: technique, highly developed core skills.  
(Keefe & Murray, 2016: 11)

I agree that a football match shares many elements of a theatre performance and specifically of a movement-based performance: it is indeed a show in itself and also a very complex one. There are many possible analyses that could be done in order to justify this parallelism. The element I would like to focus on is the effect on the audience. When watching a match, just like when watching a movement-based performance, the audience receives inputs from the several co-occurring events, with all the expected and unexpected relations between them. In football it is common sense that underneath all these events, there is a planned strategy that can be

dissected and analysed. Surely, this strategy is not the only thing that can determine the success of the match. The three qualities that can determine victory in the end are fantasia/furbizia/tecnica. They are not only essential to reach success, but also to give life and uniqueness to the planned strategies. Similarly, in a movement-based performance, the creative moment is the moment in which the performance's construction must follow a system without forgetting to leave space to the important roles played by imagination, trickery and technique. The possible combination of these three components may contribute in the construction moment and in the actual live performance.

My strategy of work in my personal method is applying a system of creation based on a series of exercises divided in three moments: introductory exercises to warm up, general exercises to develop the performers' awareness of body – space - ensemble, and specific exercises designed for the creation I am working on at that moment. Through all of them, I try to introduce in the working process elements of technique (tecnica), while helping the performers to develop their imagination (fantasia) and to free it and use it creatively with elements of games (furbizia). These exercises are based mainly on the researches and methods of Etienne Decroux, Jacques Copeau, and Rudolf Laban. There are several elements in common in the research of these authors, particularly regarding the use of the body and its expressive potentiality in connection with the use and definition of the performative space. I have always been particularly interested in these three methods and in all the possible points of interaction between them. All three practitioners were particularly interested in defining exercises to transmit their knowledge and research, both to allow the performers to develop particular skills and as a starting point for their artistic creations. They developed a specific training for the performers where the work and body and space awareness had an essential role. A system of creations based on the use of specific exercises was also especially important in the case of Copeau and Decroux. This is what nowadays we call “devising system” that is very common in the creative process of movement-based performances.

There are many similarities in the research of these three practitioners, especially in the geometrical organization of space and in its expressive use in connection to the visual compositions that the performers were invited to create. In all three methods, there is a clear attention to the work of the body in connection with the precise definition of the directions of movement in space. The work of all three practitioners takes into consideration the elements of weight and speed with the result of a clear mastery of the notion of time in the creation of the performance.

Decroux called this work “articulation” and “dynamo-rhythms”, Laban called it “basic efforts”, and for Copeau it was the work of the *ensemble* with specific focus on the practice of rhythms. As already mentioned, the three authors were working and researching around very similar principles, although with results and outcomes specific to each method and artistic vision.

## 2. “Traces and Echoes”: my creative method. An ongoing dialogue with the tradition.

In history, acting has always found its place in a fragile position between a methodical preparation and a spontaneous act. Since Diderot, acting has been analysed and judged from two opposite points of view: a well-constructed but detached interpretation and an emotional but unpredictable one. The intention behind my work is to explore how we integrate movement practice in the contemporary dramatic rehearsal and creative process as a possible response to this dichotomy. Mark Evans, in his latest book *Performance, movement and the body*, looks at different aspects of this practice in theatre, from the mainstream performances to the more alternative forms, and proposes this analysis:

The body of the mainstream actor can become limited by too closely defined notions of craft, by what can become (particularly in some cultures and some industry contexts) very fixed notions of what it means to be an actor. Movement directors within mainstream theatre cannot change this directly, but only impact upon these forces through making opportunities for change available as and when they arise. (Evans, 2019: 42)

The risk of a rigid separation between a strictly technical, physical interpretation and a more “natural” physical one is always present. However, the plural nature of the so called “physical theatres”, already starting from its roots, has always helped to find a balance between these two possible ways of acting. At the base of a creation, be it a performance, a piece of music or of plastic art, there is always a tradition. In this research my curiosity took me also to investigate the past. I tried to trace the possible roots of the use of the basic elements of body, space and ensemble, also at the core of my personal method. In my practice as a performer in movement-based performance, my personal tradition resides firstly in the technique called Corporeal Mime created by Etienne Decroux, one of Jacques Copeau’s first students. Many movement techniques and methods have become nowadays integral



part of the general theatre practice, and often they are part of Copeau's legacy, because of direct contacts or indirect influences.

### 3. Etienne Decroux: my research of his work and my adaptation inside my creative "Traces and Echoes" method.

My first and biggest inspiration is the work of Etienne Decroux and the way in which it was transmitted to me by Corinne Soum and Steven Wasson, his last assistants. They played a fundamental role in my understanding and fascination with the possibilities of creation with the body. In their teaching and in their work as directors of the company *Theatre de l'Ange Fou*, they give particular importance to the creative tools that Decroux has left to the actor through his technique and method. This physical technique that Decroux called "Corporeal Mime" is described by De Marinis in his introduction to the new Italian translation of the only book left by Decroux *Words on Mime*:

To put himself in the condition of being able to really make art, the actor has only one way, according to Decroux: he must choose and proceed with the choice of "counterfeiting the body". This is the key aesthetic procedure of Corporeal Mime (not surprisingly also called "abstract mime"), it opens the path to its more rigorous and radical theoretical-practical side.<sup>6</sup> (De Marinis in Decroux, 2003: 9)

And in Decroux's own words:

And since, contrary to marble, colour, and air, the body is already done in its form before one undertakes to do the work with it, since it means in spite of itself because its form is unmodifiable, since, it is a human body, it condemns itself to resemble a human body, therefore it has to counterfeit through its movements. [...] Otherwise the body exclusively imitates the body. (Decroux, 1994: 114)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Per mettersi nelle condizioni di poter fare realmente arte, l'attore non ha che un modo, secondo Decroux: deve imboccare e percorrere fino in fondo la strada della "contraffazione del corpo". Con la "contraffazione del corpo" siamo all'operazione estetica chiave del mimo corporeo (non a caso chiamato anche "mimo astratto"), quella che apre sul suo versante teorico-pratico più rigoroso e radicale.

<sup>7</sup> Et puisque à l'encontre du marbre, de la couleur, de l'air, le corps est déjà œuvre avant qu'on entreprenne de faire l'œuvre avec lui, puisqu'il signifie malgré lui parce que sa forme est interchangeable, puisque, corps d'homme, il se condamne à ressembler à un corps d'homme, il faut bien qu'il se contrefasse en ses mouvements. ... Sinon le corps imite le corps exclusivement.

The body is central in Decroux's aesthetic and technique, but he starts his research on the many possibilities of the use of the body as an expressive tool on stage, from the acknowledgement of its intrinsic limitations: the body can be an obstacle for the performer. From this assumption he starts his work around the idea of the necessity of "counterfeiting" the body. Technically, this means a specific way of articulating the body, followed by articulating the body in space, and using what he calls "counterweights". This is a work based on the organization of weight, muscular intensity and rhythms, and it is also part of the work of the organization of movement in space.

This important area of Decroux's work comes directly from Hébert gymnastics. Decroux (like Lecoq) reduced acting to pushing and pulling. Counterweights and walks overlap, as walking entails counterweight, Decroux said. In order to survive, man, constructed to move vertically (bending and straightening his legs), must convert this vertical movement to the horizontal plane, resulting in the first counterweight: a reestablishment of two elements on the diagonal, propelling the body into a fall. This displacement or fall, repeated, becomes a walk, and the first element of production becomes displacement. (Leabhart, 2007: 21)

The entire technique was devised by Decroux and his different assistants (between them Soum and Wasson) over a period of nearly fifty years. Articulating the body practically translates into a series of exercises designed in order to learn how to move segments or parts of the body independently, at times even challenging the anatomy of the body itself, and surely resulting in movements that are quite stylized and particular. The initial visual result is that the familiar becomes unfamiliar, but the purpose behind it is quite the opposite. Moving the focus of the action to particular details or moments that can tell us more of the intentions and emotions behind it, through the work of the body, augments the sense of familiarity even when at a first sight the action seems very stylized. To reach this particular effect also dramatically inside a performative situation, like his own repertoire pieces, Decroux uses different methods connected to articulation. In the context of a dramatic situation, one method is the choice of the body part or parts involved in the action.

One example is starting the action from a specific part of the body that is not always the most common one. For instance, if we take the action of looking at something as it moves in space, this is an action that a person would normally do with the eyes and then probably the head and the neck as the object moves farther away. In Corporeal Mime this "natural" order of the parts of the body involved, could be changed and the movement representing the act of watching could start from the

bust or from the trunk, placing the focus on the chest or the pelvis instead of the eyes. This change of part or “organ” of the body involved, determines a particular atmosphere or feeling, and it tells a different story to the audience watching. In this specific example, the audience would be able to still recognize the action of watching, but would also understand that this same action has been transposed. This way the action is charged of a metaphorical aspect that varies according to the part of the body involved. Another characteristic of this specific work of articulation is that Decroux always favours movements involving bigger parts of the body:

In corporeal mime, the hierarchy of the organs of expression is as follows: the body first, then the arms and the hands, finally, the face.

Where does my preference for the body come from?

Here: the organs of expression of the body are large and those of the face are small. [...]

Big in physicality is the loudspeaker of the truth. (Decroux, 1994: 89)<sup>8</sup>

I worked with Soum and Wasson in their physical theatre company where these physical knowledges are used at the service of their personal aesthetic. The main elements that they use are: the technique and the exercises of corporeal mime that is their common heritage; the body vocabulary of modern dance (specifically the Martha Graham technique) thanks to Soum’s dance background; and the notion and the use of the ensemble especially connected to Wasson’s theatre studies and practice. Soum and Wasson are specialized in the transmission of Decroux’s repertoire pieces and in the analysis of the way in which they have been composed both in technical and dramatic terms. They are also connected to the story of Postmodern Mime as defined and researched by Thomas Leabhart, also one of Decroux’s assistants who continued his vision, and experimented with ways of creation especially through a very strict form of body articulation.

When studying, watching and interpreting Decroux’s pieces I recognized a creative system that is fundamentally based on the use of two main elements: body and space. Decroux’s creations are short pieces that could be compared to poems or very short stories, following a non-linear plot, where reality is not reproduced in a mimetic way, but rather suggested. Decroux’s pieces are evocative but they take as a

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<sup>8</sup> Dans notre mime corporel, la hiérarchie des organes d’expression est la suivante: le corps d’abord, bras et mains ensuite, enfin, visage.

D’où vient ma préférence pour le corps?

Voici: les organes d’expression du corps sont grands et ceux du visage sont petits. ... Le physiquement grand est le haut-parleur de la vérité.

starting point a real practical action or an emotional state. These pieces have a strong technical structure, so precise that they can all be learnt and transmitted in every detail. These pieces are all unique in their aesthetic and in the way they are based on technical elements, which they also challenge in different ways. Decroux, in fact, used his pieces to experiment with the potentials of his technique.

In the creative process of his pieces Decroux applied a similar work of segmentation. He was applying the principle of a counterfeited body moving in a geometrically defined space, following the idea of a possible metaphorical transposition of the dramatic actions. He was segmenting the different dramatic moments, dividing everything in precise actions, in a way similar to the work of articulation he was doing also for every single movement that composed the different actions. This system of creation is described by De Marinis:

In Decroux, that work of double articulation that I happened to recognize at the root of the research of many of the Founding Fathers of the twentieth century theater, is brought to levels of systematic and unequalled depth (at least for the West): a work of decomposition/reconstruction concerning first, the body of the actor and, second, the physical action (as a real-conscious-voluntary action) that that body is charged to produce on the scene. (De Marinis in Decroux, 2003: 10)<sup>9</sup>

This way he found himself creating a movement vocabulary, which helped him to be more and more specific in his artistic language. Decroux never put an end to his researches, not even in his pieces which he kept reworking for most of his life, and transformed his own house into a permanent workshop studio. Soum and Wasson studied, worked and lived with him for several years and have witnessed his passion for researching and training in the technique and the method he kept creating and consolidating:

Etienne Decroux excelled in this art of transmission thanks to the power of his vision, his generosity, his perseverance, but also due to the utterly unique position in which he found himself. Indeed, he was the author, the creator, and the only teacher of this subject matter. Of course, as we all know, Etienne Decroux himself had his guides, teachers, friends, and influences – Copeau, Dullin, Jouvet, Craig, Artaud, the Prevert brothers – the list is long, the era was exceptional, many people pondered a renewal of the theatre of corporeal

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<sup>9</sup> In Decroux è portato a livelli di sistematicità e di profondità ineguagliati (almeno per l'Occidente) quel lavoro di doppia articolazione che mi è accaduto di riconoscere al fondo delle ricerche di molti dei Padri Fondatori del Novecento teatrale: e cioè un lavoro di scomposizione/ricomposizione riguardante in primo luogo, il corpo dell'attore e, in secondo luogo, l'azione fisica (in quanto azione reale-cosciente-volontaria) che quel corpo è incaricato di produrre sulla scena.

expression. But when I was a student, what he taught us was based on a highly developed technique which had become a world unto itself, and for which he was almost the only parent. Among other unique things, for example, the vocabulary he used to define this or that way of acting, this or that posture or attitude, or a sequence of movements, was specific to his “school” only. (Soum in *Mime Journal*, 1998/1999: 54)

The way I studied his pieces with Soum and Wasson followed two main paths: one implied learning his complex physical grammar and the other was entering his aesthetic world. This path implied studying the way he was composing the dramatic material, meaning all the different dramatic actions, constructed in a non-chronological order. In a similar manner to music or poetry, the pieces are created as a sort of dialogue between movement and emotions or sensations. Decroux called this way of creating “la métaphore à l’envers”, because in his creative method he was often starting from technical elements, for example a way of moving or of displacing one or more parts of the body, and he was allowing the emotion to be evoked from the composition of technical movements rather than the opposite:

The technical elements we learn are like verses. So, when we create a story by ourselves, we are bound to draw on our memories. There are verses that we will keep, and others that we will abandon, because the story doesn’t need them. The great benefit is that often what we don’t find starting from within ourselves, the verse will bring it to us. This technical figure carries a feeling, but had we started from this same feeling, we would have not found this beautiful figure that expresses it. It is the figure that brings us the feeling on a tray. We make a figure by having a technical concern, we embellish it, we find a logic, it is first just scholastic, but it will take a specific meaning. (Decroux in Pezin, 2003: 121)<sup>10</sup>

When Decroux uses the expression “technical figure” he is actually talking of technical exercises that he invented to teach to his students particular ways of articulating the different body parts, of using and creating the sensation of counterweights in movement, and of displacing in space in relation to the knowledges of gravity and weight that he was constantly exploring. In his creative work, Decroux was often starting from technical exercises to come to a composition that could evoke a particular feeling or state of mind. The visual result was a practical movement or

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<sup>10</sup> Les éléments techniques que vous apprenez ne sont que les vers. Alors quand vous montez une histoire pour votre compte, vous allez forcément puiser dans les souvenirs. Il y a des vers que vous prendrez, et d’autres que vous délaisserez, parce que l’histoire n’en a pas besoin. Le grand bénéfice est que souvent ce que l’on ne trouve pas en partant de l’intérieur, le vers vous l’apporte. Cette figure technique nous apporte un sentiment. En partant de ce sentiment, on n’aurait pas trouvé cette belle figure qui l’exprime. C’est la figure qui nous apporte le sentiment sur un plateau. On fait une figure en ayant un souci technique, on l’embellit, on lui trouve une logique, c’est d’abord scolaire, mais ça veut dire quelque chose, et pas telle autre.

action, at times even recognizable as an everyday action, but in stylized form. The stylization was reached through different processes that involved always an articulation of the body of the performer and the space around him. These two processes were called by him: intracorporeal articulation and interspatial articulation. The role played by the space in the creative process of Decroux's pieces served the development of the narrative itself. To articulate the action in a space that was geometrically defined would allow him to play with different effects like repetition, broadening and shortening of the action itself. Decroux divides the space where the action occurs through different lines/directions. He follows on the floor a separation of the space into eights, similar to dance, and then he adds also the lines that allows us to work with space in three dimensions: horizontally, vertically and diagonally. In this defined space he draws the segmented movements of the body:

One does not have the right to occupy or travel the space in a random way. In space, one must set imaginary lines considered ideal. The number 3 stands out: the vertical, the horizontal and, between two, well in the middle, the diagonal. The extension of the principle can be guessed: these three lines are found at the bottom, right, left, etc. These are the streets present in space. Each can be occupied or traveled. (Decroux, 1994: 103-104)<sup>11</sup>

The effects of broadening and shortening the action are obtained through a combined work of space and rhythm. In spatial terms the segmented movements are directed towards different eights and three-dimensional directions, whereas in terms of rhythm they have different lengths/durations. These are obtained through a muscular work that Decroux called "dynamo rhythms", where the muscles are used to express different intensities through a work of contraction and relaxation in motion:

He invented the word dynamo-rhythm to describe a combination of three elements: trajectory of the movement; its speed; and its weight – the resistance it met when moving through space. (Leabhart, 2007: 81)

In my creative method I am deeply inspired by this work of segmentation of the dramatic action, and I apply it to the creation of the entire performance favouring a non-chronological organization of the events. The scenes I create with the performers

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<sup>11</sup> On n'a pas le droit d'occuper ni de parcourir l'espace n'importe où. Dans cet espace, il faut fixer imaginativement des lignes jugées idéales. Le chiffre 3 s'impose : la verticale, l'horizontale et, entre deux, bien au milieu, la diagonale. L'extension du principe se devine : ces trois lignes se retrouvent en bas, à droite, à gauche, etc. Ce sont les rues de l'espace. Chacune d'elles peut être occupée ou parcourue.

firstly come from the work on the exercises that I propose rather than a literal, physical translation of the theme and the narrative chosen. These exercises help to spark the creation freeing the imagination of the body. Concentrating on the exercises helps the performers to step away from the issues related to the creation of the performance's narrative, and to work on something apparently much smaller. I propose exercises that I slowly bend towards a particular scene. The reason why I don't follow a narrative nor a set dramaturgical structure is because I prefer to work on the text as an inspiration to create movement and spatial dynamics, concentrating first on the quality of movements and on the spatial relationships, always in search of a specific style for each performance. The final narrative of the performance is often the result of a collage work, and the use of set design is minimal and evocative. The fragmentation of the events and their reorganization through the creative process is also intended to invite the audience to experience the performance through an act of imagination necessary to create the connections between the events even when there isn't an apparent effect of causality. This process is similar to that which we might experience in dreams or in a process of remembering. This process is very beautifully explained in the first pages of the text of the performance "Mnemonic" conceived and directed by Simon McBurney and devised by his physical theatre company *Complicite*:

Modern theories of memory revolve around the idea of fragmentation. Different elements are, apparently, stored in different areas of the brain. And it is not so much the cells that are important in the act of memory, but the connections between the cells, the synapses, the synaptic connections. And these connections are being made and remade. [...] But what I am getting at is that re-remembering is essentially not only an act of retrieval but a creative thing, it happens in the moment, it's an act, an act... of the imagination. (McBurney, 2001: 3-4)

For me the beauty of movement is like that of dance and music; it is not explicit and therefore, allows the audience to have also a contemplative experience. I developed a creative method where movement is central and it is considered in a plural way, including the three main elements I favour: body, space and ensemble. The scenes that the performers devise through this process come from a great attention and focus to the work of the imagination of the actor that is enlivened through the exercises I propose in the creative process. The way the final performance is composed tends to reproduce this work of the imagination by leaving space to the audience to create the connection between the different images and scenes. I follow a process of composition where the choice of the scenes and the link

between the different scenes doesn't follow only the progression of the events but also the representation of the perception of the events. I concentrate on how we perceive and experience these events and the kind of memories and projections these events may contain.

The work on the body and its movements and displacements in space, integrated in the rehearsal process, help the actors to trigger a deeper level of sensitivity. This sensitivity allows them to reach a higher level of creation because the body and mind are engaged fully and at the same time. Going back to *Complicite* there is in their way of composing also a system resulting from the fragmentation of events, which helps to create different levels of representation and to unfold the story in a non-chronological order:

At the heart of *Complicite's* work lies the challenge of transformation and, while this is self-evidently the very stuff of acting (although not necessarily *performing*) in any genre of theatre, the range, form and dramaturgical purpose of such transformation within a *Complicite* production is markedly different from the conventional protocols of realistic representational acting. McBurney regularly invokes the formal patterns of musical composition – rhythm, tempo and phrasing, for example – to help his actors structure material where the normal scaffolding of linear narrative and psychological motivation is absent. (Keefe & Murray, 2016: 108)

*Complicite* reaches this type of compositions through their own specific method moulded on the techniques of transformation by Jacques Lecoq, Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gautier.

Through my own method I aim for compositions created through a work of fragmentation of the dramatic actions inspired by Decroux's method, specifically his work on the body and space articulation, and the methods/researches developed by Copeau and Laban.

#### [4. Jacques Copeau: my research of his work and my personal adaptation of his exercises inside my creative process of the "Traces and Echoes" method.](#)

In my research and in the definition of my method I focused my attention on understanding where many movement approaches came from. I learned the origin in my studies and in my practice as a physical based performance. I found out that often Copeau was at the roots of these approaches or techniques and I decided to study



and adapt some of his exercises in my method. By doing so I followed Copeau's own steps. He was also attracted by theatre traditions, such as Commedia dell'Arte, which he studied and analysed with the intention of integrating them in his training and creative method:

We turned backwards in order to check what we knew, learn what we did not know, experiment with what we vaguely felt. (Copeau 1990: 169)

Since I studied with Decroux's last assistants (Soum and Wasson), I felt part of a line of transmission and I decided to look back at Decroux's own roots and I found out that the source of his work is the work with his master Jacques Copeau. The connection between the two is well summarized in Leabhart words:

Copeau's insatiable "appetite for the absolute" soon became Decroux's own and, during his career, Decroux took Copeau's "naked theatre" to degrees undreamed of by his mentor. (Leabhart, 2007: 42)

The main reason to say that Copeau might be at the source of the movement-based performances tradition is because of his focus on the actor as the central element of the performance. At that time in Europe, he was the first one to start this kind of theatre renovation:

The art of helping the actor, of showing him his way and clearing it for him, is perhaps the most pleasant and successful one I have ever practiced. It is a delicate art that requires an actor, but not too much of a one. The instructions must be slight, for the slighter they are, the more effective they become. One must know the man or woman being instructed well, and one must treat them tactfully. It is also important that they know you well, that they like you and have confidence in you. [...] The director's primary quality is patience. One cannot imagine how much is needed for certain inner states, the simplest movements or the most elementary gestures to mature in an actor. (Copeau, 2014: 141-142)

I feel that in these words there is already the presentation of a creative method and this creative method has a lot to do with what happened many years after Copeau, in different theatre systems and genres. In fact, the advices of Katie Mitchell in her book on directing *The Director's Craft* are similar to what Copeau states here and to what he did in his rehearsal practice:

Finally, remember that you are reading the play in order to come up with concrete tasks for the actors. So you need to practice translating your intellectual understanding of the material into specific tasks for the actors to execute. If you talk to the actors using the language of

literary criticism or abstract ideas they will struggle to respond to your instructions precisely and, as a result, their work will be vague. Of course, most actors are perfectly capable of holding an intellectual conversation about a play, but that is not what they are in the rehearsal room to do. Their job is to slip inside the skin of a character and enact credible emotions, thoughts and actions. Your job is to get them inside that skin. (Mitchell, 2009: 5)

Copeau started to define and give form to his creative method after many years dedicated to shaping a possible actor training. This became indirectly the base for the future development of a theatre practice based mainly on physical expression. When he went to Burgundy to try and develop an original theatre practice, this time not dependent necessarily on an already existing play, he started these attempts working on the exercises he had devised mainly with the help of his assistant Suzanne Bing. These consisted of mask exercises, improvisation exercises and physical exercises. The training at the *Vieux Colombier* had previously already been organized in a similar way. Etienne Decroux who attended the school attributes a great importance to these exercises:

If there hadn't been those exercises at the Vieux Colombier, probably I would have never chosen the path that I have. What did I do? I believed in the beauty of those exercises. I saw an artistic genre and I threw myself into it to add, and add. That's pretty much what I've done. (Decroux, 1978: 10)

Little by little the exercises became also the starting point for creation. I find very interesting the parallelism one could make between Copeau's creative attempts of his last years with the company Les Copiaux and the creative system of the contemporary company DV8 whose director Lloyd Newson forged the name 'physical theatre'. In both cases, for Copeau (especially in the years in Burgundy) and for Newson, the creative process doesn't come from an already set dramaturgy and choreography, but it comes from the rehearsal process where through a series of exercises the material is explored, analysed, written and created:

Newson's choice to call his performance style 'physical theatre' indicated a departure from the accepted contemporary dance styles in that it did not rely on a traditional dance vocabulary, but demanded athletic physicality and stamina from his dancers, as well as the ability to improvise. [...] Newson works closely and collaboratively with his performers, sharing the artistic process, channelling ideas, and improvising to uncover material that is always drawn from the performers' characters or their personal experiences. (Bremser, 1999: 174)

And we know that for Copeau the work on the physical possibilities and the rediscovery and use of improvisation were the key elements of his method. Both theatre practitioners used a series of exercises also as part of the creative process to work with their performers on the aesthetic and on the narrative of the performance. For Copeau his realization of the centrality of the actor's body went along with a new spatial awareness. He was conscious of the necessity of a theatre revolution that would include work on the actors, but also on the architecture of the theatrical space itself. This idea followed two important realizations: the influence that space had on the way the actors performed, and the role that the space had in the impact of the performance on the audience. Leabhart cites important changes that Copeau did on the space architecture and on the lights' arrangement, and underlines how these changes naturally affected the posture of the actors and their movements, also in relation to the audience perception:

Copeau intuited the intimate relationship between acting style and theatre architecture. For example, melodrama actors, like white-faced pantomimes, performed for best visibility with faces and hands thrust forward into the footlights, their backs correspondingly curved; called "crabs" because of their sideways manner of walking, melodrama actors never turned away from the footlights. In his theatre on the rue du Vieux-Colombier, Copeau covered the orchestra pit to bring the stage out into the audience. He abolished footlights and placed lighting sources above the actors, enabling them to straighten their spines and stand perpendicular to the earth as their forbears had done in what Copeau called the Golden Ages of drama – the Greek, Commedia dell'arte, Noh, and Elizabethan theatres. (Leabhart, 2007: 42-43)

This intuition, that Copeau had for movement and space in connection to the other theatre phenomena, like lighting, was part of his large theatre vision. He was able to sense how all the elements involved in theatre-making were interconnected. Therefore, he worked towards changes that would bring effective results both on the quality of the performances and on the perception and experience for the audience. This was part of his *ensemble* vision, meaning not only a choral way of performing, but also a vision of the theatre production that was largely inclusive of all the theatre phenomena. He was following his awareness of the importance of all the practical aspects of theatre as this was the key to a better experience for the audience. It is interesting here to quote the definition of *ensemble*, contextualized in the theatre domain, in the book *The Contemporary Ensemble* edited by Duska Radosavljevic:

It is worth briefly foregrounding here the online Oxford Dictionary's designation of the term 'ensemble' as originating from the Middle English adverb (via French and Latin) meaning 'at

the same time'. The adverbial aspect of this usage emphasizes a process rather than a fixed state, making it particularly applicable in the context of theatre-making. In addition, the primary meaning of the noun 'ensemble' as we use it today – to mean 'a group of musicians, actors or dancers who perform together'- is augmented by a more conceptual use: 'a group of items viewed as a whole, rather than individually'. (Radosavljevic, 2013: 1-2)

In this definition we can find the use of the word *ensemble* also applied by Copeau: the actors performing with a choral awareness, and the attention to all the phenomena involved in the making of the performance. In his consideration of all the different aspects of theatre making, he would always favour the actor as the central element and he would also work with the intention of freeing the actor from any constraint. For this reason, Copeau at one point realized that the rhythmic gymnastic exercises by Dalcroze, which he at first had been so keen to include as part of his training, were actually becoming an obstacle for the actors because they were making them dependent on music. Their movements were dependent on an external rhythm instead of following an internal impulse. For these reasons Copeau created a series of exercises, not only as part of the actor training, but also as creative tools, where he focused on the *ensemble* work, central to his practice, combining the awareness of space and the internal impulses of the actors also as a group. These impulses were worked especially in exercises where the chorus had to train a high capacity of listening while displacing in space and doing repetitions of sequences. The displacements and the sequences had to be repeated, adding variations and changes in rhythm. These would not be dictated by an external music, but by the group sensitivity and the feeling of ensemble in accordance with the necessity of the dramatic action, as enlightened by Evans in his reconstruction of Copeau's exercises:

Chorus work requires group sensitivity and awareness. [...] It is also important to develop the exercise beyond simple copying and following what Michel Saint-Denis calls 'the herd instinct' (Saint-Denis 1982: 164), which can deaden the work and lead to a fascistic feel quite out of the line with Copeau's intentions. To work as a group, as an ensemble, it is necessary to develop a strong sense of space, what Michel Saint-Denis calls a 'memory of space' (ibid.:165), and to allow emotion to be transmitted spontaneously and visibly within the group. (Evans, 2006: 145)

There is one exercise in particular from Copeau that, I believe, brings light to his work on the use of space and movement in connection with the ensemble work. This exercise is inspired by the story of the Sleeping Beauty, and is the reconstruction of the scene of the supper during which all the guests fall asleep. In a first stage of the exercise, Copeau would make the actors recreate the scene looking for detailed

actions and precise displacements in space; then they would have to perform it as an ensemble working at the unison to create a group atmosphere. The second stage of the exercise was the recreation of the moment where everyone would slow down and the guests would fall asleep all together under the spell of the witch. The effect of the different durations of the action is obtained here through a combined work of space and rhythm, like what happens with Decroux “dynamo rhythms”, but the focus is on the action produced as the effect of the work of the ensemble and not only on the action produced by the articulation work of one body:

The students’ main projects, designed to pull together all that they were learning in classwork, were the dramatizations of two fairy tales: “Sleeping Beauty”, an old French tale, and *Chant du jeudi*, a modern piece including many familiar story-book characters. Both projects incorporated the concepts becoming basic to the school doctrine: stylized movement (study of pantomime), masks, and rhythmic composition – including music and dance, improvisation, type characters, the personification of elements in nature, elements of French tradition and myth. The first scene in “Sleeping Beauty”, for example, was an improvisation in dynamics of movement and sound as the palace guards, cooks, ladies, and gentlemen fell asleep. (Leigh, 1979: 37)

Copeau used the ensemble in his performances, mostly to create a group work on stage, to give the portrait of a unified performance, and to enlarge and enhance some particular aspects or atmosphere. Nonetheless, the individual characters are not forgotten through the ensemble he would create a strong base for the individual (character and performer) to come through.

Taking inspiration from Copeau, a big part of my method is the ensemble work. The essence of my ensemble exercises is to create and compose with the group as one body, working first to keep the same position in space and then moving from there using different possible displacements.

In my own method I apply some of his ensemble exercises, particularly those connecting the work of the chorus with the elements of space and rhythm. In addition, for me the ensemble is also a way to embody and multiply the single characters. To do so, I might ask the group to repeat an action that a character is doing to help amplify it, or I might ask the group to work in response to the movements and the actions of a single character, literally like a musical chorus, creating resonances and/or enlarging the dynamic qualities. The thing that has always fascinated me in my experience as a performer, in this particular strand of theatre is also the possibility of being inventive in the group work. This allows participation in the creative process,

because the ensemble gives rise and space to the variations in the general rhythm of the performance to happen.

The work I do with my method, inspired by Copeau's exercises on the ensemble, doesn't reject music. Music in my rehearsal room is a great companion, but it does not dictate the rhythm and the sequence of an exercise or a scene, because I introduce it only in specific moments and never as the inspiration to move. Copeau reported about the necessity of working on the rhythm of the action through the combined work of space/displacements and intentions/physical textures. Similarly, I work with different elements (intensity, tension, effort, awareness), and I explore all these different movement qualities to create the rhythm of the scene. Later and only when the exercises have been done a few times, music can come as an extra input to try especially what happens when working with different speeds. The work of the exercises with music can be done in dialogue with it: confronting, contrasting, accompanying it with the movement. The beauty of the work with movement only or with movement and then music as an external extra element, is that the different use of qualities, the organization of the displacements and the order of sequences, can create a different visual rhythmic effect. For example, the performers can play with movement to establish a crescendo, or just to reproduce the identical, by the effect of repetition. Repetition can also have a different element all the time, the result for the audience in this case is that of repeated pleasure because of the effect of recognition. I like also, through this type of exercises, to work with the idea of trying to expand or contract time. This can be reached with the combination of the work of movement, space and ensemble, as shown by Copeau in his group exercises, resulting in the sensation that real time stops while the duration of the action varies. When this happens, the audience feels completely immersed in the present moment.

## **5. Laban: my research of his work and my personal adaptation of his movement and space analysis inside my creative process.**

My own way of making theatre is personal but comes from a long tradition. Laban is my third big influence because he talks of the importance of the space, which always surrounds us, and through his exercises he shows how it is an essential expressive tool. Jean Newlove in her book about Laban's method expresses it like this:

Our own bodies not only displace space, they also move in space and motion in space exists within us. (Newlove, 1993: 23)

In my interest for movement, I have always considered it as one thing with space, an element that is always present even when we are still, and that therefore has to be taken into consideration. Etienne Decroux expresses this same idea when talking about the definition of mime, and from my historical perspective, I have the feeling that he embraces in this thought Copeau's and Laban's ideas on movement and space:

Someone told me that a journalist asked Charlie Chaplin to define mime in a word or two, and Chaplin responded: "Mime is immobility." I think that Chaplin did not accurately state his own thought. He should have said: "Mime is stasis", or better yet, "movement in place". [...] Mime is movement in place. It is movement inside external stasis, as if man were a shell, within which things were happening that one could sense but not see. The mime artist transports his immobility. (Decroux, 2000/2001: 35)

Laban, as well as Decroux and Copeau but with greater emphasis than them, has always been working on the strong interrelation of the dynamics of space and movement, also in connection with the notion of rhythm/time. Time in his analysis and method is given by the rhythm of the movement played by the actors/performers. This can be sudden or sustained, and it is an element that is directly connected with the intensity/weight that can be heavy or light. The two elements together determine the way the movement can be developed, and finally this development evolves in space along precise directions. Laban organizes the elements of space, time and weight to create the notions of basic efforts. He uses them to describe and categorize three aspects of the performance: the spatial organization, the duration of a movement or sequence of movements, and the intensity of those. The combination of the three elements allows the actors/performers to have a clear indication of how to play their action physically, but the physical performance is directly connected to the emotion that might have created and/or might have been provoked by the action. Laban noticed that an emotional state or an emotional situation has a physical effect on the human body, this is often given by the work of the muscles in connection with their position and movement in space. Laban understood that a precise analysis and reproduction of a physical action in space is actually also the door to the representation of the emotions connected to it. The emotions and the intentions are clearer if the spatial organization and the muscular work are precisely defined and reproduced. This connection with

the emotional state of the character is possible also considering that there is movement around us, but there is also movement inside us, meaning that the work on space can mean the space around the performer but also the space inside the performer. In English, for instance, to say that we are emotionally taken by something we can say “I am moved”, and in other languages we can find similar forms of expression. Laban realized that something physically moves inside us when we receive or produce a certain movement and the result is the representation and the perception of an emotion.

My interpretation in my own method is that the representation is an active act from the performers while the perception is a tool for the performers to help them understand and connect with their movements and their characters, but also a passive act from the audience perspective. The audience watching the performance is receiving it, but this can and should be felt also as a physical experience and not only as an intellectual one. I apply this interpretation of Laban space analysis and basic efforts to a series of kinaesthetic exercises that I created for the performers, having in mind the idea that what they do creates and provokes emotions for them and for the audience. A movement well thought and organized can express and represent an emotion and can provoke an emotion in the audience, thus serving two purposes: the performers are able to identify and reproduce precise emotions, and they can also try to understand what might be the effect of their actions on the audience.

In my application of Laban’s analysis, I like to stress the idea that movement leaves a trace in space and produces an echo. These both have an effect on our involvement in the performance emotionally as performers and audience. The trace is given by the clear directions chosen; the echo is given by the weight definition. This allows us to decide which texture we give to the actions undertaken, trace and echo appear whether the actions are realistic or stylized. The immediate effect on the audience is the feeling of a better understanding of the performance even on an emotional level. The stage this way is never empty because the performers become aware of the traces and the echoes that their movements can create, and I invite them to play accordingly. Again, this is for me very similar to how dreams work – how, while we sleep, our unconscious combines images, sounds and the memory of smells, creating connections, extrapolating meanings or synthetizing situations.

Following Laban’s findings, in my own method I use exercises focused on space direction organization to experiment on how to move the body in space considering the different spatial possibilities. In addition, I consider how a performer can be moved by another performer in the different spatial directions, and last on how a



performer receives movements from different spatial directions because the other performers are moving around him, towards him, and away from him.

On one hand, this is a technical knowledge that the performers can acquire. Laban analysed the movement possibilities in space around the performer and categorised them in a system called the dimensional scale: he was able to draw and categorize 26 lines of movement possibilities around one performer standing on stage.

On the other hand, this way of categorizing and analysing movement possibilities and displacements shouldn't make us think that Laban's interest was to create a set of strict rules for movement. He was proceeding from an analysis of the existing movement dynamics in nature to find the essence of movements in space and use them as expressive tools. His interest was on the connection between the inner impulse to move and its external representation. By analysing existing patterns of movement and displacement in connection to different situations and emotional state, he was able to create a sort of vocabulary of movement. His work, for me, is very similar to the work of a lexicographer because he dedicated a big part of his life to analyse and collect physical moving patterns and dynamics:

These laws have always existed but Laban was able to tabulate them and present them in such a way that space was structured and no longer appeared as a 'vacuum'. Once we know where we are going in space, we must observe and analyze how we are going and what kind of movement energy we use. Our choice of the type of muscular energy, or from now on, effort, which determines how we carry out an action, is the result of previously experienced inner impulses. Coupled with our chosen spatial direction it produces a definitive expressive movement quality. Slight changes of effort and/or direction can produce the most subtle differences in expression and meaning. Strongly contrasting movements and directions can radically alter both. (Newlove, 1993: 13)

His assistant Jean Newlove in her work with Littlewood's theatre company developed a series of exercises specifically for the actors using Laban's notions and analysis of space and movement, and the "basic efforts" categories. Littlewood asked her to bring her knowledge and work at the service of the company because of her interest in a method that would help the actors, both in their technical precision and in their creative possibilities enhanced by the same physical training. This is because she realized that a physical awareness was not enough, it was necessary for the actors to go through a strict training with precise technical elements in order to give form and space to their creativity and imagination, as also pointed out by Keefe and

Murray:

For Littlewood, attention to physical training served not only as an actor's generic preparation for the kind of psycho-physical openness needed in a creative rehearsal period, but also in terms of precise and concrete detail so as to extend a performer's range, accuracy and depth in characterization and gestural choreography. (Keefe & Murray, 2016: 188)

Therefore, also according to Littlewood, if we consider the opposite scenario, meaning a complete freedom of movement for the actors with a total lack of precise movement directions, this would probably lead to a flat acting and a feeling of an empty space. Freedom doesn't mean the absence of indications, of clear directions in the displacements on stage, and of clear definition of the performers' actions and intentions. Laban in his study of human movement defines space not only as an element essential to choreograph the actions of the actors on stage, but also as an essential tool for them to work on their creativity:

Space-rhythm is created by the related use of directions resulting in spatial forms and shapes. ... The study of movement expression involves a mastery and understanding of space-rhythms. (Laban, 2011: 121)

The idea of expanding the possibilities of creativity through the knowledge of technical rules that can be seen initially as boundaries is also expressed by Copeau:

What I call theatrical convention is the use of infinite combinations of very limited material signs and means, which give the mind a limitless freedom, thus leaving poetic imagination its full fluidity. (Copeau in Evans, 2006: 48)

A well-known example for the so-called "freedom of movement" could be Isadora Duncan. Her figure became a symbol of free expressive movement, but I believe that it is important to go back to her story and her theories to find out a little bit more about this freedom that so often is associated with her name. She spoke of connecting emotion and movement, thus becoming the forerunner of modern dance, but she never denied the importance of a technique. The biggest proof of this is the fact that she opened her own school where she was keen in transmitting her own method.

Duncan challenged the paradigm of technique with that of the "Natural". That is not to say that there was no technique to her dancing, but that she ennobled an "artless" aesthetic, turning it into a virtue rather than a vice. [...] The natural correspondence between form and movement was part of the bedrock of Duncan's theory and practice. [...] So, taking her

“evidence” from Darwin’s study of the natural kingdom, and secondarily from visual art, Duncan “proved” that the movement of a dancer must correspond harmoniously and naturally to the line, proportion, and symmetry of the human form. Reacting against ballet, whose artificial movements Duncan found an offense against the “Natural beauty” of the human body, she aimed to discover movements so suited to the human form that they would be rendered virtually transparent on the body. “In my dance,” she wrote in an early notebook, “I search those movements which are in direct proportion to the human form - so that the form & movement shall be *one* harmony”. This seemingly transparency, itself the product of work and study, paradoxically facilitated the myth that Duncan’s dancing was spontaneous, her body independent of technique. (Daly, 1994: 27-28)

The theme of the centrality of human and natural qualities is recurrent also in Laban’s method and it is often preferred to a limited display of mere technique. This attention on the “natural” movement can be very useful as a creative tool. In my method, for instance, I don’t impose a movement grammar, or technique, but I invite the performers and students to acquire a physical awareness and the technical knowledge essential to gain more creative possibilities in order to choose what they could do with their own bodies in terms of expression and composition. To do this I proceed with a system of exercises that link their physical and spatial training directly with the possibility of composing and creating.

Talking about the creative aspect of technique, and going back to Littlewood, there is an interesting association with *Complicite’s* composition system that I found in Keefe and Murray:

Like Simon McBurney, *Complicite’s* artistic director, Littlewood was often unwilling to separate ‘technical’ movement training from strategies for developing an actor’s creativity, and from the actual process of composition and rehearsal. (Keefe & Murray, 2016: 189)

This comparison is significant for me also as a proof that there are indeed a lot of creative possibilities in the interaction, I personally found, in the methods of Decroux, Copeau and Laban. I have already pointed out that the fragmentation of the dramatic actions, that in my case is connected to my studies and my personal application of Decroux’s technique, can also be found in the work of *Complicite*, I will add now that also the example of Copeau, probably as an indirect influence, is very present in their creative system as they rely a lot on exercises and games:

The structure is much more of a cross between a sculptor and a football team where I will simply be trying to lead people from a game into an exercise – a physical exercise to build up their strength – into another game, which leads into a scene, and from out of the scene ... so

they hardly know when they are in a scene or not in a scene. (McBurney in Keefe & Murray, 2016: 189)

Finally, their use of space is indeed already a dramatic act, because in their performances, they play with the different time dimensions through space, and with the simultaneity of situations in time and space. I see here as well an indirect influence from Laban's research. I say indirect influence because both Copeau and Laban through their legacy are still very present in many contemporary works, but often the connection to their findings is not explicit.

My method and my creative system have focused on these same elements and are inspired by the work of the twentieth-century masters as much as by contemporary examples like the one of *Complicite* company.

## 6. "Traces and echoes": my method

My method is clearly inspired by the researches and works of Decroux, Copeau and Laban, as well as the contemporary company *Complicite* (that is part of Lecoq legacy). In my creative work I aim for the possibility of working with the body, with the space, and with the ensemble in a dramatic way, and show the potentiality of expanding and contracting the representation of time and of reality itself.

Body, space, and ensemble become dramaturgical elements, just like the usual theatrical figures of dialogues and characters. This is not only a formal change, but a structural one that allows the possibility of using different registers at the same time, shifting constantly between a more realistic and a more stylized one. In my method I connect it with an attention to the audience's perception. I analyse ways and possibilities to involve the audience without a direct invitation and without giving it a role in the performance, so not like what happens in the genre called "immersive theatre". I look for something that would trigger their imagination through a physical device, meaning a way of using the body of the performers, and in my case the body in space, to act upon the audience. As I explained previously, I try to create or induce a passive act from the audience. This might happen if they can also physically perceive the performance because their senses are constantly stimulated. This effect on the audience is the reason why I call my method "Traces and Echoes", it is connected to the work of the performers in space, and to their muscular work. In fact, thanks to a clear definition of weight I create movements that have a precise texture, and I play

with this texture in relation to the space around the performers. This way the movements and actions are clearly constructed and the audience can see and perceive their trajectory in space and also the physical effort with which they are done, meaning their impact in space as they move or even on another performer when they interact. For the audience this is clear not only visually but also in terms of sensation and effect. For this reason, I ask the performers to consider the connection between their movements and the space, also in relation to the weight they apply to the movement itself, resulting in something that might visually flow in space or something that meets a resistance in space.

Movement, for me, even the simple gestures of the actors on stage, is complex like a language and shouldn't be just an attitude, therefore not a simple expression of a behaviour. Heidegger in his book *On the Way to Language* (1959) explains that gestures represent thinking in one of its many forms. There is in the gesture the echo of giving and receiving. Things or thoughts come to us and we go towards them, thus generating/creating. The gesture becomes a synthesis of the concept of creation:

The question for a philosophy of rhetoric, then, is just how speakers communicate on this ground and basic level, just how they can induce the prerequisite *metabolê*, the *Umschlag* or sudden conversion of affect in the inherently unstable psychosomatic unity that, beneath all fictions of pure reason, we actually are. The self-evident answer is by voice and gesture, which is to say, music and dance. For the vibrations of voice with its variations in tone, volume, timbre, pitch as well as in tempo, rhythm, meter, and the correlative expressive motions of the body impact the audience immediately, and it is the bodily experience of these in the audience that invoke the reversed *hexis* or diathesis, is the *Verfassung* or psychosomatic condition and disposition, that underlies not only our volitional decisions but in fact our cognitive views of things too. (Smith in Raffoul & Nelson, 2013: 22)

This is why I am also fascinated by the story and the findings of Gilles de la Tourette. In 1886 he published “*Études cliniques et physiologiques sur la marche*”, the first scientific work on walks. His findings came from the method of analysis he had developed: the footprint methodology. The diagrams and reproductions he created of different walking patterns almost magically tell the story of people not present anymore. When we watch these footprints and we follow these walks and rhythms left in the traces we actually imagine the people behind them. Just like in a photograph we see movement, even if people are just still because we can visually imagine their previous journey or even foresee their future displacement by their position in space. We can also read their moods through their postures that represent

also how they are using their weight. A big part of it is the work of our imagination as watchers, but this is certainly triggered by precise visual elements.

Visually we have all experienced watching at night the lights of cars passing by so quickly that we see their traces in the air. They are not physically there anymore, but the movement of the cars in space draws an imaginary line that stays in our memory. This is what I try to do with the performers' bodies, these are the "traces" I look for through clear movements and displacements along the directions in space. I want the performers to build an awareness of these traces left behind by them and by the other performers, and I would like the audience to be moved by the effect of these traces.

An everyday example of what I call "echoes" in movement, could be the memory left on our skin by somebody holding our hand. The sense of touch is spread throughout the entire body and it does leave a memory trace after the physical sensation is gone, and also a touch can have different textures and intensities, thus provoking different emotions and sensations. Moreover, this information appears to be perceived also visually if we see the act of touching, the contact between people. Therefore, the audience can read and also perceive physically, through the contacts, the exchanges, the lifts, the simple touches between the performers or even the manipulation of objects, the emotions and the stories happening on stage without much conscious awareness. As a result, traces and echoes can create the effect of memories in the audience, the feeling that something that is happening or just happened on stage is manifesting in our perception and lingering on for a longer time and in an interesting way, almost in a creative way. In fact, the audience, through this work is invited to imagine and this work of imagination during the performance and after the performance is also an act of creation. The performers are also affected by this work, their perception is awakened and they understand physically the creative possibilities and freedom that they acquire inside the rehearsal context, because the work of the body in space allows them to shape the content of the performance. Their work is not only a reproduction of a given movement. The way they move, and the intensity and texture of these movements, developed in specific directions in space and in dialogue with the other performers, give meaning to the performance and determines the way it is experienced and understood by the audience.

Moving the body in space and in a physical dialogue with the other performers requires training and skills. The actors also need to develop and practice the awareness of how their relationship with space may affect the audience and what type of communication they can establish with the audience through movement. To

help the actors train their movement possibilities and their spatial awareness, I propose a series of exercises to help them technically but also artistically.

There are few preparatory exercises that I always propose as part of the general introductory part of my work. They are inspired by the ideas of Decroux, Copeau and Laban on body articulation, space geometry and ensemble games, which I apply following my theory that the reality and the materiality of the theatre phenomena can and should influence the creative process. These exercises are essential as tools to explore each performer's imaginary landscape through the body. The final general aim is to help to focus on the relationship between what the actors do and what the audience sees and feels

## **7. Exercises on the articulation of movement and space inspired by Etienne Decroux's technique.**

These exercises are an exploration of the possibilities of starting a continuous movement leading from the head, and then the same but leading from the legs. There are two possible routes for our movements according to Decroux: progressive and digressive. To explain this concept, inspired by the figures invented by Decroux and called "Farewells", I created a series of exercises. The main aim is to be able to create clear journeys with our bodies in space, also connected to clear intentions.

### **a. Exercise 1. Goodbye**

In this exercise I invite the performer to explore the situation of a farewell. The performer will start this action standing and giving their back to the person from whom they are departing. When he turns around to face the person, he can either start to turn from the head, looking around or from the feet as though something is pulling the body from behind. When they are facing the other person, they can say goodbye or wave their hands.

In Decroux's technical vocabulary, when a performer starts turning the body from the head it is called a progressive movement, otherwise if the movement starts from the base, for example the feet, it is called digressive movement. Progressive and digressive are two ways of articulating the body, separating all the elements and moving them one by one thus creating the effect of a chain of movements. It is possible to portray different emotions and tell different stories, especially if we start

combining this work with different speeds and weight, for example if we play as though the air has some resistance.

I ask the performers to let the body speak for itself, meaning that they shouldn't plan the emotion behind the farewell first, but they should do the physical action and follow my indications of whether the movement is progressive or digressive, and then of which speed and weight they should apply. The emotions happen, they are both visible to the audience and clearly perceived by the performers as they do the action, because they come from the movement itself, its design in space (progressive or digressive) and the different textures (speed and weight) that can be added to it.

The aim of this exercise is to explore the dramatic possibilities of movement in space, articulating the body in displacement.

### [b. Exercise 2. The chain effect.](#)

At the very beginning of the exercise, I ask the performers to stand up from a chair and then to sit down again. I ask them to do it first in a progressive way and then in a digressive way and to play with a clear separation of all the parts of the body. Then I direct them to try the same sequences, but with different speeds and finally with different weights.

I then ask them to concentrate on this chain effect. I ask the performers to walk away from the chair and experiment progressive and digressive movements in space starting from different positions and moving freely around the space.

Finally, I ask them to try two by two, thus creating little duos. Every performer keeps concentrating on the quality of the displacements and turns in space, but keeping also the awareness of the other performer in space. It becomes a dialogue and the speed and weight applied to the movements become the elements that tell the story because they create the possible emotions and atmospheres.

The main aim of this exercise is to work on the articulation possibilities of the body in space, and the different emotions we can portray with it.

### [c. Exercise 3. The balloon](#)

Firstly, I ask the performers to work in small groups and pass to each other an inflated balloon bouncing it up in the air, paying attention not to make it fall. The performers have to keep their concentration on the balloon, but at the same time they have to be careful that they work as an ensemble. I also ask the performers



watching to concentrate on the journey of the balloon, to look at the lines it creates in the air and to see how these lines correspond to the design and the movements of the group in space. Secondly, I request the performers to try the exercise again, but this time focusing also on the chain effect, meaning moving one element at a time in a fluid way, and trying to make the journey more complex. Instead of choosing the shortest route to reach the balloon I ask them to move around each other. Thirdly, I request the performers to do it again trying to choose to move either in a progressive or a digressive way.

As we proceed with the exercise, I ask the performers that are just watching to notice the differences, to be aware of how the movement of the group becomes more and more organized, and how the more it is organized the more it looks fluid and it seems to match the harmonious movements of the balloon.

In the last stages of the exercise, I request the performers to leave the balloon and to try and reproduce the same ensemble effect, displacing the group harmoniously in space and fluidly between all the individuals of the group.

The aim of this exercise is to work with the ensemble and its spatial organization, practicing both an awareness of the ensemble dynamics from the inside, being part of the group, and from the outside being simply a witness of the action but with a critical thinking and the possibility of giving an evaluation on what they have seen.



Picture from "Did you know seahorses also experience life?" (Balloon exercise) / Courtesy of A. Rotondi

[d. The three exercises merged together. Working with the body with the awareness on the traces and echoes we leave on stage. Looking at a contemporary exercise by Frantic Assembly to find possible connections with what I do.](#)

In this last exercise, as visible in the video (Exercise "Traces and Echoes"), I invite the students/performers to work on body articulation, rhythm, ensemble, dramatic intention:



Exercise  
Traces  
and  
Echoes

1. We start with a warm up that focuses on articulating the different parts of the body already focusing on the idea of the mark that we leave as we move. I do so by asking them to use different parts of the body to write in the air or on the floor. This way, they have to concentrate on the accuracy of their journey and they can immediately visualize what is produced by their movements in terms of trajectory.

The exercise can be done progressively or digressively according to which part of the body starts the movement.

I ask them also to play with different concepts of weight and “dynamo rhythms”.

2. We continue warming up the awareness of the resonances (which I call echoes) that we produce with our movements, in this case producing a real vocal sound to go along with the movements and displacements in space. I ask them to work as an ensemble moving around space and creating different harmonies through their choral or individual movements and sounds.
3. I then ask them to bring the awareness of body articulation, trajectory, displacement, traces in the air and on the ground, accompanied by different weight and intensities, inside a dramatic context: the farewell improvisation. This time I invite them to sit on two chairs at the opposite extremities of a diagonal. The person that will receive the goodbye cannot see the person seated behind and preparing emotionally to leave.

The emotion behind this action of parting has to be clear and communicated through the body.

It begins with the actor who will say goodbye that now has to first stand from the chair. This can be done with a progressive or digressive chain of movements and then the journey towards the other person can be direct or indirect, still connected

with the possibility of accentuating a specific part of the body for a change of direction, a pause or a stop.

The person sitting has to concentrate on the sounds to understand the mood behind the journey of the other person. These sounds are produced by the actor leaving, because of the body standing up from the chair and walking, in a natural way without accentuating them artificially, but putting a clear awareness into the intentions and therefore the weight and intensities of every moment. The sounds of the journey are what I call the echoes in this improvisation and the journey from chair to chair is the trace of the actor in space.

To finish I ask the students/actors to try an exercise from the company Frantic Assembly called "Hymn Hands", and I ask them to think that behind every arm movement, directed towards one another standing in pairs, there is the possibility of a goodbye. The alternation of arms movements to touch the other person, as proposed in the original exercise, becomes a series of attempt to connect and to part.

I put the focus on the trajectory of the arms and the trace that they leave in space, especially as seen from the eyes of the audience. To work on the audience awareness, I ask the other actors watching to stand in a circle around the pair working. The idea is that we are always moving inside a circle of possibilities in terms of directions for our movements.

The actors performing the movements are asked to use the awareness of progressive and digressive, weight and intention, and to keep the connection between their movements and the audience through the clarity of their trajectories and their intensities. The aim of the exercise is similar than before with the two chairs, but this time the performance is given by smaller movements.

I use this exercise to explain how we can apply similar principles with smaller movements, but still with big dramatic intensity.

I also like to do the connection between different works and methods from movement practitioners in different times.

## 8. Exercises on the *ensemble* movement in space inspired by Jacque Copeau's findings

These exercises are inspired by Copeau's research on the role of games, "*le jeu*", to develop *ensemble* skills in connection with the development of a good sense of rhythm that he considered essential in the actor training. This type of work can help the actors to be present in the moment in space and to use the spatial awareness to work on the rhythm of the scenes and then eventually of the characters. The movements of the actors dictate the rhythm of the performance and create the "music" that brings all the other elements together.

### a. Exercise. Creating the group. First part

I ask the performers to stand in a big circle with one performer alone in the middle. The person in the middle holds a tennis ball and will throw it to each one in the circle, one by one. Each one will throw it back to the person standing in the middle, thus creating a sort of ping pong effect. The person in the middle can establish a rhythm, but also break it with sudden changes. They can first follow the order of the circle and then throw it without any order, trying to surprise the catcher who must stay focused.

After this first part I invite the performers standing in the circle to run in, one at the time, and steal the role of the person in the middle. This can only be done when the person in the middle throws the ball and not when they are about to catch it. The aim is to steal their place not the ball.

### b. Creating the group. Second part

Once everyone has been in the middle, I ask the performers to try and establish a system. One person in the middle throws the ball to somebody in the circle, the person standing to the left of the catcher moves to take the central place. This is done following the order of people standing in the circle clockwise. This time, the person in the middle after throwing the ball must quickly leave the central position and run away, exchanging positions with the person running from the circle to the middle

At this point I ask everyone to memorize who they throw the ball to and all the pattern of exchanges. I invite them to continue this order slowly opening up the circle until they start to walk around. Everyone must be very alert, looking out for the

person they need to throw the ball to and also making themselves visible and present when they have to catch the ball. All this while they keep walking across the space and also follow my indications of changes of speed, changes of directions and levels, plus changes of weight.

### c. Creating the group. Third part

After a few sessions of this exercise, I ask them to think of rhythms as though all the movements of throwing and catching were possible notes of a larger symphony. They have to work together, keeping their eyes and ears on everything and everyone.

At this stage I ask them to drop the ball and continue the same order of exchanges only that now they have to replace the action of throwing the ball with different actions that I propose from the outside (for example, hugging each other, shaking hands, whispering a word in somebody's ear, etc.). Little by little I ask them to physically propose a different action from the inside, while continuing in an improvised way.

Finally, I transform it into a composition exercise where the routine is used as a base to create exchanges and actions in an ensemble situation. The group must move in space and exchange actions in the order that came out of the game. The order is fixed, but the actions chosen and the rhythms and textures of everything that is happening in space, are free and together they become the elements that create a possible narrative.

The main aim of this exercise is to practice how to work creatively in an ensemble situation, combining the spatial awareness, because the direction of the movements are key elements in this exercise, and also because the performers need to practice and gain a sense of alertness and control of all the space around them in order to complete all three tasks.

## 9. Exercises on the physical articulation of space inspired by Rudolf Laban's analysis

Following Laban space articulation work, in connection with the study of his movement dynamics and intentions (expressed through the definition and the interplay of the qualities of space, time and weight), I devised these exercises where space is used in the service of a dramatic creation.

### a. Exercise 1. The silent speaker

In this exercise the performers are sitting two by two, one in front of the other. The idea is to give "voice" to that awkward moment that exists before we actually start speaking. I ask them to concentrate on this pre-linguistic moment and to perform as though they realize that the other person is about to speak at the same time and therefore, they stop and decide not to speak anymore.

The performers have to use their body as a thinking muscle, meaning that all the body has to participate and express the action of thinking and of getting ready to speak. To do this I ask the performers to use the "basic efforts" categorized and explained by Laban, these become the motor of their movements. The "basic efforts" are the tools that the performers use with the muscles of the entire body to express what is their physical and mental state. Words are never spoken, but sounds can be used if they simply happen to arise as a result of the muscular work. The sitting position helps the performers to feel their body as one and to find an immediate connection with their core. Thanks to this sitting position, they naturally start to use the entire body almost like a hand: from the centre of the body (the core) all the other muscles and bones are easily activated and can participate in the movement. The "basic efforts" immediately help to give a precise texture to the action and this will bring a feeling to this non-speaking situation, it will create the same effect of adding colour to a picture or a drawing. But even if the performers are sitting down all the way through this exercise, it doesn't mean that there is stillness; on the contrary there is a lot of action. All the possible directions that Laban drew from our position in space (the dimensional scale) and all the movement possibilities implied are there but used only as potential displacements. The performers' intention of speaking, of approaching the other, of directing their words to the other, becomes the beginning of a possible displacement. The audience must be able to see the tension of the

performers towards each other; the movement possibility should be represented at its starting condition.

The aim of this exercise is to play with the different textures in a dramatic context, and to embody the possibility of moving in space even when simply standing or sitting down.

### b. Exercise 2. Approaching the other

Applying Laban's principles of direct and indirect movements and transposing them to a dramatic situation, I ask the performers to play with the situation of approaching someone to say something. The person that they must approach this time will simply be standing still, while the performers have to come from further away. The journey in space to get closer to the person they want to speak to, will reveal the situation, the emotion and the intention behind it. The main thing that the performers can play with is the displacement in space, the way in which they want to use the space in geometrical terms. But before thinking of the possible design of the journey in space, I ask them to choose whether they want to travel in space following a direct or an indirect system.

At the beginning of the exercise, I allow them to move only across one precise diagonal, and as they travel along the diagonal they can experiment with the difference between a direct and an indirect journey. At the beginning an indirect journey becomes a curve or a zig zag way of proceeding, but then as they go along with the exercise and I add the possibility of different speeds and weights, the possibilities start multiplying. The geometrical design becomes more and more a three-dimensional journey where also the rhythm is essential to show the way the space covered takes shapes, and the directions are clear thanks also to pause, acceleration, slowing down and stops.

The aim of this exercise is to study and use the space directions also in a creative way, and the displacements will include not only the directions but also all the muscular texture possibilities and choices with which the journeys are executed.

## 10. Exercise combining the findings of Decroux, Copeau and Laban on the relation of movement, space and the element of play (*le jeu*)

### a. The talking space

In my exercises I try to incorporate as much as possible a spatial knowledge and a spatial awareness when moving. I do it, always keeping the possibility of improvising and playing in the exercise with the purpose of giving creative tools and not fixed rules. I believe that technique is necessary to improve creativity, but it is very important to stay away from the danger of encouraging the performers to become too self-conscious in their movements. Therefore, it is very important for me to always introduce an element of play inside my exercises even when practicing more technical knowledges, similar to what Copeau realized in his actors' training experiments with Susanne Bing:

Copeau's legacy also resides in the countless games and their derivatives which formed the core of his and Bing's work at the Vieux Colombier School. Through the dissemination of these games via his nephew Michel Saint-Denis (The London Studio and The Old Vic School in Britain), and son-in-law Jean Dasté (Commedie de St Etienne in France) and from him to Lecoq, the concept of learning to act through play has fed into drama training. (Callery, 2001: 95)

In this exercise, which I call "The talking space", I start establishing a division of space in eights, clearly inspired by Decroux findings. I propose a way of displacing that follows these possible directions in space, such as, for example, alternating straight lines and diagonals. This is similar to the basic exercises of Jean Newlove on the principle of the cross, as defined by Laban. These changes of directions can be regulated by different rules: 1. always turn to the left when starting a new "journey" alternating diagonals and straight lines. 2. always change three eights when turning to the left. 3. count the number of steps walked in space going from nine to one and then again from one to nine. I ask the performers to walk the space following these rules and to do it as a group. They help each other to move and stay together first with their voices, counting loud the number of steps they have to do, then I ask them to stay together without the help of their voices and relying on the space indications and on their breath. They learn little by little to combine their visual awareness with their movement awareness, connecting to each other through breathing.

The visual result of this organization of the space is the geometric reconstruction of a spiral. The spiral appears thanks to the journey that the



performers do, both through their motion in space and through the rhythm that it creates (the steps of every directions diminish as they go from nine to one, thus resulting in an accentuated rhythm).

I then ask the performers to try all the displacements walking backwards, from nine to one and continuing from one to nine. At the beginning the challenge is to find again the right directions in space. These are to be organized according to the previous rules of the eights' division of the space. The performers will now find themselves having always to start the turns to the right and probably at the beginning they will feel lost because they had become accustomed to the space surrounding them and had found visually a way of organizing themselves in order to know each time where to face. These visual repairs are not there anymore as walking backwards means looking in the opposite direction to where they are going. It is important to practice the possibility of moving in space without relying all the time on our sight, but also on our mental and physical capacities of organizing the space around us. It is a human possibility that we all experience when we walk around a familiar space at night or also when we find ourselves in the opposite situation of walking in the dark in a space that it is not familiar. In both cases all our senses are awakened, only that in a familiar space we don't really realize what and how we are doing it. When performing on stage, it is important that the performers look comfortable in the space they are occupying and that this space is used as an expressive tool no matter what they are doing, allowing the audience to perceive the transposition from the actual space "here and now" and the metaphorical level it could take.

Once the performers have understood and embodied the rules of this space articulation, I ask them to play with it. I invite them to try different possible situations, using the principles of "jeu" defined by Copeau:

1. The group stays compact but one performer alone stands away from the group and will have to perform in contrast to the displacement of the others. I propose a possible situation: people standing at the airport. The performers will represent a group of friends waiting for one of them who is visibly late. The wait is very long and they end up missing their flight. The latecomer arrives rushing in and facing the group to apologize (words from him are allowed). As they walk towards the group, the performers start the spiral displacement. I ask them to stay together in their displacements and in the rhythm they choose. They don't talk, don't answer back to the prayers and the explanations, they just keep walking away. Visually, it appears as though they are walking

away from the latecomer who will have to try and be always in front of them in order to apologize and in order to refrain the group of friends from walking away from him. The performer playing the role of the latecomer will feel physically exhausted from the attempt of always facing the group while the others keep changing direction.

The changes of eight become shorter in terms of length in space because the performers are walking fewer steps as they go along, this is because in the first part their steps go from nine to one. Once the group is back “home”, meaning they face the audience again as in the starting position, they start walking again, and this time they have reversed the spiral walking from one to nine thus resulting in a sort of rewind of the previous situation.

The dramatic possibilities are endless, displacing in space in different eights becomes the representation of running away, getting angry, rethinking what happens, coming back on our decision, and more.

2. There is no more ensemble, but the performers work in couples, two by two. I ask the performers to face each other so that one will work forward and the other backward. After a little practice of the physical relation in space, turning in different eights and adapting physically in order to try facing each other after every turn, I ask them to try different possible contacts and to let this influence the rhythm with which they walk and their relation in space. For instance, if one of the two performers is touching the other with one hand, this could become pushing the other away, or resisting to the other advancing, or it could be an intimate situation, a moment of sharing, or many other variations. As I ask them to try different forms of contact, more possible dramatic situation occur. The performers can try and walk, keeping one shoulder always in contact, or their foreheads, for example. All these different connections influence the situation that might arise from displacing in space together. I then ask them to try with different rhythms and efforts, to accentuate an emotion or provoke a different situation to come through.
3. Every performer is invited to walk the space alone and play with the dynamics of movement and space present in this articulation exercise. These possibilities include of course the different rhythms that can be applied to the displacements (and inside this category I include also pauses and stops), the “dynamo rhythms” that will represent the muscular intensity of the movements, and the efforts that help the performers to combine the spatial organization with the time and weight awareness in order to bring to life

different possible emotions and/or situations. I ask the performers to try first following my specific technical instructions and then I switch to describe only the possible moods or situations they might be in. In this change of information that they receive, hopefully they understand the physical connection between what they were trying to achieve technically and the dramatic interpretation that they could execute.

Through playfulness the space becomes 'other' and the performers can understand movement in space as a dynamic and creative element. The changes in space happen through different displacements that reflect changes in attitudes of the performers, and their level of physical commitment is the main tool for these transformations. The concepts of time and time passing are also affected by these changes, by the duration of the displacements given by the predetermined number of steps, and by the performers' explorations of the expressive possibilities of space. This happens thanks to the exercises that I propose on the possible speeds, rhythms and the efforts of the walks in the different directions. The awareness of the experience of time both for the performers and for the audience comes from Laban's research as also explained and organized in Newlove studies:

The speed with which a movement travels spatially is on a continuum from very fast to very slow. We need to remember that whereas the speed of motion of inanimate objects is constant and calculable, everyday human movements are neither. We are not mechanical. The speed with which we move to accomplish a purpose will tend to accelerate and decelerate depending on circumstance, making for a freer, irregular rhythm guided by our kinesthetic sense. The resulting dynamic qualities lead us to our continuum of *suddenness* and *sustainment*. This we shall use as our basic time continuum, without losing touch with duration and speed. (Newlove, 1993: 58)

This continuum is the basis of my "Talking space" exercise. The aim is to give life to the possibility of rendering the narrative through the work in the space on the intensity of the movements. These are expressed and defined also with different speeds and "dynamo rhythms", without forgetting the importance of pauses, stops and suspensions.

## 11. My method – My practice

To analyse what I do in the creation process and describe my own creative method, I devised a piece with nearly forty performers, I worked in a systematic way in order to break down my own creative method. I chose to be inspired by Peter Handke's text *The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other*, but I preferred to work on an adaptation of the text written by a colleague, the playwright Armando Rotondi, in accordance with my dramaturgical view and indications. The adaptation is called *The empty square/space in the bright light*. Here we played with the images and the repetition of characters crossing the stage in order to create a crescendo, in a very similar way to the original text, but in a shorter and more condensed version.

The original text by Handke provides for 450 characters and it depicts the life of an ordinary town square throughout a whole day. The text is a piece without dialogues or any spoken words. It is the stylized transposition of a real moment in his life: Handke was sitting for a whole day outside a café watching and witnessing the day unfolding in a small-town square. What he saw and what he shows in the text is a series of people passing by and the succession of a few events that in reality were not connected to one another. I started the rehearsal process from a very clear idea on how I could use the space, and how I could articulate individual movements as well as ensemble movements in space. I wanted to try and create the possibility for the audience of witnessing and visually participating in a collective experience just like it might happen in the square of a small town. In order to recreate this feeling, I lead the performers in the creative process through a series of exercises.

My exercises and my dramatic reconstruction and physical transposition of the text come from my method and my investigation. These are not focused on the research of a perfect visual form, nor on the definition of precise rules underlying the visual construction. Movement for me is at the surface of the construction of my creations, it is only the visible end of a dramatic organization whose purpose is to help the audience to go beyond the observable.

I start from the principle that the spectators want to be able to recognize themselves in the actions and characters on stage, but that they can also be carried beyond the visible in a liminal space between reality and dream where memories and feelings intersect. When this happens, everyone in the audience can take a personal journey and give a personal interpretation of the performance. To facilitate this operation, meaning the transition from the visible, the materiality of the scene and of the bodies, to the invisible, the space of the metaphor and of the unconscious, the

characters don't have to be too specific or represent only individuals with a clear social and historical identity. I give greater space to the role of memory and I refer events to a kind of original place where they might become the symbol of a collective experience, something that all the spectators can recognize and in which they can feel represented. I want to move away from a narrative order subjected to a chronological system. To do so I look for actions that are recognizable and that could remind the audience of a state or a feeling, and that have been experienced by everyone in life, or at least are known and therefore shared by everyone. These actions are practical and can represent and reveal also relations and connections between the characters on stage.

For example, in the performance "The empty square/space in the bright light" I chose to represent the feeling of loneliness in a crowd situation, with two different scenes connected to one another. The connection is the weather condition, it is raining and people look for a shelter. This action of looking for a place to take refuge could end up representing both a situation of hospitality, of care for one another, as in the first scene where one character is helped and guided by the other two with an umbrella (in the video Thesis-Performance from the minute 8:50 to the minute 9:06), or it could represent the opposite, meaning hostility and rejection as represented in the following scene where one character is oppressed and controlled by the others with an umbrella (in the video Thesis-Performance from the minute 9:07 to the minute 9:47).



Umbrella scene 1



Umbrella scene 2





Pictures from "The empty square in the bright light" / V. Temussi

These two scenes are inspired by a moment in the original text where the scene is invaded by many characters “an entire team comes running in” (Handke, 1996: 84). Handke makes a list of all their possible actions, including “opening an umbrella”, I concentrated just on this, still trying to keep the hectic atmosphere, but wanting to explore more only this one action that for me could evoke common and diverse memories for the audience. Instead, Handke describes a scene that might resemble a painting by Hieronymus Bosch, resulting in a portrait of isolated life moments:

They don't stop in the square either as they fan out in all directions, disappearing, reappearing, each for himself and also part of the game in his “warm up”, chimera-like, changing shapes and movements abruptly, on and on: from a standing jump, face unmoved, instant transformations into running like a rabbit, knocking dirt off shoes, spreading arms, shielding eyes, walking with a cane, walking softly, taking off a hat, combing one's hair, drawing a knife, shadow-boxing, looking over the shoulder, opening an umbrella, sleepwalking, falling to the ground, spitting, balancing along a line, stumbling, skipping, spinning once along the way, humming, moaning, punching one's head and face with the fist, tying one's shoelaces, rolling briefly on the floor, writing in the air all this topsy turvy, not followed through, just a first try. (Handke, 1996: 84)

#### [a. The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other](#)

I chose to work on this text because I felt that the dramatic construction was very close to what I was investigating, and I carried the composition of the performance with my exercises as tools and possible initiators of a physical transposition of the text. In what Handke saw and witnessed in a square while he was

sitting in a café during a whole day there was no intended causality, but for the outside watcher, for him, things were leaving a trace behind them like a fragrance. The successions of events became part of a whole story that he was combining in his own head, but this story was fluid and kept changing and adapting with the new elements coming into focus. Every element of life passing by in front of his eyes was unique in his time and space existence, but it was also somehow part of a larger picture that ended up being a human pageant. From this visual event that he experienced, Handke had the idea to recreate on stage this same effect and to let the audience live this same experience.

The theatrical experience continues the author's initial experience of watching the ongoing in an Italian piazza. Real passers-by mingled with remembered images from his own life, private recollections overlapped with associations from literature, film, and the daily news. The square becomes a bridge between continents, a mythical island in the storm of history in process, a temporary resting place, a bustling urban thoroughfare and, again and again, a celebration of community. (Honegger in Handke, 1996: 28)

Handke created many characters and wrote their precise journeys on stage, including entering, crossing and leaving the stage. The characters are only sketched and this way the depersonalisation of the text allows a larger picture to come through. Every character is a tile of the large and varied mosaic of humanity. Every character is only defined in the present, in that crossing of the stage becomes a metaphor of the fluidity of time. The sequence of cause and effect here is completely fortuitous. The audience, in their imposed ignorance of the past of the characters, is invited to imagine and create his own personal story, just like in life.

This way of organizing the action on stage as a series of consecutive entrances and exits gives the impression that the appearances and happenings keep living in the present, as though every character crossing left a trace on stage that the next new character encounters. The spectators are invited to take an active role in the final making of sense, similarly to what happens in the movie *Wings of desire* (1987) written by Wim Wenders and Peter Handke. Susan Broadhurst points out, in her book *Liminal Acts – A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory* (1999), that this wouldn't happen without somebody watching, therefore without an audience. This is because the events are only connected through their spatial relationship, therefore, the visual experience and interpretation of the audience bring meaning to the succession of the events, and this might be compared to what we experience in dreams.

In Handke's *The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other*, the audience cannot be passive because the lack of a preconceived story and, on the other side, the presence of a series of images and their juxtaposition, become a sort of call for action from the audience, even if it is just a passive action. The audience has to do the work of connecting things and extrapolate meanings from them. The same happens in the movie *Wings of desire*:

Rather than 'obliterating audience participation', as Pfeil suggests, it would seem that this particular film does the opposite, and encourages the audience's participation. The cold, starkly beautiful monochromatic imagery of Berlin actually forces the audience to participate by seeing the space and time of the city in ways that would otherwise have been ignored. (Broadhurst, 1999: 125)

In *The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other* the space, like the characters, has also been depersonalized. Handke places the sequences of the crossing and the sporadic scenes, in an unspecified town square. Because of this neutrality of space, and the lack of details and scenography elements, it becomes the square of every possible town, and finally, the symbolic visual image of the process of time unfolding, the depiction of life itself as it embodies time passing by. Space works like an hourglass and we see the day unfolding as the text becomes more and more surreal. We recognize the evening getting closer, that moment of the day where the passage between day and night opens a whole window of possibilities and carries a little wave of fantasy and hope.

Handke, by taking away any particular signs or evidence of the geographical and historical place, makes everything important in its essence and this becomes recognizable and familiar for everyone. For instance, in the play the feeling of the evening getting closer; in the text this is given by the slight changes of a repetitive open sentence: "The stage is an open square in bright light." that becomes "The open square in the bright light." and "The empty square in the light." Thus, suggesting a possible change from the natural light of the sun to the electric light, a light that stresses the dimensions of the space and its emptiness, because the characters presented are more and more defined also in their physicality and the attitude with which they pass through the stage. Handke in his descriptions also adds details of their clothes, the objects they are carrying and how they do it, thus giving indications on how their movements might be affected by their clothes and objects and allowing an understanding of the texture (speed and weight) with which the movement is happening.



The text starts with a quote that became for me a clear indication of how to proceed: “Do not betray what you have seen; keep to the image.”, taken from the sayings of the oracle of Dodona. Handke this way advises against imposing any meaning, the text is built as a harmonic structure created by the clear images in motion. The journey of every character crossing the stage is very meticulously described in the text as well as the form and qualities of their movement.

Someone crosses the square, oblivious to it – a fisherman on his way.

Also, right afterwards, someone as an old woman, all bundled up, pulling a shopping cart behind her.

She hasn't quite disappeared from view when two men wearing firemen's helmets storm across the square, carrying hoses and extinguishers, in the course of a drill rather than an actual fire?

Right on their heels, walking like someone lost in his dreams, a soccer fan on his way home, still a long way off, with a charred flag under his arm which gradually disintegrates as he moves along; he is followed by someone nondescript with a ladder, which another, entering after him as a beauty, brushes against in passing without either one paying attention. (Handke, 1996: 84-85)

This text proves that visually in a performance, with an intentional use of the space as a dramatic tool and with the work of the bodies involved in a precise definition of the texture of the characters' movements, the audience can feel involved in an interactive way. This happens also for two main dramatic reasons, the first is that there is no preconceived and defined narrative, the second is that the audience receives visual stimuli that mimic responses similar to the experience of a day dream, thus allowing many imaginary possible stories to happen in the audience's heads at the same time.

The performers have to be very precise both in their use of the directions and in their muscular work in order to be sure to leave a clear trace behind them and bring every moment to life in a unique way, the door to the dialogue between images is always open thanks to the traces and echoes clearly left behind by every crossing.

#### [b. The empty square/space in the bright light: physical adaptation](#)

In my physical adaptation of the text, I worked on three main components: precise articulation of space, clear movements of the performers and of the ensemble. I gave particular importance to the quality of the movements and for me this means a precise work of the muscles to explore the intensity, the tension and the efforts. Space and movement together were used to give to the audience a very

specific kinesthetic experience with the intention of reproducing the sensation of the situation that Handke recreated from real life, where watching becomes one thing with the act of daydreaming. For this reason, the choice and organization of the elements used in the exercises at the base of my creation, follow an ideal journey from the inside, meaning the body, to the outside, the space. For example, in one scene to portray the idea of dust that in the text is given by the sentence, “A cloud of dust; a billow of smoke.” (Handke, 1996: 86), I started with the simple gesture of one person brushing a hand to clean the floor, this gesture triggers the invasion on stage from different parts of people representing the dust being wiped away. (In the video Thesis-Performance, from the minute 10:46 until the minute 11:30).



Dust

I focused part of my creative process of this performance on the reproduction of the image of human continuity that the original text by Handke depicts. For example, in one scene I recreated the visual sensation of watching from a distance people walking by, taking as inspiration the effect of looking at people walking in a mall, and using the action of carrying a bag as a practical element recognizable from the audience (in the video Thesis-Performance, from the minute 29:07 until the minute 30:35). The different characters crossing the stage during this scene share the same bag and pass it to one another, thus marking the importance of this object that defines and identifies the different moods and attitudes of the character carrying it. The inspiration from the text is a short passage:



Bag

Then several persons are simply walking, some with, some without a clear sense of destination; one who doesn't know where he's headed transforms midway into someone who does, while his successor, clear at first, suddenly loses his goal. (Handke, 1996: 93)

I wanted to explore also the element of time using the tool of space. Instead of working on the idea of the fluidity of time present in the original text, I focused my adaptation on the idea of the crystallization of time, and this is also the reason why the written adaptation of the text we created was mostly a condensed version of the original text. In the performance I created an introductory scene that would depict the feeling of the opening sentence “The stage is an open square in bright light.”, and then I repeated elements of this scene in different moments of the performance in order to transmit this idea that time was not really advancing and that all the possibilities present in one specific moment were portrayed. (in the video Thesis-Performance, from the beginning until the minute 4:00). One element repeated from this beginning scene later on in the performance is, for example the sleeping character present at the start of the entire performance. At one moment it is carried



Beginning

in and momentarily positioned in the same spot to represent the possibility of repetition present in my cyclical representation of time (in the video Thesis-Performance at the minute 31:43). The main idea behind the adaptation process was to keep a similar level of absurdity as in the original text, but to work also on different effects. Instead of working only on the succession and the juxtaposition of different characters and moments, I accentuated also the idea of repetition and multiplication of the characters and the scenes, culminating the performance in a sort of collective dream moment, (in the video Thesis-Performance, from the minute 35:55 until the end).



[Repetition](#)



[Ending](#)

I also explored the possibility of rendering everything, even the weather conditions and the changes of lights described in the text, through the relationship between movement and space. For instance, in the text at one point it says:

The square by itself in its bright light. Again, the rustling sound sweeps all around, autumnal.  
(Handke, 1996: 96)

I worked on the possibility of rendering physically the sensation of the sound and of finding an equivalent both for “rustling” and “autumnal”, the result is a scene where the performers recreate and mimic the noise and the rhythm of the rain as it falls, (in the video Thesis-Performance, from the minute 34:38 until 35:40). This is done with their own laughs followed by body percussions that introduce spasmodic movements on the spot and a crescendo towards a rhythmic series of jumps and falls. The rhythm and the musicality of every scene is given by the movements of the performers and in addition I added in some parts the use of voice and of body percussions. The tensions and efforts played by the muscle of the performers create a music score. I used music in the performance, but never in a leading role and it is never associated with a particular scene. Music is not only in the elements of the soundtrack, it also resides in the image, in the spatial organization and in the performers’ bodies. The result is a polyphony or better a harmony where the different parts are working by accumulation. The work of the composer Mirko Ettore D’Agostino, author of the original soundtrack for the performance, is adding an atmosphere of constant suspension, that in the performance represents the suspension of rationality and the slow descending into the subconscious.



[Rain falls](#)

In the video “Thesis-Rehearsals Long” there is a short moment from 9:13 to 9:17 that is very dear to me because it looks as though the performer is moving following



[Rehearsal moment](#)

a music while in fact she was moving in silent experimenting with different efforts and tensions.

### c. The elements

To prepare the creation of this performance I worked around four elements (intensity – tension – effort – awareness) originally identified and conceptualized by four founding fathers of modern theatre: Etienne Decroux, Jacques Lecoq, Rudolf Laban, Jacques Copeau. Their artistic and theoretical contributions happened historically in the first decades of last century and for Laban and Copeau we can say that their research is at the heart of the rise and the assertion of theatre as we know it nowadays.

I used my personal way of combining and adapting the elements and the exercises from these theatre practitioners to teach or better said to facilitate the performers to move as a creative ensemble.

### d. Intensity

The first element I worked with is “intensity”, and the inspiration comes from Etienne Decroux, an actor and a teacher who has been called the father of modern mime. He called the form he created “Corporeal Mime”, which he defined as a dramatic art played exclusively with the body.

For him, it all came from the idea that when people feel something, they translate it even unconsciously into a movement of the body. This movement happens first of all in our muscles and it is the intensity with which we engage in an action.

“Intensity” has a mechanical explanation. In fact, muscles can contract, expand, vibrate, sustain a displacement and hold the movement for as long as needed. Decroux used to call and classify these technical possibilities of the muscles under the name of “dynamo rhythms”. “Dynamo rhythms” are the description of the muscular work underneath a gesture or a displacement. Decroux goes literally beyond the surface, meaning not only beyond the aesthetic of the gesture or of the displacement, but beyond the skin itself, to describe the intensity that might produce a movement. The work of the muscles might be difficult to clearly identify and name, that’s why Decroux invented the definition “dynamo rhythms” and divided them into categories. The basic dynamo rhythms are: 1. Toc, an explosion or implosion of the muscles; 2.

Resonance, the extension of a muscular explosion that therefore comes after a toc and implies the same work as to sustain a note with a bow. (Visually we should have the impression that the movement continues beyond its will, similar to a voice carried by the wind); 3. Vibration, the contraction of the muscles that happens usually in a working situation, but that can also be felt in a state of rage or nervousness; 4. Fondue, which implies a never-stopping and never-accelerating motion which creates a sense of elasticity.

It is a very deep work where the actors are invited to concentrate completely on the quality of their movements rather than the shape or the type of action they might do. I used this work in a series of exercises that I organized to create different scenes. In particular a scene towards the beginning of the performance (in the video “Thesis-Performance” the scene starts at the minute 6:37 and ends at 8:37). The interaction between the characters in this scene is quite simple. They are stealing each other’s front stage role and this is symbolized by stealing each other different pieces of costumes, like entering in the skin of a character. I introduced this scene towards the beginning of the performance to symbolize the interchangeability of roles present in the play. It is one of the many physical adaptation of the text I did, where rather than simply interpreting the descriptions and indications of the text I worked on the semantics of it.

To compose this scene, I worked with the performers first on the physical recreation of basic dynamo rhythms in different movement contexts, then we added the manipulation of everyday objects, holding them and using them in an ordinary way but reproducing at the same time, with the muscles involved, different dynamo rhythms. We then chose the parts of the costumes we could manipulate and we tried the same exercises with those. Finally, I asked them to work together looking for causalities between the movements, suggested by the use of the dynamo rhythms (what happens when we do a toc with an object in our hand as we move and we are physically interacting with another body? And where would the resonance, happening after the toc, lead the next movement to?). We reworked everything thinking of the connection between the movements in order to represent the act of entering inside the role and fighting for it.

“Causality” is also a word used by Decroux in his method. He organized different groups of causalities by dividing them in different categories. Defining the causality means working on the relationship of cause and effect between different movements and different actions, in order to define why and how we do something.



The work and organization of dynamo rhythms and causalities determine the rhythm of a scene, therefore its dramatic meaning.

Decroux used this type of creative tool to endorse an evocative physicality, which is a physicality with a sculpture-like quality, also determined by the extra attention and focus on the articulation of the body. Nonetheless, he also claimed that for a movement to be relevant it needs to be recognizable. This can only happen if the movements come from a “supposed original”, as he used to call it. In other words, their roots should be in a real action.

The work of the muscles according to the different dynamo rhythms creates this link with reality. The audience, in fact, will always recognize the intensity of a movement if they can identify it clearly, therefore if the performers are clearly performing it. “Intensity” is only visible in the movement, and for Decroux even immobility is moving because the body is working in order to keep still, therefore the body of the actor should always be engaged and be expressive no matter what position or motion he is in.

This intensity can then be dramatically translated into an impulse that starts the movement inside the body physically but also emotionally. The body starting the movement is already in a state that can be not only described but also measured and recreated. The definition of this state of the body leads to the second element I focus on: “tension”.

#### [e. Tension](#)

The second element is a personal adaptation of Jacques Lecoq’s work of the seven states of tension.

Jacques Lecoq was a theatre pedagogue, a pioneer in the use of movement as a dramatic tool in his theatre exploration that would consider all possible elements and tools in order to help the students to express dramatically to the best of their abilities and inclinations.

My approach, when applying his theories, helped the performers to move from the analysis and definition of their own movement qualities to the relation and connection to the other performers around them. This relationship does not have to be always expressed in the form of a physical dialogue or an actual interaction; I asked the performers to start considering the outside, the world around them and choose how they could relate to it. The world outside us, meaning outside our comfort zone, outside our own kinesphere includes the presence and the absence of other persons.

The others could be a community of people that are physically there or not, they could be those that are there in our heads because we have to take into consideration their judgement or their possible points of view. The others, meaning the performers and the characters, could be absent, but still present for the performers, they could also just simply remember them. How does a performer react to this presence/absence? He could be ignoring them, or he could be open to them, he could avoid this presence or he could be in a constant contrasting position. All these ways of being in a social situation can be worked and represented on stage through the body. The body can be for example open and very centred or it could be accelerated and evasive.

Lecoq organized these possibilities through seven different states of tension that are like states of being (a definition also present in Decroux) where the centre of the body, the engine of our movement, changes according to the state of tension we choose for our characters. This shift of centre obliges the body to constantly reorganize the way it functions, also using different intensities/dynamo rhythms. The physical impulse in the body is different because our disposition towards the movement is emotionally and physically different.

In the rehearsal work leading to the performance, for example, in some particular scenes I asked the performers to move as though they were receiving the impulse from their pelvis in order to create movements that were very rooted but also not very open to the outside world. Moving from the pelvis would correspond in Lecoq to the state of tension number two. These movements kept the performers connected to the floor rather than the upper world, which would be the space around them above their waist. I used this type of movement to show two particular moments of the day, the beginning of the day that in a small town could be the awakening of everything (in the video “Thesis- Performance” the scene starts at the very beginning until the minute 4:00; in the video “Thesis-Rehearsals Long” it starts at 7:35 and ends at 8:44), and the moment that we called the “nap”, the moment in between, the transition from morning to evening (in the video “Thesis- Performance” the scene starts at the minute 10:57 and ends at 11:20). In the text these parts correspond to the sentences “The stage is an open square in bright light” and “The open square in the bright light”, these sentences keep coming back like a refrain with slight variations to represent the changes in light due to the changes in the weather conditions, and also as the day unfolds. The physical representation of this one sentence became the opening scene of the performance. The scene starts with one performer lying on stage asleep. She awakes little by little, but she keeps that physical attitude and tension that correspond to our physical state as we wake in a warm



States of  
tension



Nap



sunny day and our body struggles to gain full awareness. The physical attitude and the tension of the body together in motion lead to my third element: “effort”.

#### f. Effort

The third element is “effort” as a result of my personal adaptation of Laban’s principles.

Rudolf Laban was at the heart of Movement Studies in the twentieth century. His research on the nature and on the dynamics of movement has been very influential in different artistic fields but also in many different social environments. The word “dynamics” relates especially to the forces that make movement occur. He called these forces the basic efforts that help the actor to describe and define the quality of his movements and the intention behind them, allowing him to perform in different situations according to the type and style of theatre performances. The intention, as said, is given by clear intensity of the muscles and clear impulses and gravity/weight of the movement of the performers.

The work by Laban is best known as the “Eight Basic Efforts” or the “Eight Action Efforts”. Laban organized the analysis of movement, according to three main principles: Space, Time and Weight. These elements combined together create a series of eight so called “basic efforts” that can be used both to describe or create a particular action. These efforts describing the quality of the movements are connected to the physical and emotional work that each movement implies. The efforts, according to my methodology, can be used as the notes of a musical score to understand and describe the movement, but also as a tool to help the performers to analyse and perform a particular theatrical situation.

The performers of *The empty square/space in the bright light* were invited to use the efforts to organize and define their performances also adding the principles of flow and bound which help the actors to have a clear physical understanding on how to engage in the movement. In my work, I have used the principles of flow and bound to define first of all whether the performer is receiving or conducting the action. In particular, in the rehearsal process, receiving the movement would be the starting point for the creation of scenes that were representing particular weather conditions or describing the sky. The performers were representing the wind, the hot climate, the calm sky, the rain. Additionally, for the scene I created to represent a physical adaptation of the arrival of a tempest, I used instead the principles of bound movements and the basic efforts of punching, pressing and gliding.





Thunder

The text says “There was thunder, and it is thundering again. And a woman has run across the square and now she is running back, in her arms a gigantic pile of unfolded laundry.” (Handke, 1996: 90). To create this scene, I looked for the explosive quality of a tempest transposed in a human condition expressed in the form of being in a bad mood, and in the context of a contrasting relationship between a single person and two groups of people. The groups try to impose their rhythms as though they are having a dialogue or an argument with her, they do so by stomping their feet on the floor (In the video “Thesis-Performance” the scene starts at the minute 25:20 and ends at 28:02). In this scene, it is clear how the different elements (intensity, tension, effort and awareness) can be combined as creative tools. The sound of a tempest getting closer and closer and therefore louder and louder is given by the feet stomping on the floor and this same movement symbolizes the disagreement between the characters involved. This argument takes the form in the space of a separation between two clear entities – the groups and the single person – using first just distance between them as they stay on the same lateral plane, and then also the diagonals to add depth and make the separation even stronger.

“Intensity” was also a very important element for the creation of this scene and we worked on it also with group exercises exploring “basic efforts” and “dynamo rhythms” in connection to physical displacements. For the creation of this scene inspired by the sentence about the thunder, I invited the performers to explore with different exercises the dynamo rhythm called “toc” in connection to the basic effort of “thrust” (direct-heavy-fast). In these exercises the main task was to be receptive as an ensemble to different sounds, responding to them physically with “different dynamo rhythms” and “efforts”. I used natural recorded sound that I would play to give the signal to the ensemble to do a specific dynamo rhythm or basic effort. To create this particular scene, the exercises focused on the necessity to show the explosive quality of the sound of the thunder.

In this case it was useful to work on how to embody a “toc”, an explosion of all the groups together and at the same time, while they were walking in the space. The rumble of thunder can also provoke a resonance, an expansion of air like a wave, and then the same noise becomes quieter and fades away. I proposed the performers to work with these natural sound effects, listening to them while staying still with the eyes closed and feeling in the body the effect of these sounds. After this first listening moment, I led them through the ensemble exercises to help them experiment with to embody the different sounds (in the video “Thesis-Rehearsals Long” from the minute 2:29 to the minute 2:48). We went through the exploration of the physical response,



Embodying  
sounds



Rhythms  
of the rain



Earth  
shakes

concentrating on how to embody sounds and express them through efforts. This work was the starting seed of the scene called “the rain” (in the video “Thesis-Performance” from the minute 34:39 to the minute 35:40).

The exercises involving space articulation and efforts, with particular focus on flow and bound to explore the idea of receiving or conducting the movement, were the starting point for the creation of another scene that represents the human conflicts in the form of a passive response of a group of characters to the shaking of the earth created by four other groups entering the stage and imposing their presence and their personal rhythms through clapping and stomping while they approach the first group (in the video “Thesis-Rehearsals Short” from the minute 2:40 to the minute 4:28, and again in the same video from 9:08 to 9:58 where we can see the performance images). The dialogue between different groups in space and in connection with the use of sounds can only happen if they have developed a sense of awareness, which is my fourth element.

#### [g. Awareness](#)

The fourth element is “awareness”, which is, I believe, the very essence of Jacques Copeau’s researches and the core of most acting training nowadays, especially in Europe.

Jacques Copeau was a leading figure in the development of the twentieth-century theatre practice, especially for his innovative views on the actor’s training, and Copeau’s ideas have become part of the international vocabulary of western actors also thanks to the work of his nephew Michel Saint-Denis, especially in England.

The core of his training, proposed to his actors and then to the students of his school, is the development of the physical, emotional and mental awareness in the rehearsal process and on stage. This means each actor’s ability to be alert and responsive to the other actors and their actions in space. One of the tools that Copeau used, to help the actors train this capacity is the work on the ensemble. His idea of the ensemble is connected to the use of space that the actors were invited to do. Space was not a box where the scene was framed, but a bridge between the actors and the audience. Space, where the ensemble moved creating visual scenes in motion and also building rhythms to go along with the narrative development of the play, had to be considered in a three-dimensional way that also included the fourth dimension which is the encounter with the audience. The encounter, the idea of going towards the audience, means being aware that the actions on stage convey a message, also

an emotional message, which can be evoked and provoked also according to the different uses of the possibilities given by the space articulation.

Space can be articulated thinking about the place of the actors along with the physical qualities (intensity, tension and effort) with which this organization of space happens. In a scene that I named “The Mall” (in the video “Thesis-Performance” the scene starts at the minute 29:07 and it ends at 30:33) I used this space awareness combined with the other three elements to portray the evocative qualities of an everyday scene of people walking inside a mall. I wanted to recreate the effect of seeing them from very high as it might happen in a mall with many floors. In this optic the perspective of the vision generates encounters and exchanges that are not really happening in reality. This optical effect is like the effect of a kaleidoscope because the vision from far suggests moments of proximity and the images can seem very close. I asked the performers to create a very specific displacement in space along an imaginary spiral that would take them closer to the centre and then far away again. The spiral gave the direction, but the walks were also organized in a geometrical way following Laban’s dimensional scale. I decided to push the boundaries of reality: the characters in their spiral journey meet in the centre two by two and in the moment of almost getting in contact they pass a bag between each other. These exchanges were first invented in an improvised setting and then more and more organized by playing with different “dynamo rhythms” and “basic efforts”, and also adding the use of a physical state of tension where the starting impulse would be in the upper body. In the resulting scene, the pace with which the performers walk is almost mechanical, but the moments when the bag is passed from one person to the other have all specific characteristics. The gesture of carrying a bag and walking around, gives to the audience the feeling of seeing something that even if not plausible is still recognizable because it is the portrait of a very ordinary action.

At the same time this scene is showing the possible atypical side of an everyday situation, in this case shown through the action of people passing the bag to each other with different attitudes (thanks to the combination of intensities and efforts), and this being their only moment of interaction. The interaction feels like something known and is recognizable by the audience because it is still an ordinary action and it is inserted inside the frame of a realistic situation, which in this case is walking around. As a result, it is a moment suspended in time. I took the inspiration from a description, present in Handke’s play, about a form of displacement and the definition “empty handed” also present in the same paragraph. The text says: “This and that person, old people, young people, men and women coming after her from all directions now



[The Mall](#)

follow in her trail, [...] all headed toward an invisible center beyond the square; one man returns empty-handed, goes elsewhere; another woman has continued down the street, another man, back again for a moment, climbs down below the ground further in the back.” (Handke, 1996: 93).

These elements in the rehearsal process, through improvisations and games, first became the description of a parade where the unconscious of the person watching would be invited to create a connection between the different characters. Then I concentrated on the element of the bag in order to give to the characters something that could visually associate them, and I complicated the displacements adding the design of a spiral and asking the performers to walk independently but keeping the awareness of the spiral, to reach the center of it, once there to exchange a bag and then to leave empty-handed. As we worked on these displacements, these movement dynamics reminded us of the effect of watching people passing by in a big mall.

This way of creating, proceeding through a study of the movement possibilities to find afterwards a possible narrative, means reversing the usual system of creating the story in the first place and then its physical representation in movement. This system was used more and more by Copeau and his company in their rehearsal process through the use of exercises to bring ideas for the creation. The exercises would suggest a way of moving and from the movements created would emerge the idea of a possible performance, or even would suggest the idea of the possible interpretation of a play. This reverse order of creation was also used by Decroux and he called it “the reversed metaphor” (*la métaphore à l’envers*). In this way of working the movement itself can at some point suggest a story. This system of creation without a linear narrative construction can be found also in the poetic imaginary of Pina Bausch:

Pina Bausch’s Tanztheater is best described as a theatre of experience. By overcoming the limitations of categorized theatre through inclusion of musical elements, mime as well as cinematic effects, the choreographer is increasingly able to work in her subjective fears, desires and needs. The spectator is included in the action on stage, as a fellow player also concerned, by this method of subjective representation. The theatre of experience aims at an emotional involvement with the problems raised – not with the characters. Conventional dramatic structure with a beginning, a turning point and an ending is completely abandoned in favor of a form that appropriates reality by means of excerpted individual situations. [...] Because the *Bewegungstheatre* (theatre of movement) does not use a story-line for communicating information, its aim becomes communication of bodily experienced reality. (Muller in Climenhaga, 2013: 26-27)

The interesting side and specific way of Copeau's training system made him the pioneer of this type of works. All his work, the analysis of space, actions and emotions and the way these are interrelated, is researched and developed through what he called *le jeu*, the theatre games. Theatre games are exercises where the actors are invited to work with the material from the play in a creative way. Copeau, indeed, was interested in helping the actors develop their own creativity, to be as "natural" as possible. For Copeau, this word – so abused in theatre discourse – meant to be connected with the organic laws of nature. In few words, Copeau wanted to provide an experiential and creative journey for the actors and create the possibility for the audience to share these experiences. All the exercises that he and his assistant Suzanne Bing invented, experimented with or simply recreated from different theatre traditions, were focused on the idea of working all the theatre phenomena, including the text, as live and organic elements.

My adaptation of their ideas and exercises follows this same idea of awakening the actors' body and space awareness with a particular focus on the ensemble work through games and physical improvisations around the images present in the text (in the video "Thesis-Rehearsals Long" from the minute 9:11 to the minute 9:30, and again from the minute 12:10 to the minute 12:40), but I also focus on the possibility of using these exercises in my creative process to devise scenes that are completely independent from a chronological narrative order.



Exercises,  
games and  
ensemble

#### [e. My creative method for the \*Empty square/space in the bright light\*](#)

During my rehearsal process, we explored the use and the awareness of space, body and ensemble also through games. Specifically, I combined them with the idea of exploring two very important connotations: inside and outside. Similarly, Peter Handke's original script suggests that there is the inside that we inhabit, our own selves, and the outside, the projection of ourselves in space through the movements of our bodies (that I called traces and echoes), and the result of this work depends also on the perspective of the observers. Wanting to establish the encounter with the audience through moments of physical perception, I created a scene (in the video "Thesis- Performance" the scene starts at the minute 4:00 and ends at 5:40) where the performers reach the stage running from different parts of the auditorium. The intention was to give to the audience the impression of being themselves carried inside the performance.



Walk,  
beginning

Creating the encounter with the audience for me means also coming out of the idea of a permanent separation between the performance and the audience. I prefer to work with the idea of permeability between them. In this respect, I followed a principle already stated by Laban:

What really happens in the theatre does not occur only on the stage or in the audience, but within the magnetic current between both these poles. The actors on the stage forming the active pole of this magnetic circuit are responsible for the integrity of purpose with which a play is performed. On this depends the quality of the exciting current between stage and audience. (Laban, 2011: 5)

I made the decision to add my particular scene not at the very beginning of the show, but after a slower, more classic beginning scene, because I liked to provoke the opportunity to take the audience by surprise. There is a very interesting similar recollection of Jean Newlove in her book about Laban's method, which is also a great source of inspiration for me:

A certain well-known producer (who shall be nameless) was giving a lecture on training methods within her company. She had found the audience socially conditioned; they were extremely polite and attentive during the first half of the evening. During the break everyone left the hall for refreshments. This gave her time, with the help of members of the company, to enliven their understanding of the dimensional cross. The chairs were turned to face the back wall and many (with clothes and handbags still attached) were taken from one side of the room to the other. The audience returned, relaxed and stable, prepared to be passive listeners once again. Like the rest of us, they were conditioned to accept the customary as normal and because of this, they were accustomed to a 'normal' three-dimensional world. The producer came on to the rostrum as the lights dimmed and the audience panicked as they realized things were not in their logical (i.e., 'right') order anymore. In the break, chaos had been created out of order. Emotions were aroused and a lot of hilarious activity ensued before they finally settled down, having restored their chairs and property to a more or less 'normal' dimensional arrangement. From then on, they were a much livelier bunch, participating well in the general discussion. (Newlove, 1993: 23-24)

I particularly like this story because it doesn't tell us to physically involve the audience in the performance, but it does tell us that the creation of a performance needs to challenge and target the spatial position and awareness of the audience in order to catch their attention. It is true that the audience is the receiver, but this doesn't exclude the possibility of them participating with all their senses to the experience. This triggers a possibility for the audience of feeling a direct connection with the performance, a connection that mimics a physical participation. We know from science that when we watch a sport event our brain is triggered to feel partially

as though we are actually doing that activity and this creates a sensation similar to a real experience. The philosophy of sport also considers embodiment in relation to the perception of the experience:

Phenomenology, with its critique of the 'objective' scientific approach and its questioning of the nature of first-person human experience, opened a new way of examining human embodiment. To illustrate this new approach, two German words are sometimes used: *Korper* and *Leib* (Husserl 1952). The word *Korper* depicts the body as an object. The word *Leib*, often translated as 'the lived body', stands for embodiment as experienced from within human existence. However, *Korper* and *Leib* are not contradictory concepts. Rather *Korper* is correlative to *Leib* as the perceivable body; that is the body conceived in terms of how we perceive it. (Martínková in McNamee & Morgan, 2015: 183)

This perception of the body in motion through the eyes of a collective group, for instance an audience watching together, can be triggered also attending a performance.

A similar approach to audience perception and participation can be seen nowadays in many contemporary performances. I particularly like the works of the famous Batsheva Dance Company, directed by Ohad Naharin precisely because of his focus on the audience's point of view and perception. For example, in the performance called *Venezuela* he repeats the choreography twice, although with different music, lighting and dancers. It is an indirect message to the audience, inviting them to acknowledge and question the role of music and the interplay and the effect of the theatrical phenomena. Naharin's choreographic work is built on a special training called "Gaga" where a central role is given to the awareness of the movements in the body and through the body, also in relation to the perception of the space and the other performers in it. Similarly, I conducted my research and physical adaptation of Handke's text concentrating on the role played by the body of the actor alone or in an ensemble in relation to the use of space, and also focusing on the reception of the audience and the perception of the performance.

## 12. The Exercises: "Traces and echoes"

According to the philosopher Jacques Derrida a written message is repeatable and recognizable beyond the presence of the producer and receiver. Written language, he says, leaves a trace beyond our capacity of interpretation and once it exists, it does it both in the presence and in the absence of writer and reader. Derrida

suggests that written text is woven by all the traces it leaves. Similarly, in my creative method I am interested in all the possible narratives given by the traces and echoes of movements overlapping or cohabiting even beyond the presence of their producer, meaning in this case the performer. The audience will carry these traces and echoes in his memory both rational and physical, and they will continue to resonate beyond his will.

I created exercises that are working around the theme of the dynamics of movement, including the notion of weight, and dynamics of space, including the notion of the ensemble work, with a focus on the relation to the audience perception:

Movement training should train the actor in the same way that a performer tunes a musical instrument. Once they have become a finely tuned instrument, they should then be capable of noticing the subtle phases of perception and intention, in relation to characterization. (Snow, 2013: xiv)

The idea is that a creative work that starts from a work on the body can help to engage the imagination of the actor and the audience thanks to a work that focuses on the kinaesthetic sensitivity.

#### [a. Exercise. Reading the text](#)

Reading the text is of course something all the performers should do before entering the rehearsal space when working on a specific play, but what I mean here with “reading the text” refers, for example, to the moments of the video “Thesis-Rehearsals Short”, where in the first images I read and speak about the text to the entire group of performers standing in front of me. What I am doing in these moments is to apply to the text the four basic elements I work with (intensity, tension, effort, awareness) but vocally and through simple gestures. I then invite the performers to read alone and in small groups parts or sentences from the text applying this same system, looking for the rhythm that this combination of elements could create. I ask them to extrapolate this rhythm and create movement phrases from the rhythm in an ensemble. The aim is to work on the text without starting from preconceived ideas about the interpretation of it, and focusing on the visual possibilities coming from the text and on the movement’s dynamics coming from the rhythmical reading.



## b. Traces. Exercise 1. The Kinesphere in connection with another body and its space

### *Preparation part*

The exercise starts from a neutral still position with the eyes closed. I invite the performers to feel their weight on their feet, shifting it back and forth and from side to side while keeping the connection with the floor. Keeping their eyes closed I ask them to shift the weight on their toes and to lift their heels. Holding the balance with the eyes closed is quite difficult. I guide them with my voice to keep the mental connection with their feet, telling them to push the floor to feel rooted. I tell them to come down from the position whenever they feel like, but I also invite them to try more than once and to push their boundaries each time a little more. The last challenge is once they are up on their toes to raise their arms above their heads. At the same time, they must feel their feet, grounding them and the hands reaching far.

This exercise is meant to awaken their perception of their entire body in preparation for when they will be in motion. In the standing position the movement is actually only all inside the body, because of the little adjustments a person needs to do to keep still; therefore, the possible lines of direction of the movement are only felt and imagined as I don't ask yet for any form of displacement away from this position. Experiencing this subtle but difficult movement helps the performers to be aware of their body in space and to train their muscles to start any movement from the inside and with a global awareness of the body and not only from their limbs or head as it often happens. The dynamics of the movement worked here are subtle but they evoke what happens when we walk. In fact, we need to constantly shift our weight back and forth, and this translation combined with the pressure we need to apply with our feet on the floor helps us to spring forward and creates a wave that travels through our entire body from feet to head.

### *The work inside the kinesphere*

Here I ask the students to stand in a precise point in space and to explore with the body all the movement possibilities around them. They are not allowed to leave what becomes their own space, which represents their kinesphere. This means as well not to displace away from their centre, but they can lift one leg and shift the weight as far as possible (far reaching) without leaving the centre. This exploration of the

space around them can be done with every part of the body. The result is a translation and extension of different parts of the body. resulting in an interesting articulation exercise. I guide them to experiment with different parts of the body and to try to sustain the movement in a difficult balance position. I tell them to look for help inside their own body through a work of compensation and therefore a contradiction of one element of the body against the other. The contradiction is in the different directions where the body parts involved aim for and move in. I apply here the same natural principle that we normally apply to avoid or to slow down a fall, meaning reaching in the opposite direction, which is a natural form of compensation.

I then ask them to try and keep an external eye on what they are doing, starting to memorize some of the journeys their body are doing and trying to repeat them. This helps the performers to develop the capacity of being inside and outside the movement at the same time, which gives them the possibility to create, fix and repeat a movement. This creative work happens while moving and being in the action. A creation that comes from moving and not from planning, keeps the feeling of something new that is happening in the moment, because the body did not try to follow a preconceived mental structure translated into an image. It all happens through movement.

This exercise helps the performers to remember and recall through their physical memory all the possible textures and the organic qualities of the movement, thus allowing them to create a sort of personal vocabulary at their disposal.

### *Working in pairs inside the kinesphere*

This is the last part of the exercise. Here the performers are invited to stand in the same imaginary kinesphere meaning that they are standing very close to each other. I ask them to repeat the same exercise as before when they were alone, but this time they need to look at their own movements and the movements of their partner at the same time, and find, while they move, the possible connections and interactions. I ask them in particular to be a support for each other so that they can hold better their balance and they can expand their movements even further away from the centre. They cannot speak among each other while they do it because they are working on their physical listening capacity, and cannot plan in advance who is going to support whom and in which moment. This part of the exercise is to train the awareness of the other in movement, and to practice how to connect physically through movements while being in the middle of an improvised creative moment.

These interactions and connections are then expanded and can become a form of displacement.

I also introduced them later on in the spatial game exercise as an extra rule. (In the video “Thesis-Rehearsals Long” we can see moments of it from 00:50).

### [c. Traces. Exercise 2. Walking the space](#)

#### *Preparation part for this work in the space*

To work on the space articulation, I guide the students through the process of devising a displacement. This is an exercise created on the base of the division of the space in eights (like a cake with all the slices). This division, coming from Decroux’s space analysis, could also be interpreted as a representation of the Laban cross adding the design of the diagonals, intersecting in the same middle point, but without stressing any knowledge of three dimension yet.

I lead the performers through the different possible steps in space and I ask them to start repeating and memorizing the directions. First, we play with different directions’ possibilities and then little by little each one will create their own score adding possible speeds, rhythms, pauses, stops, and finally dramatic situations: looking for someone, being lost in our thoughts, and other different possibilities.

At this point I ask them to play with possible dramatic situations. For example, I could ask someone in the group to stand in front facing them and pretending that he is trying to speak with them, trying to approach them to tell them something important. The students are asked to act as a group even though they are all starting their own personal set of displacements from different points in space. Their responses to the person trying to approach them can only be physical using the set of displacements in space that they have organized. This means that they can express through the way they walk away or towards the person according to their previously organized displacements, and according to their rhythms and their movement intensities. These are also created thanks to a mixture of different speeds eventually adding pauses, as though they are suspending the action to show possible hesitations. The group has to work in unison without talking to one another. They do so by really listening to each other while moving and at the same time they have to listen to the person they respond to. For example, the group might all try to stop at once if the single person who is trying to approach them becomes too irritating, or they might feel like running away speeding up their journeys all at the same time, or pausing as

though they are about to respond to him but then they might continue and walk away again. The journey that the group is doing in space comes from all the different displacements already fixed in terms of number of steps and directions, and each individual set of displacements should be created so that every student will always end up at the starting point. This way every set of displacements can be repeated in a loop. It is a sequence that helps the performers to train their space articulation, their clarity in the displacements, their capacity of working as an ensemble listening to each other while trying to move in unison, and the physical dialogue with an external input.

The last part of this exercise is working in a pair as there will be one person using his own set of displacements, therefore having a fixed journey, and one person trying to interact dramatically without disturbing the fixed organization in the space of their partner. Half of the students will be still using the same sequence they created but the other half is now working with them in a way that obliges them to really study the displacement's organization to create their own dramatic score in response to it, looking for ways to use the other person's set physical score at the service of a possible dramatic situation. They are now creating starting from technical tasks and using them in a theatrical way to show a dialogue in space between two bodies moving. They can try all sorts of physical interactions to find what kind of situation they could portray, for example to start they could try what happens if the person approaching walks backwards in order to keep engaged with the other one who is walking following his set score. The dialogue this time, while they follow the sequence and perform, is also created, adding the work on the efforts, therefore they must find in the body the intention with which they engage with the partner. For example, using the effort of pressing as they walk might give the feeling and impression of opposing wills, or the effort of slide could become trying to approach someone who is constantly escaping while using care and attention.

These exercises on the articulation of space help the performers to become familiar with the geometry of space and to use it as a dramatic tool, this way they can identify space as one of the possible means of expression.

## The walks

I ask the performers to practice and experiment different walks in space:

1. I ask them to walk in the space only concentrating on walking in diagonals, ignoring the others.
2. I ask them to keep walking independently from each other, but keeping an eye on one person in the group. They can choose any person, but they must keep their gaze always on the same person being careful not to follow her steps from too close nor to stare at her. They must find a balance between their own independent displacement in space and the capacity of not losing track of the specific person they chose.
3. I ask them to keep walking in the space in diagonals and being independent from one another, but this time exploring the space. In this part of the exercise I ask them to think that they are looking at every detail, taking every detail into account. I give the example of walking in a museum and exploring with the eyes, as much as possible, all the things that are exposed around them.
4. The last part of the exercise is the capacity of switching quickly from one way of walking to another, and from one particular way of being in the space to the other, also mixing them. Mixing could mean, for example, being able to move independently, keeping an eye always on the same person and exploring the space around them, all at the same time.

This type of exercises where the performers are asked to walk through the space, is included in many different actor's trainings as part of the warm up session. In some cases, they are called "walking the grid" because the space is organized geometrically in a specific way. I apply some of these exercises to focus on the dramatic intentions behind the movement. I want the performers to question and explore their intention when crossing the stage. Technically it depends on where their focus is while they do it, but then it becomes also a question of dramatic intention. These intentions can be clearer also if the combination of directions in space, textures of the movements (intensities and efforts), and rhythms of the displacements is well performed. This is a way to help the audience to clearly perceive the performers' intentions, even when they are simply moving on stage.

## The spatial game

This game is still part of the exercises to work on the different spatial perception, awareness and expression. Every day I give the performers new rules for this game until we have a list of possibilities, every rule represents a task or a movement possibility. These rules come from the exploration of the walking exercises, adding to them big or small variations. Every rule has a number and the performers can call the numbers themselves as they walk. I create different rules according to what I need to work for the performance.

In the video of the rehearsals “Thesis-Rehearsals Long” (at the second 00:19), we can see a group running around one performer. This is the rule I created with them in the first part of the rehearsals of this performance. I wanted the performers to experience the different possible perceptions of movement in space that they can create and provoke for the audience. Therefore, as part of the walking exercise I added the possibility of calling this rule (I gave it a number that anyone could shout as they were walking), and when this happened everyone had to start walking faster and faster and finally run around the person that called this rule. Similarly, I added other rules that implied that they had to be very alert as a group and try to move at once changing the rhythm or “dynamo rhythm” at unison, or else fall to the floor or other ways of interacting with each other or with the space around them.

This game is meant to help the performers develop their experiential awareness, along with their ensemble and spatial awareness, all very important in my method. I try to create the possibility for the performers to experience for themselves some of the effects that their movements can create in the audience. For instance, in the rule, where they all run around someone, I looked for the possibility of recreating for the performers the sensation of being surrounded by bodies in movement and to feel almost on their skin the dynamic sensation that this can create even if just standing and watching. The idea behind this rule, where we see a performer standing in the middle while the others run around her, is to try to reproduce and to simulate what the audience feels while watching the performers moving in front of them on stage or even around them in other performative settings. These experiential exercises are also an introduction to my work on kinaesthetic awareness.

I used these exercises in the process of creation of one of the scenes of the performance “The empty square/space in the bright light” where the performers run in and invade the space coming from different parts of the theatre, including the



auditorium (from minutes 5:23 to minutes 5:37 of the video of the performance called “Thesis-Performance”).

#### d. Echoes. Exercises on kinesthetic awareness

##### *Touching*

I start with a simple gesture: putting the hand on someone’s shoulder. It is an exercise about perception where the person receiving the gesture is sitting and doesn’t see the other person walking towards them. The hand creates the moment of contact. The body of the person receiving the gesture becomes fully concentrated in that moment and it is therefore very sensitive. The person doing the gesture comes inside the theatrical space and walks toward the person sitting. The displacement must represent already the intention of the touch. This gesture can be performed with different efforts with the intention of transmitting a message both to the person sitting and to the audience. The dramatic intention is expressed through the qualities/textures of the gesture that should match the prior displacement.

Everything becomes of great importance and can create a big difference, for example, if the performer walks directly to put the hand on the shoulder it creates a visual impression to the audience which is distinct from what he could create walking indirectly. Similarly, if the walking pace is determined also by diverse combinations of weight and speed, for example, heavy and fast or light and sustained, these combinations might lead to the perception of different emotional situations. Everything creates what I call “the music of the moment” played through the choices of directions, the efforts and the intensities of the muscles, and the possible speeds. To understand if the dramatic intentions that they are expressing are clear, these can also be measured asking to the person sitting, the receiver, what did she feel, what emotion and message did she receive. The person sitting is telling us what the audience might perceive just watching.

##### *The jacket manipulation: first part*

This exercise is a manipulation exercise that works especially with the texture of the movements, and particularly on the elements of effort and intensity connected to the dramatic intention of the action. The first action is to put on a jacket.

First, I ask the performers to wear the jacket and repeat the action of putting it on more than once, studying what they are doing, using their own external perception. Then I ask them to create a precise sequence, a series of movements that they repeat always in the same order to put on the jacket. The action of wearing a jacket has a natural spiral flow to it. I ask them to feel the spiral and accentuate this design in space with the body as they put it on, also thinking of letting the action guide the movements because it naturally invites the body to rise and fall. Once every performer has their own sequence of actions to put on a jacket, we start playing all the possible efforts and intensities with which this action can be done.

I ask the performers to repeat the sequence, and I would pick different efforts or intensities with which they have to try to perform the different movements they have created. Slowly I change and I ask them to perform with a dramatic intention, for example, being angry, being careful or being undecided. The qualities of effort and intensity are played by the entire body, the manipulation of the jacket shouldn't be just an action played by the arms or the upper body. This exercise wants to focus on the importance of being in every action, from the smaller to bigger ones, with the entire body. This will be the only way to transmit a sense of truth through our movements, and this will be perceived by and shared with the audience. Embodying an action means giving it the organic quality it has in life where the mind and body act as one. Decroux used to call it the thinking body.

### *The jacket manipulation: Second part*

Here the jacket is gone and there is only the body of the performers. I ask them to work on the same movement qualities they used for the manipulation of the jacket. The performers this time work in small groups. It is still a manipulation exercise but it only involves the bodies. Usually I ask three performers to manipulate the body of a fourth one. This happens through an exercise where they have to give impulses. To give an impulse doesn't mean to push the other person. I ask the performers in charge of the manipulation to choose first of all which part of the body, they would like to touch and to think of this chosen part as the motor of the movement they are going to initiate. It could be any part, for example the head, the elbow, the knee or any other. Then I ask them to think in which direction they want that person to move to, starting from the body part they selected. The manipulation is just a touch on the body, this impulse can be given as a slight touch or even as an accompaniment towards a destination. The performer receiving the touch/impulse responds by going



into that direction, choosing the effort and the intensity for the displacement. The performer receiving is the one playing the action's qualities, the performers manipulating are in charge of the clarity and the coherence of the choice of directions and of motors (body parts initiating the movement). The chronology of choices is very important. Their task is also to be able to follow the movement they initiate in order not to remain still in space, but to become almost a shadow of the movement. This exercise gave birth to the scene in the video "Thesis-Performance" from the minute 8:42 to 9:45 where we see first one person walking under the rain and being manipulated by two others that are nicely showing her how to find the way out, and immediately after another group that is manipulating one person with the intention of controlling her. To create these two different central characters that are manipulated in different ways and show this difference through their movements' qualities, I worked also on the body tensions especially focusing on their different relation to the floor. The first character is very light and tends to work with the upper body moving away from the floor, the second is very grounded and works with the lower part of the body always in the direction of the floor.



Double  
umbrella

### *The jacket manipulation: Third part*

This time the impulses are coming from the inside. I ask the performers to work on their own body imagining that it is an external element. The manipulation is coming from the inside; the performer is invited to work on the contraction of the muscles, particularly their efforts and dynamo rhythms. The performer has to send the inputs to different parts of their own body also playing with the possible resonances or reactions coming from it. As shown in the video "Thesis-Rehearsals Long" at the minute 3:38 until 4:18 I use this exercise to work with the performers on the scene that we called "the rain" to represent the rain falling on their body and little by little the rain itself splashing on the floor as the performers start jumping and falling.



Inputs and  
resonances

### 13. Four ensemble projects where I applied my method

I experimented my method consisting of exercises as tools to initiate a creative process, and of a specific dramatic reconstruction and organization of the performance material, also in four other different ensemble projects: *Time Passing*, created and performed with the students of the Master course at the IAB - Institute of the Arts Barcelona in December 2017; *Uniglobal 2018* opening event created with students and actors between Barcelona and Liverpool in 2017/2018 and performed in June 2018; *Netball World Cup 2019* opening event created with dancers and actors between Barcelona and Liverpool in 2018/2019 and performed in July 2019; *Did You Know Seahorses Also Experience Life?*, created and performed with the students of the Master course at the IAB- Institute of the Arts Barcelona in November 2019. All these performances have in common the ensemble work process as they were created in group contexts, in two cases (*Uniglobal 2018* and *Netball World Cup 2019*) with very big groups. All the projects were devised with all the performers involved. With every performance I went a little bit further with the systematization of “Traces and Echoes” and I focused particularly on working in the creation of visual journeys in space with different intensity, tensions, efforts and awareness. In all of them I worked from the concept of space as a partner for the actors to tell the story and not as the container of their stories.

For instance, in the first performative work *Time Passing*, I started exploring the possibility of space being a representation of the fragmentation of different moments in time by making the actors, often representing the same character, repeat the same actions in specific points of the space in a loop going forward and backward in time. In *Uniglobal 2018* instead, space was articulated geometrically and in rehearsals this work was the starting point to create a particular angular and menacing physicality for the performers. In my second big opening event, this time for the *Netball World Cup 2019*, the relation with space was very peculiar because the entire piece depended on the images projected on the floor. The risk would have been to become only a description of a description, meaning following and repeating the designs on the floor. Applying my method of creation, we could instead use the drawings as directions and lines that helped us to articulate the movements and displacements, but only as indications that could actually help to channel our imagination as performers and director, embodying our ideas. Following this experience, I started using the space more and more as a tool to prompt different dramatic moments as I did in the final performance *Did You Know Seahorses Also Experience Life?*. Here space



Four  
ensemble  
projects



Time  
passing



Uniglobal

represented moments in time. Like a journey inside our memories. Memories were taking life and forms thanks to the displacements in different parts of the space and through the different ways of moving across it.

In every performance I tried to focus on the possibility of creating with the performers applying the inside/outside system of creation which is at the core of my method. Their artistic response has never stopped to surprise me because in the process soon all the technical elements of the exercises disappeared and gave way to a big wave of creativity from their part. It has been very interesting for me to notice how once I found the right exercises the material was almost immediately began to take shape; it was as though each performer's creativity was tuned in the same way and they were speaking the same physical language without the need of teaching codified gestures or movements.

#### [a. Time Passing](#)

(In the video "Thesis - 4 Performances" from 00:08 to 4:58)

This ensemble performance was inspired by the book *The Child in Time* by Ian McEwan. I worked with eight actors, creating in a choral way, and exploring the main theme of the book: time and its description. Just as in the book, I treated the story with all its details, just as a pretext to show and demonstrate the scientific theories of time. The book is somehow an experiential product because the reader is actively involved in the creation of the perception of time shifting. The narrative organization of the book, in fact, is constantly putting the events on hold, obliging the reader to pause the process of reading, and to go back and re-examine the events under a new lance, because the writer gives theoretical and scientific explanations of time, changing almost to an essay type of structure. Following this example and wanting to give to the audience a similar perception, I worked with these time definitions (shifting, pausing and going back), starting from a work based on the exercises of flow and bound, two qualities that can determine the way a movement is articulated in space.

When moving with a flow like quality the movements become mainly digressive (the body transports the upper body and the arms, almost as if these parts were moving in a delay), and the performers appear as though they are retracing their own steps. When moving with a bound quality the movements are mainly progressive (the upper body is leading the movement, with a resulting effect of control of the action) and the performers' actions seem to follow a linear narrative order.



The exercises I proposed included the creation of personal movement sequences starting from a displacement in space. The performers were asked first to let their movements flow by transporting the body through their core, while also letting go themselves to the forces of gravity, and then to direct their bodies with a bound quality resisting to the gravity and always trying to hold the movements. From these sequences we worked to find the construction of the different scenes and the quality of the overall movements of the performance.





Pictures from “Time Passing” / Courtesy of A. Rotondi

#### [b. Uniglobal 2018](#)

(In the video “Thesis - 4 Performances” from 5:06 to 11:15)

This performance is an epic physical reconstruction of the human condition, symbolised by the life of a town and few main characters going through the rise and fall of economics and their effects. The effects become surrealistic and futuristic with the appearance of a ship and its crew that will try to destabilise and disorientate people in their more basic behaviours. The performance is based on a text written by Andrew Sherlock and worked in a collaborative way with a team of professionals. I worked on this project as movement consultant and directed some physical moments.

The audience is engaged in the performance both as a single individual and as a crowd because the story shifts from the epic choral moments to more intimate ones. Therefore, the quality of the movements had to go from resembling more ordinary gestures to more symbolic ones, sometimes happening in a consecutive order sometimes simultaneously, giving a landscape effect more common in modern paintings or even in the way space might be organized in dreams.

The intention behind it is that the audience watching the performance should feel really engaged and almost invited to react, especially in some crucial moments



where the ordinary is subverted. At these points the theatrical action, likewise in epic theatre, is easily recognizable at a start as something that everyone has experienced or witnessed in everyday life, for instance the morning routine of a small town. This sensation of something known should be reassuring for the audience. The relaxed audience should then be ready to become engaged and shocked when the events of the performance show the brutality of some human aspects breaking the harmony and the flow of the actions, in this case accentuated by repetitive movements. The audience lives an experience that becomes also personal, because it provokes a strong reaction, inside the collective situation established at the beginning. The organization of space and time is also similar to the epic theatre because of the creation of different consecutive collective moments in the performance.

The exercises I worked on to create some specific moments, for example the crew attacking, were mainly focused on the geometrical articulation of space. Since the stage where the performance was going to be shown was very big and the movements had to be readable by a large crowd, I worked on the coordination of movements in a series of displacement in order to reproduce the visual impact of a crew descending from a boat and approaching people in a menacing way. I also focused on the geometrical aspect of the movements to accentuate the particular state of the characters. To do so, I devised a series of exercise where movements had to respond to precise articulation rules with all the possible body parts working in opposition and contradiction.



Uniglobal  
2018



Picture from Uniglobal / Courtesy of R. Duque

### c. Netball World Cup 2019

(In the video “Thesis - 4 Performances” from 11:25 to 15:14)

For the Netball World Cup Opening event in 2019, I devised a performance that included two ensemble pieces performed in the two netball floors side by side, and choreographed to create a mirror image. I worked this ensemble creation using my exercises’ method and then using the physical material coming from them to create sequences of movements that would first mimic the game itself, and the rules of the game were used at the service of the choreographic composition. On this occasion the work had to be performed in synchro and in response to the images projected on the floor. Both the images and the movements had to be created using the same music cues, therefore, music was the leading element.

The piece was devised starting from the rules and positions of the real game. We studied the postures, the tempos and the drills. From this work we moved to a transposition that became more and more detached from its original, the game. The performances had to be divided in four moments, representing the four elements: earth, water, air and fire. To find the movements I worked on these themes and looked for qualities that could represent these natural elements.

I started working with exercises on the articulation of space and of the reconstruction of geometrical figures through movements in space, and in a second moment on exercises that would allow us to focus on the clarity of the muscular intensities and efforts since we had to portrait the dynamicity of the game and transpose it to the dynamicity of the natural elements of earth, water, air and fire. The relation to the floor was very important because the inputs for the changes of atmospheres and rhythms were coming from the video projected on the floor. The entire creation had to follow a vertical perspective, therefore the exercises to clarify the tensions with which the body was moving in space in relation to the floor and the ceiling became essential. Movements were mostly happening together, but also in a canon, in repetitions and at times in isolation.



Picture from the Netball World Cup Opening 2019 / V. Temussi

#### d. Did You Know Seahorses Also Experience Life?

(In the video “Thesis - 4 Performances” from 15:19 to 22:06)

This last performance is a devised piece on the theme of the perception of time in our day to day lives, but also more generally in life. In this work we explored scientific theories about time. I invited the performers to work on their memories, recalling the moments that are often just remembered as still images. Sometimes memories are nothing more than a glimpse of a moment fixed in time because we are actually recalling the old photo that kept that moment in our memories, but other times is possible that we are only really able to remember that moment in a fixed frame.

I asked the performers to explore these memories collectively in an ensemble process, telling these stories to each other, but also playing different games that would help them to recall the sensations of these moments frozen in their mental pictures. I proposed a few games to help them deal with these memories as if they were present and alive material.



The first game was to re-enact the scenes, each performer had to ask for one of the other performers to play themselves in the memory, while the other performers could also play the other characters present in the memory. The performers were invited to recreate their own memories moving physically the others, almost like puppets according to what was needed in the scene, displacing them to re-enact their own memories while at the same time they were explaining them. This manipulation of the others in space, helped them all to find the clear colours of their memories selecting the intensities, the efforts and the tensions with which they wanted the other bodies to move. To do so they had to be extra clear in their vocal description of the scene and in the manipulation of the other bodies in order to transmit it also physically to the other performers watching. The main preparatory exercise for this manipulation consisted in standing in front of each other two by two, holding the arms in front of the body, with one of the two manipulating the other grabbing the hands and holding them inside their own fists. The arms are the connection to help the performers to feel the movements' directions in space and the qualities of the movements and of the displacements. In this exercise it is important not to pull or push the other person, but to transmit the motions the performers want to reproduce in space: walking, changing directions, changing levels, jumping and many others. The actions come from the messages transmitted through the body and not through words.

With these exercises we created scenes for the performance in which they were explaining and recreating their memories. In the creative process I was suggesting changes either in the spatial order of the characters or in the general rhythm of the scene, at times I was overlapping the scenes and playing with the effects created by this operation.



Figure 1 Pictures from "Did you know seahorses also experience life?" / Courtesy of A. Rotondi

## Conclusion

Because the medium of the resulting work is not conventionally-referring language, whatever meaning it has will not be expressible in any other terms than those of the work itself. It is not an *arbitrary* meaning: because we cannot give a 'correct' translation into some other medium, it does not follow that we can give the work any meaning we care to. (Maurice Merleau-Ponty in McGilchrist, 2019: 150)

In this research I wished to stress the importance of movement practice in the rehearsal process as a creative tool both for the actors and the directors. Following my practical examples on creating and directing, I came to the conclusion that the actor should feel entitled and empowered to contribute in the creation of the performance. I started from the belief that the actor's role in a performance is much more important than disappearing behind a character and through my research I realized that there is another possible way to create a performance involving the actors as active co-creators. They can actually help to establish a physical dramaturgy system if prompted by the director with an approach that comes from movement and therefore, from the body.

Movement practice, for me, is the key to a more independent and creative position for the actor, in the creation and in the rehearsal process, but also in the final performance. For this reason, in my own creative method I worked through a series of physical exercises that enable the actor to acquire physical skills as well as creative skills, never imposing a way of doing things but always opening the possibility to explore each performer's imaginary landscape inside the work set by the director with the exercises and the creative material proposed.

I constructed a creative method based on three main elements: body, space and ensemble. Through my creative process and the resulting performances, I have demonstrated that the movement of the actor's body in space can actually widen the possibilities of exploration in the rehearsal process.

In my research I also investigated the past to trace the beginning of the use of these elements as creative tools, and as inspiration for the structure and definition of my own creative method. For this reason, this research presents an historical overview that traces the possible route towards the affirmation of movement practice in the theatre production.

The History of Theatre in general has demonstrated that movement practice owes much to the research work of Copeau and Laban. They have been able to have an impact both on the development and on the analysis of the actors' movement possibilities in connection with the space analysis. The influence on theatre practices that came after them, has been huge and has left a very long legacy that continues into the present. My own creative method comes both from the analysis of their researches and from the technique at the base of Corporeal Mime, a method developed by Etienne Decroux, a previous student of Copeau.

Every physical technique implicitly brings the risk of thinking that acting could become a very controlled and controllable form. Copeau, Laban and Decroux, on the contrary, always proceeded in their works and research focusing on freeing the creative possibilities of the actor and the space and I followed their legacy of trying to define clear dramatic concepts, looking for a set of rules through different exercises, but at the same time being very open to experimenting and to the freedom inside it. Perhaps more important than this, I have been trying to avoid the creation of a specific style that would identify my performances.

Copeau, Laban and Decroux started from the analysis of natural movement to reconstruct it and make it alive on stage, but also repeatable in order not to depend only on the actors' moods at the moment of performing. Their researches took them in many different directions and the desire to continue experimenting and researching made it impossible for them to actually concentrate just on performance-making and establish a creative method.

Inspired by the works of these three masters I decided to focus my personal method on performance-making through a creative process, wanting to create a working system that could be flexible to adapt to different performances, but also different directors in order to be useful also for other creations and not only mine.

My method focuses on the relationship between what the actors do and what the audience sees and feels, in order to avoid creating a fixed system with recognizable movement conventions, and to concentrate on the constant communication between performers and audience through their movements in the performance. I devised a system of exercises that I called "Traces and Echoes" focused on the creation of the performance from the inside (the performers embodying the proposed material) and the outside (the awareness of the creation with an eye on the possible perception of the audience). The final visual impact of the performance for me should go beyond a mere description of the play to focus on the experiential aspect of the entire performative event. More than a new movement method I

wanted to inspire a new way of creating in which movement practice was at the centre of the creation in all the aspects, starting from the dramaturgical construction of the performance. Through my own practical physical exercises, I worked on a creative system that would allow me to treat the dramaturgical elements in a new way when creating and directing a performance. All my performances in the practical work of the thesis were constructed around the investigation of the expressive possibilities of the body, the space and the ensemble. I want to place myself through my works in a constant search for communication with the audience, creating a space that the audience is invited to accept as reality through its own experience, even if with my movement choices and the physical architectures I create, I actually state that it does not exist. What is true is the textures of the movements in space and all their precise intensity, tensions, efforts and spatial/ensemble awareness. My *mise en scène* of the corporeal is genuine and not just a description or a version of something already expressed through words.

What I constantly look for in my works is the relationship with the audience through visual and physical means that should allow for a perception of the performance to go beyond the present moment. In order to reach it in the creative process I invite the performers to do a work where the inside/outside perception is the central point both to prompt creativity and to understand how to connect to the audience. This research has led me to a sort of beginning position, but now I remember, I have clear tools to create and I know where I stand in the legacy of movement practice. It is a beginning because as I say in the historical overview, “theatre is the privileged place where we are allowed to start each time everything all over again”. In every new creative work I like to bring my method and start working with it as though it was the first time, to allow me to rediscover it and the performers working with me to have the feeling that they are discovering and creating it with me. But I now know through this research that there is a journey I am actually guiding them through and that therefore there is a way not to get lost and also a possibility to share my method in the moment of the creation and beyond.

Transmission is a new experience that I just started to experience thanks to this research. Transmitting my creative method in order to see it develop in the hands of other directors and of aspiring directors is the new frontier that I am crossing now. This is both a very fascinating and a very rewarding experience.



Picture from "The empty square in the bright light" / V. Temussi

## Appendix 1. Exploring other methods of creation: Kellie Hughes, Lluís Homar, Andrés Corchero

I interviewed Kellie Hughes, Andrés Corchero and Lluís Homar and I asked them the same questions. I did so because I was particularly interested in analysing the way they use body and space despite their different biographies, theatre and movement trainings, and works. They share in their creative methods the application of the actor's body and of the space as tools for investigation and creation. The performances I chose as examples of their works create a special effect on the audience. All three performances work on the imagination of the audience and succeed in taking them on a journey that goes beyond the "here and now", playing with the architectures of time and space. The physical and spatial creative systems they apply are specific to their different trainings and traditions, but I believe that what they have in common is the principle that all the theatre phenomena they are working with must participate to the making of the performance and must be used to create a special communication with the audience. I also believe that what they did with these performances was a great example of a total embodiment of the ideas and stories they want to transmit. In this I also see a perfect example of Laban's ideas on the possible communication through the body.

In *The master and his emissary* (2019), Iain McGilchrist mentions Laban and his explanation of a specific communication system in sub-Saharan Africa, and I find it relevant here because it stresses how body movement can be the language itself and not only the visual representation of it:

Rudolf Laban, who perhaps more closely observed the meaning of bodily movement in performance than anyone that ever lived, has some fascinating observations to make in this regard. In sub-Saharan Africa there is a form of communication using drumbeats which has been dubbed, perhaps somewhat infelicitously, 'rhythmic drum telegraphy'. The technique is widespread, and by it apparently detailed messages can be communicated over long distances. According to Laban, there is no attempt, as the Westerner might imagine, to mimic the sound pattern of words or phrases; that would be rendered pointless by the many different languages spoken by different tribes occupying adjacent territories. Instead 'the reception of these drum or tom-tom rhythms is accompanied by a vision of the drummer's movement, and it is this movement, a kind of dance, which is visualized and understood'. Communication occurs because the listener inhabits the body of the person who drums and experiences what it is that the drummer is experiencing. (McGilchrist, 2019: 122)

Hughes, Corchero and Homar clearly create the conditions for an embodied communication to happen.

In their careers they have been influenced by the theatre, dance and movement practitioners they studied and worked with.

For Hughes we can mention the methods of Corporeal Mime and of Viewpoints and for Corchero, certainly the method called Body Weather after his physical theatre and music trainings. In the case of Homar it is difficult to mention just one influence as he explored many methods and systems both in Europe and in the United States. His professional career started in the seventies when he was still only seventeen and continues nowadays, but he is currently working and experimenting also with movement notions and ensemble methods clearly inspired by Copeau and Decroux.

My three case studies represent three different personal approaches and styles, but I am interested in their creation methods in connection with the elements I am researching and working with in my own creative method, specifically with the actor's body and the space.

## 1. Kellie Hughes: her story

Kellie Hughes is an Irish theatre director. I first met Kellie Hughes many years ago when we were both studying at The International School of Corporeal Mime in London, but I met her again artistically a few years ago when she had finished working as a co-director on Olwen Fouéré's performance *riverrun*.

In the years between her graduation from the school in London and this performance, which saw her being acclaimed as a director nationally and internationally, she has worked with Blue Raincoat, an ensemble company from Sligo in Ireland. Blue Raincoat is famous for its distinctive, visually rich, physical language as also mentioned in the book on contemporary Irish theatre performance by Jordan and Weitz:

Within this context, 1991 was a vital year in contemporary Irish theatre, as three key companies emerged: Pan Pan Theatre in Dublin, Blue Raincoat in Sligo, and Corcadorca in Cork. They had the shared aim of offering an alternative to the traditional Irish dramatic realism that dominated institutional theatre. [...] Blue Raincoat had a focus on investigating play-texts through physical theatre, adopting the corporeal mime technique of Etienne Decroux. (Jordan & Weitz, 2018: 297)

The company has its own working space and theatre, which allows them to dedicate quite long periods to the research and the development of the material of



the performance bringing together performers, designers, writers, artists and specialists from diverse fields, to create their works. Their strongest influence and inspiration come from the work of Etienne Decroux, but considering the nature of their project that covers all aspects of the performance, it is clear that through Decroux's principles and creative ideas they also perceived the influence of Copeau. In fact, they largely developed their works, thanks to the ensemble ideas and the ensemble research process. Hughes started working with them mainly as an actress and gradually also took on different roles in different domains, like physical training responsible for the company and project manager for outside educational events. But more important in her last years with the company, she started directing hence developing and affirming some of the skills that were evident already from her school time in London. Here she had affirmed her own independent voice in every possible creative way, even writing, directing, and performing two theatre pieces for the Science Museum.

Kellie was an ensemble performer with Blue Raincoat Theatre for seven years, collaborating on the creation of new works, interpreting classic texts and directing on occasion, most notably the *Yeats Project*. Interested in the expressive potential of the body, Kellie wrote and performed two shows for the Science Museum, London: *Art, Science and the Moving Body* and *The Brain and the Body* (televised on the BBC). (Jordan & Weitz, 2018: XX)

After seven years with Blue Raincoat she started her personal journey as an independent theatre director, but always carrying in her working process this spirit of collective work.

Kellie Hughes can be described, in a poetic kind of way, as someone who has always been herself. When Hughes started the school in London, she knew what she was looking for, something that had fascinated her from a very young age: the expressive movement. She started being attracted by movement, dance and theatre very young and one can say that physical expression was always a part of her life. The first point of attraction was the technical rigour demanded in dance, a precision that can lead to virtuosity and to a high level of stylization. Like the story of many other dancers/movers, she had to fight to go to her Irish dance classes. There is in many cultures a sort of resistance towards this path, this career. Often the motive for the fight that young movers and dancers decide to undertake comes from an unknown necessity to do it.

The great Belgian choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui in his essay "Pèlerinage sur moi" talks about genes, something in your blood that comes from far in your

family and is the tradition that you carry with you in your physical exploration. I am comparing Hughes to Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui because of their creative flexibility and interest in collaborations across all artistic fields.

I don't think that it is only by chance that she started being interested in a traditional form of dance. In traditional dances, the performers represent the people of the country, each and every one of them. They reflect their ideas, their aspirations, their memories, their dreams. This feeling of possible communion with the audience is something that Hughes always looked for, both as a performer and a director.

Hughes career in dance was quite fast and she performed in the World Tour of *Riverdance-The Show* in 1996/97 when she was nineteen years old, but she left very soon as well. She did so because she realized that the incredible choreographic work and the performing intensity necessary to do this kind of work was far from the need and love of expression and communication that she wanted to look for. Therefore, she went into Theatre Studies, into reflecting and analysing, graduating and then completing an MA in physical theatre at Royal Holloway - University of London. But again, something was missing, and of course this was the stage, the audience, the performance entirely, and the physical training as part of the preparation to be a performer. This is what led her to train with Corinne Soum and Steven Wasson, last assistants of Etienne Decroux and directors of the physical theatre company *Théâtre de L'Ange Fou* and the International School of Corporeal Mime. Here Hughes found technical rigour and passion for precision, but this time with an emotional content and a dramatic purpose. This school and the method they used to teach followed two main strands: transmitting the works, the technique and the principles of Corporeal Mime; transmitting a specific way of creating, mainly breaking down their own performances and creations into creative principles and tools.

Hughes continues to apply the movement techniques studied with them and then personally experimented and researched both as a performer and as a theatre director. She is currently Director in Residence at University College Dublin and Artistic Director of the UCD Ad Astra Performing Arts Academy, where she applies her knowledge and experience:

Hughes is, of course, influenced by her own practices and experiences, privileging those movement techniques in her teaching within the context of UCD. This means that the UCD courses address the challenge of academic demands as well as the demands of the profession. (Jordan & Weitz, 2018: 337)

### a. Kellie Hughes: *riverrun*

The cellist Christopher Allan, went to see *riverrun* and came out mesmerized. During the performance, he told me, his mind had been wandering in a daydream, in different moments, but each time he “went back to it”, he was surprised to realize that the performance was actually talking about his own dreams. It was as though his thoughts and his own daydreaming were actually provoked and orchestrated by the performance itself. Fouéré’s *riverrun* is an adaptation of the voice of the river in James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*.

Kellie Hughes started working on the performance after being invited to a reading by Fouéré’s herself:

Olwen’s reading that day proved that Joyce’s ‘sound dance’ was so much more. [...] As Olwen gave voice to her reading of *riverrun*, I felt I was experiencing an expression of human existence and the universe, travelling to a space beyond rational thought. There were shards of elusive meaning but ultimately Joyce’s *Wake* read aloud felt like a challenge to us to embrace what we do not know or cannot understand, to come to terms with the fact that we will never have enough knowledge to decode the book, but that if we can surrender ourselves to a place of unknowing, its beauty beyond reason and intellect will reveal itself. (Hughes in Jordan & Weitz, 2018: 416)

Hughes, reflecting on her work as co-director, on the challenge of working on someone else’s creation and vision, describes her way of directing, of working on a composition, on creating from a small intuition and giving it body. Body is the word that is clearly connected to her working method. She looks for the right way to give body to the ideas, almost to ground them, making them visible, accessible like materials.

By witnessing what Olwen’s inner landscape created in rehearsal and investigating a series of physical impulses inspired by individual sections, we developed a physical vocabulary, initially through improvisation. We then broke this vocabulary down further, exploring weight and working with or fighting against gravity, structure, rhythm, tempo, inter-corporeal and spatial articulation, instability, contradiction, energy and harmony. We gradually discovered how the body could express the shift from a tiny atom to an embodiment of the universe, a droplet of water to a vast ocean, all within the unceasing flow of the river, rising and falling, traveling from life to death to renewal. (Hughes in Jordan & Weitz, 2018: 417)

The work with weight shows the influence of Corporeal Mime on Hughes’ creative work. The core idea of this technique, is that movements are moulded by the

ideas, as though the body of the performer was the material in the hands of the sculptor. This material is not worked to stay fixed though, but to sustain a constant fight with gravity that the human body does even when it is simply standing. This fight with or against gravity is categorized in movement possibilities that Decroux calls counterweights and that define the movement itself. That's why standing is moving as well, because we must fight against gravity to hold the body up. Even if it is an internal movement, it does follow these invisible laws of counterweights that are movement itself. According to Leabhart counterweights help to connect the movement to the centre of the body:

These counterweights move the work from the periphery (hands) to the center of the actor's body, three inches below the navel. Even if the hands did sometimes of necessity occupy space away from the center of the body, they needed strong energetic links to the center. (Leabhart, 2007: 80)

It is very difficult to describe this performance as it would be difficult to tell the meaning of the text *Finnegans wake*. There isn't a narrative in the performance, but the creation follows the imaginary connections created by the words, playing with the sound of the voice in space, expanding the sound effect with lights and with the subtle physical work of the performer reciting the text. Hughes focuses on how to physically transmit the story and she does so thanks to her deep knowledge of physical and spatial principles that give her an outside global perception of the work:

When you read *Finnegans Wake*, the beauty of the structure of letters is arresting. As this aspect of Joyce's work is necessarily absent in live performance, the body and its sculptural quality, took on even more importance in staging *riverrun*. We expanded and contracted Olwen's vocal impulses into physical echoes. (Hughes in Jordan & Weitz, 2018: 417)

In this way, Hughes transposed the effect of the words of the text and the imaginary landscape that these create into a specific work on the body in space.

#### [b. Kellie Hughes: creative process](#)

Hughes works in search of something: the essence of the performance that she wants to reveal to the actor and to the audience. In her work her artistic research covers a wide and diverse poetic and dramatic field. The main body of her performances has been of devised theatre pieces, adaptations and revivals of classic texts, and at times also working with other media, like radio and digital. She moves

freely from radio drama readings to non-text-based dramaturgies. This is because Hughes is not only a director, but a “physical” dramaturg.

Lise Uytterhoeven defines this kind of new dramaturgy in her book *Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui: Dramaturgy and Engaged Spectatorship*:

Defining dramaturgy itself remains difficult as there is a multitude of complex practices to which the term applies. The pioneer Flemish dance dramaturg Marianne Van Kerkhoven conceived of dramaturgy as a two-fold function. On the one hand, it refers to both ‘the internal structure of a work’ and to the dialogic and ‘collaborative process of putting the work together’. On the other hand, it also implies an analytical function in the interplay between the work and the spectator, moving ‘beyond the idea that the drama contains a simple set of signifiers for us to decode’. (Uytterhoeven, 2019: 34)

Hughes’ path from dancer to actress and then to director is what empowered her with the tools necessary for this role of new dramaturg. Each project is like a journey in which Hughes sets out in search of new forms that become discoveries. The form that is found allows the heart of the content to beat. This form is found thanks to an analysis of the material of the performance, from a vision, which includes from the beginning, a spatial and physical perception as she did in the creation of *riverrun*.

As part of the rehearsal process, she often starts with some physical dramatic exercises. She follows the idea that it is important to start with a playful attitude in order to come out of preformed opinions and old habits. She usually looks for something that is new for everybody, something that involves spatial awareness, rhythm, and timing. She likes to put the performers in the situation where they have to deal with one another in space. If the work has to start with the text than this playing quality is recreated by reading the text in a non-formal way, trying all possible roles, trying different roles, and also mixing genders. Both approaches help the actors to be more aware of one another, thus working on some important ensemble elements.

Integral parts of her rehearsal process are light, space and movement. Hughes usually works with the same lighting designer, Michael Cummins, because they share a common vision. Light, for both, is a way of painting the space, collaborating to the realization of multiple visual worlds. Space and Movement are the first things that attract her to a piece, they are there from the very start, even before dealing with the literature of the piece. Her impression is that she is seeing a piece before she hears it. Even when she is adapting from literature, the visual perspective comes to her first. One question she also asks to herself when working the space and its different

meanings and material possibilities, is how and if the light should include the audience or not. The spatial relation between the piece, the audience and the performer for her has a lot to do with light.

When Hughes talks about space, she is also considering the space of the actual venue where it will be performed, the architecture of the venue that is going to host the performance. When possible, she wants it to be integral to the piece, thus including the audience perspective and point of view according to the spatial situation. She is constantly trying to bring the audience into the piece, that's why she rarely thinks of a fourth wall. For Hughes the relation between the audience and the performance is what makes theatre. All theatre, she says, has to be about the audience.

For *riverrun*, seeing each venue before going to perform was important for both Olwen Fouéré and Kellie Hughes. They almost reimagined the piece each time, according to the space that they were in. They were trying to take away the division between the piece and the audience. They wanted the experience of the performance not to be intellectual, but more unconscious, happening from the body. The way she adapts a text and creates a piece is very much related to how she sees the visual and spatial relationship of the actors, and the set as well, thinking about what it would look like. For her all the decisions come from the visual perspective, even in the stage of writing the piece.

I like to have stuff around me and it depends on the project. For "Death at interval", I wanted a specific old real piano as main prop for the piece. I do like to be able to find things in rehearsals as well, a rehearsal process should be about exploration and discovery, and not just putting something on stage which is in my head, because I do see the process as a collaborative process. Also, a process where the actor is at the center of the creative process and we are collectively trying to put a vision on stage, ultimately as a director I have to make sure that it makes sense, but leaving space to be able to find is very important. (Interview, September 2019)

The music is also thought as another element that works in relation to the organization of space and of the movements of the body. It should enhance the theatrical effects she is looking for, and therefore connect with the audience not only intellectually but almost unconsciously through the effect of all the theatre phenomena involved:

Music, movement and space need to be treated like an extra actor on stage and need to be given the attention as if they were a living body because otherwise you are creating

something that doesn't have a connection. Connection is very important if you are creating a piece of art. (Interview, September 2019)

Hughes approach to the work is both visual and rhythmical. In the sense that she works to balance the presence, the communication and the possible cohesion or contrast of music, movement and space. In this dynamic structure that she creates, the actor is the breathing element that needs to bring the rhythm to life, the actor should play the structure like an instrument and transmit this rhythm to the audience.

As an audience if we see that an actor is in control of the rhythmical structure of the piece, we will engage with them, if they are not, we won't like the piece but we won't really understand why. For me rhythm is the most important thing in theatre in terms of how you create something. But I don't have a rhythm before I have a structure. The movement will have a skeleton and then the rhythmical structure will come after that. (Interview, September 2019)

Hughes admits that the kind of work that she does implies a great challenge of communication with and between the parts involved, the musician, the lighting designer and the actor at least, and that often, since the dramaturgical structure grows and happens in the moment of the creation, she feels that to transmit her visions is the greatest challenge. The visual rhythm that guides her in the creation, is at times hard to grasp and translate into words. She likes to remember an anecdote which encloses this feeling perfectly, even though she is not sure that it is a true event: the story goes that somebody asked Carole Churchill, who was working on a new piece, "Have you written it yet?" to which, she replied "No but I can hum it". For Hughes this anecdote carries the essence of what a creative process must be about: capturing and making visible the inner rhythm of the performance.

## [2. Lluís Homar: his story](#)

The first thing that I should say is that Lluís Homar decided to do theatre from a very young age but theatre entered his life quite casually. It was in fact an element of the social life of his neighbourhoods. His life in theatre is very interesting also from the point of view of the history of the theatre because he is the icon of an actor's journey through methods, techniques and performing experiences. Homar embodies the history of theatre in Barcelona from the 1970s until the present. He is a great Spanish actor both in theatre and cinema, and now

in this last decade a decisive and sincere theatre director, once again. I say ‘once again’, because he has already gone through this experience previously in his life. Homar is a man of the theatre who started acting precociously at the age of six in the local parish theatre and never stopped since; who has lived through many theatre experiences, including being a director and being the artistic director of the *Teatre Lliure* (that he co-founded in 1976), the main performing arts theatre in Barcelona. The *Teatre Lliure* has a long and fascinating story that makes it, still today, one of the main theatre centres in Europe. In its starting days it was an innovative space for two main reasons: the proposition of a programme of international plays for the first time performed in Catalan<sup>12</sup>; a theatrical space that was adapted each time to suit new performative needs and experiments.

I suppose that it is already known, but the name of Teatre Lliure (Free Theatre) had not been chosen because of the times in which we were living and in which one began to breathe a freedom that until then did not exist, that too. But, really, the name comes because Fabián and Lluís Pasqual wanted to work on a stage that wasn’t Italian-style, that is, in the classical style of stage and plateau, but was multipurpose, to be organized as befits the spectacle we performed. (Homar, 2017: 71)<sup>13</sup>

Homar’s journey as an actor is full of moments of research and study because, as he says in his biography, he couldn’t stop questioning his own work and the profession itself. He had a real thirst and live curiosity for learning, and in his studies the body had also a primary importance.<sup>14</sup> This continued search for

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<sup>12</sup> “Those years that, for all, were a time of much theatrical, and cultural effervescence in general. Companies were founded, groups were created... everything was to be done. We were coming from a very complicated time and everyone really wanted to do things. We wanted to do international repertoire theatre, and do it in Catalan. And a proposal like ours, at the time, was very revolutionary. Our theatres, in general, did not program the great European or American classical authors. Molière, Shakespeare, Goldoni, Chekhov, Brecht, Ibsen, Tennessee Williams... All these authors, and in Catalan! All this was gone. And we, on top of that, had great luck. We were privileged. We had something that nobody else had at the time: a theatre”. [original: “Aquells anys que, per a tots, van ser un temps de molta efervescència teatral, i cultural en general. Es fundaven companyies, es creaven grups... tot estava per fer. Veníem de temps molt complicats i tothom tenia moltes ganes de fer coses. Nosaltres volíem fer teatre de repertori internacional, i fer-lo en català. I una proposta com la nostra, en aquells moments, era molt revolucionària. Els nostres teatres, en general, no programaven els grans autors clàssics europeus o americans. Molière, Shakespeare, Goldoni, Txékhov, Brecht, Ibsen, Tennessee Williams... Tots aquests autors, i en català! Tot això no hi era. I nosaltres, a sobre, teníem una gran sort. Érem uns privilegiats. Teníem una cosa que no tenia ningú més en aquells moments: un teatre”]. (Homar, 2017: 67). My translation from Catalan into English.

<sup>13</sup> “Suposo que ja és sabut, però el nom de Teatre Lliure no es va posar pel que sembla, pels temps en què es vivia i en què es començava a respirar una llibertat que fins aleshores no existia, que també. Però, realment, el nom ve perquè el Fabià i el Lluís Pasqual volien treballar en un escenari que no fos a la italiana, és a dir, a l’estil clàssic d’escenari i platea, sinó que fos polivalent, que s’organitzés escènica segons convingués a l’espectacle que representéssim”. (Homar, 2017: 71). My translation from Catalan into English.

<sup>14</sup> “I lost ten kilos and, above all, I began to realize that, as an actor, we must prepare the body, which is our working tool”. (original: “Em vaig aprimar deu quilos i, sobretot, vaig començar a prendre consciència que, com a actor, cal preparar-se el cos, que és la nostra eina de treball”). (Homar, 2017: 81). My translation from Catalan into English.



knowledge and technical tools in the field of acting took him to New York for a year to study with Uta Hagen at the HB Studio ten years after the start of the *Teatre Lliure*, where he was still working and deeply involved in. It is in these classes in New York that his interest in a form of acting, which would come from a clear emotional connection and with the purpose to transmit something real, found the form and the technique he had always had an intuition for. The exercises that were part of Ute Hagen's training gave him the tools to ground his acting in the body to connect with the emotions. Once back in Barcelona he returned to work at the *Teatre Lliure*, and here he realized that he was missing a work more focused on the actor. The *Teatre Lliure*, in fact, following the example of the *Piccolo Teatro* of Milano (Teatro d'Arte), was focused on making a high standard theatre for a more general audience. This was its mission and it certainly achieved it, gaining more and more weight in the cultural scene. Instead, the work that Homar had started to long for more and more was not there yet and this work could be synthesized with the words he uses to describe a rehearsal and performance experience that he had in another theatre at that time: to be connected with yourself and the other actors through a deep state of awareness.

It also made me discover the management of silence when you act. To know how to stop time, to catch the spectator and take him wherever you want. Not from the artifice, but from being inside. Connected with you and the rest of the actors. (Homar, 2017: 147)<sup>15</sup>

Almost every new work and commitment inside or outside the *Teatre Lliure* was for Homar a chance to learn more and gain more tools to be the theatre practitioner he is now. Homar has an ethical position, a kind of political (in the sense of engagement and involvement) and spiritual attitude towards his work.<sup>16</sup> He doesn't want a "demonstrative" theatre, but one that should be emotionally and dramatically consequential. In 1991 he started his journey as theatre director along with continuing to perform and in 1993 he became the Artistic Director of the *Teatre Lliure*. After this intense experience, he spent ten years exclusively

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<sup>15</sup> "També em va fer descobrir la gestió del silenci quan actues. Saber parar el temps, atrapar l'espectador per endur-te'l on vulguis. Però mai des de l'artifici. Sinó des d'estar a dins. Connectat amb tu i amb la resta d'actors". (Homar, 2017: 147). My translation from Catalan into English.

<sup>16</sup> "The luck that I have and those who dedicate to this work is that in the end there is a recipient: the audience. We don't do it for us. It's for the others... And this has become a priority, and we must think that, with our work, we do a service... But, for it to be that true, we cannot be disconnected, we must assume ourselves." [original: La sort que tinc jo i els que ens dediquem a aquesta feina és que al final hi ha un destinatari: el públic. No ho fem per nosaltres. És pels altres... I això ha de ser prioritari, i hem de pensar que, amb la nostra feina, fem un servei... Però, perquè sigui així de veritat, no podem anar desconnectats, ens hem d'assumir a nosaltres mateixos"] (Homar, 2017: 30). My translation from Catalan into English.

involved in cinema and TV until he came back to the theatre both as an actor and a director. Nowadays he is again also an artistic director, this time in Madrid in one of the national theatres, called “Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico”. His artistic and creative life is full of performances, encounters, and life-changing artistic experiences. There is one recurrent encounter, and this is with a play, *Terra Baixa* a classic Catalan text by Àngel Guimera written in 1896. The English translation of the title is *Lowland*. This play entered his life three times, always with a great artistic and personal impact. The first time at the beginning of his career when he was still involved in amateur theatre, then at a turning point in the history of the *Teatre Lliure* and finally, when he came back to the theatre after a decade working for the camera.

This is also how I met his work. I sat through the premiere of this performance in 2014 and realised that the audience was not just ready to watch a show, but they were expecting to hear the story that everyone in Spain, and especially in Catalunya, recognizes as its own because of its place in the cultural heritage. The audience expectation was not disappointed and I could feel that a sort of spell had fallen on us, we were all virtually embraced in a feeling of communion as though we were witnessing a renewed ancestral ritual.

#### [a. Lluís Homar: \*Terra Baixa\*](#)

In 2014, giving a proof of conceptual deftness Homar decided to venture on a challenging project: transforming the almost epic text of *Terra Baixa* into a solo piece. Homar worked side by side with a team where all the main theatre figures were represented: actor, director, set designer, sound designer, movement director, dramaturge, music composer. He does so in pursuit of his idea of a form of theatre that could captivate the audience and transmit a story through a work of unity. Homar is the creator of this new project, collaborating on the text adaptation with the dramaturg Pau Miró. He performed in it. It is important to call it a solo piece and not a monologue because even though he is alone on stage, he embodies the voices and the stories of four different characters from the original play.

*Terra Baixa* is the story of two words, one is called the highland and the other, that functions as a twisted shadow, is called the lowland. This is magically represented also by the scenography that with the device of a firm white curtain divides the stage in two clear parts where the front is the lowland, the land of low passions and intrigues, and the back is the highland. In the front everything is set in a strict order

made of a precise disposition of objects, and the ‘characters’ displace mainly along parallel lines. Like in a puppet box, movements are happening mostly in profile along those parallels that develop from one side of the scene to the other, framed only by few basic elements: two chairs, a table and a mirror. Behind the curtain, as it opens up, the audience discovers the “world” of the highland, the land of free, wild, sincere behaviours. Here, in contrast, everything is chaos. The chaos of the highland is represented by an overwhelming presence of leaves from high up the ceiling to the floor. From the way the leaves are set and the way the character/s move using the depth of the space, the audience receives the impression of something invading the entire space. The conceptual work on the scenography went along with the development of the performance where everything, according to Homar, had to be integral and coherent with the actor’s process:

The staging is always important. The important thing is to know why these elements are there. In the case of *Terra Baixa* the scenery was telling the story. There was a contrast between the Low Land world which is more rational, more established, a room, a closed place, as opposed to nature that represented the High Land. Here is a very clear example of how the constructed world is dismantled to give way to a more animal-like one. Suddenly everything fell apart, the curtain fell and the scene became an open space. The audience can see that as humans we have built something that is limiting us because of all the mechanisms of power, of control, and of domination of one over another. (Interview, December 2019)<sup>17</sup>

The lighting design was also stressing the difference between the two worlds (a very cold light for the lowland and warmer for the highland), also accompanying the performance’s journey towards the invasion of chaos when the leaves invade the space and the light enhances this effect changing intensity.

Homar wanted everything to be at the service of the story, to do so, according to him, everything had to be integral to the creative process. To work this way, connecting and sharing with the other parts of the performance, suggests also an implication from the actor who is asked to take part and be responsible for the

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<sup>17</sup> “Siempre es importante la puesta en escena. El importante, pero es saber al servicio de que están estos elementos. En el caso de Tierra Baja la escenografía estaba contando la historia: había una contraposición entre el mundo de la Tierra Baja que es mas racional, mas establecido, una habitación, un sitio cerrado, en contraposición con la naturaleza. Aquí hay un ejemplo muy claro de cómo se iba desmontando este mundo construido para que diera paso a una cosa mas animal, mas visceral y de repente las hojas invadían este espacio y todo se desmontaba, acababa cayéndose la cortina y se convertía en un espacio abierto. Era como decir que como ser humanos hemos construido algo que en el fondo lo que hace es que nos limita, y nos hace ser una versión mala de nosotros mismos y aquí entran los mecanismos de poder, de control, de dominio de uno sobre otros”. My translation from Spanish into English.

creative process just as much as the other elements involved and even as much as the director himself.

In *Terra Baixa* everything goes together, everything also participates in the creative process. I believe that everything can go together, but in the end the center is the actor at the service of a text. We need to give space to the actors to make them realize that it is essential to get involved. The essence of a creative work is a text and an actor, and the director has to understand that he is at the service of this. Sometimes everything seems to be there, but the most important thing is missing, which is to give life to the piece. And life comes from the actors at the service of a text. And it's not just under the director's responsibility, but also of the actor, because I always like to think about the possibility of shared responsibilities. (Interview, December 2019)<sup>18</sup>

Homar likes to use the word “process”, when speaking of the work that an actor undertakes during the rehearsals. The process starts from the rehearsals, and it continues also during the actual performance. He favours this word over ‘method’ or ‘technique’, because he puts the emphasis on the research and work that the actor has to undertake on many levels – physical, emotional and intellectual. Similarly, the other elements contributing to the performance, like lighting or the set, go through processes that, according to Homar, have to coincide with that of the actor. Movement as well is not analysed separately. The process of creating the characters in the final space of the performance, working in connection with the set as well as the text that carries the emotional atmosphere, influences the rhythm of the characters, the pace of their displacements. The way the text is articulated, becomes the articulation of the body and likewise the intensity in some point of the text is accompanied by an explosive physical energy. These coincidences and influences are not choreographed, but at the same time they are not left to chance because they are facilitated by a work done from the very beginning of the process. Movement, for Homar, is part of the working routine, even when the rehearsals have not started yet and they are working on the text analysis. Homar collaborates closely with the movement director Oscar Valsecchi (also assistant director for *Terra Baixa*) and together they devised a daily routine especially for the creative process. This includes a time dedicated to discovering the working space which they then use as a tool. They move into this space, and the actors and the people involved in the process are guided

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<sup>18</sup> “En Tierra Baja todo va junto, todo participa de lo mismo también en el proceso creativo. Yo creo en que todo puede ir junto, pero al final el centro es el actor al servicio de un texto. Se tiene que crear un espacio donde los actores ven que es indispensable que se impliquen. La esencia en proceso de creación, es un texto y un actor, y el director tiene que entender que está al servicio de esto. A veces parece que todo está, pero falta la cosa mas importante que es dar vida. Y la vida viene de los actores al servicio de un texto. Y no es solo una cuestión del director, pero también del actor porqué me gusta siempre pensar en responsabilidades compartidas”. My translation from Spanish into English.

through a series of exercises aimed to connect their inside awareness and the outside perception of themselves and the others in the space. The equilibrium between all these parts is delicate but, for Homar, the actor must be at the centre of the creative and performative events. The common aim for all the parts involved is to transmit a story to the audience.

b. Lluís Homar: the creative process. “El teatro nos permite imaginar.”<sup>19</sup>

Homar likes to play with the idea of the non-director. The creation happens from the realization of shared commitment and responsibility of all the parts involved within their clear differences. This way of working, according to him, might reach a point that is not very practical and at times is not possible, but he believes that it is interesting to explore this possibility. He wants to transmit to the actors this idea of commitment and, in order for it to be so, the role of the director has to decrease a little. He likes to use the verb “to accompany” rather than “to direct”.

We have created in the last half century the figure of the director as a little demigod. I like to think of the director as a facilitator for the actors to be able to do. (Interview, December 2019)<sup>20</sup>

He likes to define this way of working as an act of responsibility that doesn't imply a full autonomy of the parts involved. Homar considers that autonomy might come as a consequence if the actor becomes truly responsible for what he is doing.

I give importance to the author and the actor, and the role of the director is to facilitate this meeting. (Interview, December 2019)<sup>21</sup>

He insists that in order for the actors to shine they have to realize that they have to do work on themselves in order to deserve the space; the journey to oneself is the journey to the other, and it comes from training but certainly also from a practice of humility and generosity. It is also about bringing awareness to the sense of utility, of service, of realizing that the role of the actor is serving something. The novelty of his creative and rehearsal process is that he insists for the complexity of

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<sup>19</sup> “Theatre allows us to imagine” (Interview, December 2019)

<sup>20</sup> “Hemos creado en el último medio siglo la figura del director como un poco demiurgo. Me gusta pensar en el director como un facilitador para que los actores hagan”. My translation from Spanish into English.

<sup>21</sup> “Para mí el importante es el autor y el actor, y la función del director es facilitar el encuentro”. My translation from Spanish into English.

the work of the director to be shared with the whole team. The creation happens from the realization of shared commitment and responsibility of all the parts involved respecting their clear specificities. Homar in his role as a director starts from the principle that there shouldn't be any hierarchical divisions between the people involved and that the actors play an active and fundamental role.

His theatre work nowadays has a militant quality to it because he is fully engaged in the research of a working process that connects not with the persona of the actor, but with his real self, and to bring this truth on stage in order to communicate with the audience. He likes to stress also the importance for the director to take the actors into account not only in the work routine, but also on a personal level; his role implies also taking care, giving peace of mind, and removing pressure in order to make them feel comfortable in the process. This attitude towards the actors is the starting point for a work that is focused on creating a space in which the actors' bodies talk. Emotions are part of the body, but if the working process is not correct the body itself could block them. Everything starting from the work on the text is done to facilitate the necessary understanding of the process, helping the actors to feel in a space where they can completely relax into the work and loosen up. If the body is loosened the actor is available. This process of acquisition can lead to autonomy, but the director will always have to set some limits. These limits are not fixed in stone though, and, for Homar, it is always interesting to explore them in order to serve the idea that the director should not try to leave a permanent mark on his work; on the contrary, he should disappear and be just a facilitator for the actors to embody the texts from themselves.

Technically, for the actors, according to Homar, it is important to interpret from something concrete in order to avoid being too generic. When the actor is precise in the preparation, then at the moment of performing, he can be freer.

Theatre can be a space that allows us to reconnect with the good things that human beings have, for this reason, we, that are involved in it, need a significant degree of awareness with ourselves. Surely there are rules, techniques. But just because it is harder it doesn't mean that it is not possible. Technique often gives you a clue on how to connect to the inside. This is what they say about music, that it carries meaning. Technique is work and thus connects you more to something that is true and frees you. (Interview, December 2019)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "El teatro puede ser un espacio que nos facilite reconectar con estas cosas buenas que tiene el ser humano, para esto los que lo hacemos necesitamos un grado de consciencia importante con nosotros mismos. Pero si que hay reglas, técnicas. Pero que sea mas difícil no significa que no sea posible. La técnica muchas veces te da pista de cómo conectarte con el fondo. Así como se dice con la música que es portadora de sentido. La técnica es trabajo y así te conecta mas a algo que es verdadero y te hace libre". My translation from Spanish into English.

At the same time, Homar warns the actors not to use the technique as a mask to hide what they are lacking in their lives, because otherwise they risk falling into the so called *cabotinage* (play-acting).

At present the research and exploration of his own method led him and Oscar Valsecchi to create a series of workshops. The aim is to work on this idea of searching for the truth, the one that actors need to bring on stage. It is not the truth in the naturalistic sense. It is something that Homar believes that everyone carries even though hidden behind many layers of social masks:

How do you get to this truth? It's a personal path. I want to work with the person holding the actor. If something changes in the person, it is the only thing that can make this sustainable. (Interview, December 2019)<sup>23</sup>

When they give these courses, they create a space in which no one needs to show how good they are, but everyone is invited and accompanied to look for what is there, only what is there, in themselves. To bring this on stage means showing something that can speak to everyone and that everyone shares. Homar claims that there isn't a map to do this process, but theatre must redeem a space of real life in which we see that it is worth believing in the human being.

### 3. Andrés Corchero: his story

Andrés Corchero is a performer, a choreographer and a movement director. He works with actors and theatre directors bringing his personal investigation on the creative potentials of the body, taking his inspirations from The Body Weather technique. This technique was invented around 1973 by the Japanese dancer and actor Min Tanaka. This method includes a strong physical training as a starting point for a wider sensibility and the receptivity of the performer. For Tanaka movement shouldn't give the performers tips on how to do certain things, but it should free their body and enliven their imagination.

Corchero applies this method both as a training tool for the body and the mind and also in his creative work.

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<sup>23</sup> “¿Cómo se llega a esta verdad? Es un camino personal. Yo quiero trabajar con la persona que sostiene a al actor. Si se modifica algo en la persona, es lo único que pueda hacer esto sostenible”. My translation from Spanish into English.

It all began by chance at the end of the 1970s through a friend who was studying theatre at the *Taller de mim i teatre contemporani* in Barcelona, and convinced him to join her. This school was mostly dedicated to visual performances where the body had a central role. Today we can call it physical theatre. They were studying techniques and methods of movement coming mainly from Grotowski, Barba and Meyerhold. The physical work fascinated him and allowed him to discover his body, and he saw that there was something in his own body that until then had been unknown to him. The most important turning point was that while studying, he saw the *butoh* show of the *Sankai Juku* company. The work impressed him; the performers seemed to be hardly moving, yet in terms of the body it was hypnotic and compelling. This first impression determined where Corchero is now.

While he was making his mind up on the idea of moving to Japan, he went to a workshop with *Odin Theatre* and was fascinated with their work and specifically the work of Iben Nagel Rasmussen. In 1985 during an impressive international theatre festival in Barcelona he met Min Tanaka. Corchero had encountered his work previously in the sessions conducted in Barcelona by Albert Vidal, who had been to Japan working with Min Tanaka and Kazu Ohno. He took this opportunity to ask Min Tanaka if he could work with him; Corchero knew that he was giving courses for foreigners only twice a year, but apart from this he did not have the door open. Corchero had the courage to ask him if he could follow him and join him in the company's work and follow the training to which Tanaka simply replied 'If you can handle it, you can come!' And this is how it all started. Corchero went to Japan and from 1986 to 1995 he became a member of the dance Company *Mai-Juku*, directed by Min Tanaka, touring through Japan, Europe and United States. Still from 1986 to 1995 he alternated these collaborations as guest dancer at Min Tanaka with his own creative work in Barcelona and Europe. In his own work he started to apply and adapt the knowledge applied, and he kept the idea of an outside perception connecting it to the attention of the audience.

For Corchero, the artist has to be careful all the time about the role of the audience, who has to feel invited to enter inside his vision as though the audience could almost touch the performer. This relation with the audience is connected to the work of Tanaka, a method where the performer trains all the senses to gain a precise perception of movement and space. "Body weather" is a name that goes beyond the mere idea of external and internal landscape, but wants to refer to all the senses of the performer.



The performer is the material made in three dimensions and that brings a three-dimensional perspective to the performance. His personal investigations around the physical expressive possibilities took him throughout his career to work closely with artists from various disciplines. The first encounter that gave also visibility to his work in Barcelona, was with the poet and translator Feliu Formosa. In their creative work, in this dialogue between poem and dance, the aim for Corchero was to sort the words in the body and see how this order could become a narrative of its own, which doesn't have to be logical, but it has to have an intention. Following a coherent path between order and disorder, Corchero collaborated many years first with the visual artist Jordi Rocosa and then with the musician Agustí Fernandez and in a second moment the musician Joan Saura. He created and participated in different artistic projects, most notably his own company *Raravis*, between 1993 and 2012, in collaboration with the dancer Rosa Muñoz.

Corchero never stopped; the list of names and companies with which he has collaborated (and continues to collaborate) is very long. There is one recurrent encounter with his Japanese colleague Oguri, an artistic brother across the oceans, with whom every encounter is another step in their common research from *Body Weather* to their expressive and conceptual aesthetics. His artistic trajectory is one long conversation on many themes related to art, life, beauty, exploration and relations, one piece enters into the other stretching a thread that feels like one line of thought.

#### [a. Andrés Corchero: \*My neighbour sky\*](#)

This performance takes its title from a spatial element (the sky), and calls it 'a neighbour'. The creators and performers Oguri and Corchero explain that when they are far from each other, in distant countries, despite all the boundaries and borders, they have in common the sky over their heads.

Oguri and Andrés Corchero met in Japan in the company *Mai-Juku* directed by Min Tanaka. They had been apart for many years when they met again in 2011 in Barcelona and their artistic mutual understanding that had been slumbering for almost twenty-five years sparked off instantly giving birth to a still present fruitful collaboration.

This performance was designed to be performed outdoors, supposedly under the sky, and it is created as an adaptable concept but with certain prerogatives. One of these is the presence of water, for example a fountain, where the performers are

in for most of the performance. I saw it during the Grec Festival 2018 in Barcelona at the Fundació Joan Miró, performed inside the beautiful fountain overlooking the entire city and under the shadow of the beautiful statue by Miró “Lluna, sol i una estrella”. It is a work in continuity, which changes every time, according to the space where it is performed. In *My neighbour sky* the journey of the two characters is told and then understood by the audience through the performers’ relation inside the space and their use of spaces inside and outside the fountain. The story unfolds through a series of paths crossed in space and in depth in the water, and through games of mirrors and repetitions that play with the horizontality of the space and the spatial relationship of the two performers.

As in all of Corchero’s performances the narrative comes from inside the performance, meaning that the audience follows the unfolding of a possible story after “meeting” first with the presence of the two performers and after discovering and understanding their specific characteristics and qualities through their place in space, their relation with space in their displacements and their movements. The two performers on stage (or, rather, in the water) become two members of humanity engaged with the problems of life symbolized with naturalistic elements – for example, holding a stone on their heads or crossing the water at different speeds. The result that they hope to achieve is that the audience at one point could feel connected with the performers/characters and would recognize the essence of their own being in them.

A second moment of the performance is the interaction of the two ‘characters’, the different ways in which they relate and physically relate become the representation of their relation and friendship. Again, the audience can feel the common traits of human ways and habits of communication. Finally, this relationship between two people opens up again to include, this time, a general look on the life and the history of humans’ attitudes and behaviours, and the usual human concepts of and on the other. This is done also adding two texts in voice off that allow the performers to communicate with words that become metaphors of the concept of borders, nationalities, colonization and immigrations. One is a text by Antonin Artaud and the other is a text by Karl Valentin.

The poetical and metaphorical tones of the performance give way to moments of profound irony and engaging dynamism that collaborate to make the entire performance a hypnotic experience. This hypnotic feeling is also created by a subtle and clever use of the light. Oguri and Corchero calculated the exact time of the sunset, and agreed with the organizers that the performance should start a bit before. The

spotlights were strategically placed to give light as the sky darkened. There was no light technician. The light was designed this way because the performers/creators wanted to achieve this beautiful effect. The lights were there from the beginning, although the audience couldn't see them, but as the sun went down the performance was progressively lit with lights of different intensities coming from different places, and showing different intensities according to the distance of the light from the darkening landscape. This way light proved to be very important because it was clearly affecting the perception of the performance, actually changing the physical condition, and therefore the state, of the viewer:

And then it was beautiful because every day was different. (Interview, November 2019)<sup>24</sup>

Thanks to this, it also had an effect on the perception of time, influencing and at the same time expressing how time passes from the viewer's point of view.

#### [b. Andrés Corchero: creative process](#)

When he begins a process of creation as a director, Corchero gives a short talk where he sets out what is going to be the topic on which the actors are going to make a creation. This starting point is already an important key element of his working process. It is not a creation where the definition of the performance comes from the outside. He doesn't act as a director imposing a view from above; on the contrary, he works with the actors to accompany the creative process:

If the topic comes for example from a book, the first questions are for the actors. I ask them what they have found in the text, I invite them to contribute with their vision. And more possibilities open up, because one part of the book can lead to another book or to an image. I am interested in awakening creativity and motivating each one to contribute individually to the creation. (Interview, November 2019)<sup>25</sup>

Corchero's process comes from and includes a methodology that he proposes throughout the whole development of the creation. This includes a daily routine with a physical training, exercises to develop perception, listening, relationship with the other, and also the use and the perception of time. The concepts of space are used

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<sup>24</sup> "Y entonces era bonito porque cada día era diferente". My translation from Spanish into English.

<sup>25</sup> "Si el tema viene por ejemplo de un libro, las primeras preguntas son para los actores, sobre que han encontrado ellos en el texto, para que aporten su visión. Y se abren posibilidades porqué una parte del libro puede llevar a otro libro, a una imagen. Me interesa despertar la creatividad y motivarles para que cada uno individualmente aporte su granito de creación". My translation from Spanish into English.

from day one, both as part of the physical training and in the basic exercises. The work has many elements of relationship and understanding of the dramatic space.

This methodology comes from the work of the Body Weather technique and creative system. The daily routine influences and serves the whole creative process that consists in Corchero's application of this knowledge to the actual creation starting from the way he applies the technical tools to explore the theme, adapting it and embodying it. Corchero in the training uses the expression of 'entering one's own body'; this helps to describe the exercises he uses to lead the actors to be fully aware in the moment of creating and performing, as well as to help them connect through their own bodies to their visual imagination.

Before showing and sharing his ideas on the creation of the performance, Corchero wants the actors to contribute with their own ideas. Once the daily training has started, as part of his work on the creation, he asks the actors to prepare a piece of approximately five minutes coming from what they are understanding of the work they are doing with him. In a work process of two and a half months after three weeks he asks them to present to him a composition in a solo piece format, where the starting and most important elements are the body and the space. They can eventually also use some objects, and if they want even music, sound and text. They can use these elements and combine them as they prefer, from their own inspiration or from the work that they have done during the working weeks, but always related to the subject they are dealing with for the performance. This is a first sample that allows them to have an individual material that can grow or disappear depending on each one's proposal. From there he will lead them to work on the performance that is built from what they have proposed, improvisations that they do in an ensemble, and material that he suggests coming as he says from 'within my collection of ideas'. Little by little the process continues and they discover what to use and how to structure it in time. Time for Corchero is a fundamental element. When he talks about time, he is actually talking about the rhythm of the performance, but seen and analysed from a double point of view: the performer and the audience. Rhythm, according to Corchero, comes from the way you approach the notion of time on stage; what happens inside an apparent slow part of the performance can be actually composed by a series of very fast fragments. The internal rhythm of a part has to be varied, different, as it might happen in music, but how that part unfolds is little by little. And he adds that without variety there is just monotony:

I have a special care with how I structure time in my pieces, I look at how time unfolds. I organize the times of each part inside the piece and inside each part, because the sum of the parts may create an intensity or not. It is necessary to organize the piece looking for a certain variety of moments and times, so that the audience might go through different sensations, emotions, and moments when nothing is happening. Because in fact in these moments, where in principle nothing is happening, things are actually happening in the audiences' heads. Even when they are questioning themselves about what is going on and why nothing is happening. These moments of nothing, therefore become for the audience a way to reconnect with the performance and reposition themselves. You can't decide what's going to happen in the audiences' heads, but I can decide and make the artistic choice of where I stand in space in these moments of silence.<sup>26</sup>

To this work on time perceived as and achieved through rhythm he might then add music, but more than music he likes to speak of sound. Sound, for Corchero, regards many aspects, including technical ones and always related to the audience perception; like for example, attending to the question of volume in order to control how the audience listens. This is because he is aware that sound can take the audience to a specific emotional dimension. This plus the work of the performer creates the musicality of his pieces.

The sense of musicality has to do with listening. When you move and even when you don't, you are emitting a sound. You can produce noise because you are moving too much and without a connection with your thoughts, sometimes you can be immobile, but if your thought is restless you can emit noise. This depends on how you think and put your thoughts in your body and how you convey it, that is your music. The music depends on how you put yourself in your body in relation to your thoughts.<sup>27</sup>

Once the performer has their own music because they have found the movements and how to perform them, then this can be in relation to a 'real' exterior music. This dialogue between the music of the movements and the actual music is also part of the musicality of the piece. On the one hand, there is the individual music (the music of mind and body, muscles and bones), on the other hand, there is the

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<sup>26</sup> "Tengo un especial cuidado con como estructuro el tiempo en cuanto a la pieza, como transcurre, como organizo los tiempos de cada parte dentro de esta pieza y dentro de cada parte también porqué la suma de las partes hace que esto tenga una intensidad o no la tenga. Es necesario organizar la pieza con un ojo a una cierta variedad de momentos y tiempos para que el espectador pase para distintas sensaciones, emociones, momentos en que no pasa nada porqué en realidad si que están pasando cosas, pasan en la cabeza del espectador que piensa que está pasando, que me está diciendo, se recoloca. No se puede decidir lo que va a pasar en la cabeza del publico, pero puedo decidir donde me coloco yo en estos momentos de silencio". My translation fro Spanish into English.

<sup>27</sup> "El sentido de musicalidad tiene que ver con la escucha. Cuando tu te mueves y no te mueves estas emitiendo un sonido. Puedes hacer ruido porqué te estás moviendo demasiado y sin una conexión con tus pensamientos. A veces puedes estar inmóvil, pero si tu pensamiento es inquieto puedes emitir ruido. Esto depende de cómo tu piensas y colocas tus pensamientos en tu cuerpo y como lo transmites y eso es tu música. La música depende de como te pones en tu cuerpo en relación a tus pensamientos". Translation from Spanish into English.

music that comes from the physical and spatial relation with the other performers, finally there is the actual music playing.

Integral parts of his creative process are also the space and the lighting. Light, for him, represents how he sees things and similarly to what he does with movement, he uses it to hide as well as to show. Sound, light and space go together. According to Corchero, there is an awareness of how to keep the public's attention, and that has to do with how an actor dominates a movement in space. The important thing is what happens between the actor on stage and the audience watching, not what happens to the actor. This relationship is grounded between what the public sees and what the public perceives in space. The presence and interrelation of these elements influence the energy that is projected because the audience is receiving different information. How the audience see the performers on the stage and how they show themselves is of great importance because it determines the perception of the performance and therefore the dramaturgy itself.

In his performances there are recurrent themes. The main topics that he addresses in his pieces are the passage of time, the losses, and the neurological psychomotor problems. For this reason, he is very interested in the neuroscientist Oliver Sacks, who writes about the approach to movement from a place that can't be really controlled because of a handicap. Corchero is interested because he finds that it is something that is also part of the training: this listening, this attention, and the going back to learn again what each one already knows: moving. He thinks that in the end he doesn't create performances that are separated one from the other; rather, everything is a line:

It's a way of getting closer to yourself, to how you see the world and how you want to share it. And this world is not only mine, it is a world that is we share with many other people. It is all part of a journey that is my life. I don't see any performance cut off from the other one. Sometimes I worry, I wonder if I'm doing the same thing, but, even if the elements are the same, I'm combining them and working in different ways so that the public will listen to me differently. (Interview, November 2019)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Es una manera de acercarse a si mismo, a cómo uno ve el mundo y como lo quiere compartir. Y este mundo no es mío solo, es un mundo que se comparte con mucha gente. Todo forma parte de un trayecto que es mi vida. No veo ninguno espectáculo desligado del otro. A veces me preocupa, me pregunto si estoy haciendo lo mismo, pero, aunque los elementos sean los mismos, yo los voy combinando y trabajando de maneras diferentes para que el publico te escuches de otra manera". My translation from Spanish into English.

## Appendix 2. Interview Outline

Question 1. What inspired you the most to become a Theatre Practitioner?

Question 2. Do you have a particular favourite way of starting the rehearsal process with the actors?

Question 3. Historically radical theatre changes have always involved different aspects of the theatre experience; major changes occurred especially in the staging, including light, space and movement. When you create a performance do you consider these three elements and how?

Question 4. When you work with actors at which point do you start to include notions of the theatrical space?

Question 5. Do you work with props and with the final setting from the very beginning of the rehearsal process?

Question 6. Do you use a particular type of movement technique?

Question 7. The connection between music and movement in theatre is never the same. Do you work with music?

Question 8. Do you have in mind a specific rhythm for the movement and the displacement of the actors on stage when creating a performance?

Question 9. According to Appia the shifting point of the staging is a three-dimensional scene that creates the impression of movement, expressed in the space from a succession of forms. This way the space is alive and can resonate to the music. What is the relation in your work between music, movement and space?

Question 10. What creates a sense of musicality for you in your works?

Question 11. In Copeau's theatre vision and research, space is considered and used as an expressive element. He gave particular importance to the analysis of space also in relation to the audience. When you create a performance how do you organize your work in relation to the audience?

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