



»TRACES«

A Guideline for Dance Improvisation Classes

TASK & TOOLS BY
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INTRODUCTION

»**TRACES**« has been a practice-oriented research, in which I have been interested in finding strategies to transmit the teaching of Dance Improvisation to other dance pedagogues in the field of Contemporary Dance. My research also focused on the implementation of somatically oriented improvisational tools in the same field. This orientation emerged during my studies and research process for my Master of Arts and Artistic Master Class at the Palucca University of Dance Dresden.

This guideline for Dance Improvisation classes begins with a personal presentation, providing the reader with an understanding of improvisation as much as my personal experience of it. It finally gives concrete advices and tasks to be put into practice in a Dance Improvisation class. These tasks were compiled by myself and are inspired by my own teaching experience.

ABOUT ME

I am a choreographer, dance teacher and freelance dancer. Since 2002 I live and work in Hamburg. I started my dance education at the Dance Conservatory of the University of Chile. My artistic career is characterized by various international experiences in Latin America and Europe. In 2005 I founded my label "Danza Urbana", for which I am in charge of the artistic direction and creation of intercultural dance projects.

In 2021 I successfully completed the "Master of Arts" in dance pedagogy/contemporary dance and in 2023 I graduated from the "Artistic Master Class". Both Master programs were held at the Palucca University of Dance Dresden. For the Artistic Master Class I explored the connection between practice and theory in the field of improvisation in dance education.

During 2021, I also realized the project "Carajo! what's next?" It consisted in the development of a hybrid dance concept, combining analog/digital media. In 2022, I realized the project "In & Outside", a digital documentation of all my choreographic projects. Both projects were sponsored by Dis-Tanz-Solo, Neue Start Kultur and Dachverband Tanz Deutschland. Furthermore in 2022 I was selected for a Dance Residency by Fonds Darstellende Künste entitled "Who am I today?" for which I researched on improvised choreography. It was sponsored by Fonds Darstellende Künste, Neue Start Kultur and in collaboration with Wiese eG, Hamburg.

My pedagogical and artistic work is also characterized by offering a space for reflection and individual expression and by providing quality space for experimentation.

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UNDERSTANDING DANCE IMPROVISATION

In Dance Improvisation, the dancer relies on his/her technical skills, body awareness, and artistic intuition to generate movement spontaneously. He/she may draw inspiration from various sources such as emotions, sensations, imagery, or the surrounding space. Improvisation can take place individually or collaboratively within a group, allowing dancers to engage in dialogue and exchange ideas through movement. Dance Improvisation is not limited to any specific style or genre of dance. It can be seen in Contemporary Dance, Modern Dance, Jazz, Ballet, Hip-Hop, and many other forms. It is often used as a tool for choreographic exploration, as it allows dancers to discover unique movement possibilities and develop their own artistic voice.

The practice of Dance Improvisation encourages dancers to embrace risk-taking, adaptability, and spontaneity. It challenges them to trust their instincts, listen to their bodies, and make artistic choices in the moment. It can lead to unexpected and innovative movement outcomes, fostering a sense of freedom and individuality within the realm of dance.



DANCE IMPROVISATION FOR ME

Dance improvisation has, for me, the potential to get closer to both the emotional and psychological imagination and the cultural identity of the dancer. This expression through body language offers one a world of possibilities and interpretations that mark the individual stamp of the dancer. My guidance in Dance Improvisation focuses on creating a bridge between the dancers' feeling, the communication between them as an entity and their interaction with me as a guide in the process. It also aims at activating the dancer's skills such as listening to her/himself, getting out of his/her usual movement patterns, encouraging body exploration, awakening the ability to be responsive, and being receptive to musical and environmental stimuli. I would say that Dance Improvisation offers, the opportunity to move out of one's own comfort zone, to disrupt the usual, to reveal what was not known, and to surprise.



MY SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

Dance is a way of living in the world.
Lisa Nelson, dance artist.

For this guideline I was mainly inspired by Somatic approaches and Improvisation Technologies, wanting to combine both in Dance Improvisation classes. Somatic comes from the Greek word: Soma, and refers the integration of body, mind and spirit. Somatic dance is an embodied movement practice that focuses on cultivating a deep awareness of the body and its sensations. Another key of Somatic dance is the concept of "listening" to the body, as well encourage the integration of motion and consciousness.

As a teacher of Contemporary Dance, an integral part of my teaching philosophy is the conviction that Somatic approaches are essential to the development of the dancer as an artist, as they support the dancer's powers of agency, self-regulation and independent problem solving.

This guideline is also influenced by the work of the American choreographer William Forsythe through his system called "Improvisation Technologies" (1995-96). The keys to his vocabulary offer multiple perspectives on his approach to improvisation. In which the body is transformed as an interface to draw lines, curves and volumes in space.

I have personally practiced "Improvisation Technologies" and consider it a method that generates practicable tools that allow dancers to get in touch with different ways of conceiving movement, inviting to go beyond the usual and preferred ways of moving. With the influence of these two concepts I have generated and put into practice my own version, with excellent results.

TARGET GROUP

This guideline is mainly addressed to young teachers in dance and body expression. It can be implemented in classes in a Community Dance context and its exercises can be adapted to work in a context with adolescents and adults.

HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Before beginning each session, it is a good idea to introduce the topic of health and safety with the dancers. While it is true that in improvisation we develop creative skills, it is also important that dancers learn to develop safety awareness, muscle strength and a sense of responsibility for the health and safety of themselves and the group. For example, avoid performing extremely acrobatic movements during improvisations, without being previously trained and with activated muscular strength. Knowledge of basic principles of weight transfer and floor technique can help prevent injuries. Consider incorporating exercises where the body can get into motion in a warm-up. Clearly state safety tips before beginning a movement exploration.

CLASSROOM CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE TEACHER

Before each session, it is essential to prepare the space and discuss hygiene issues with your dancers or group.

Floor: The surface for dance practice should be appropriate, ideally a linoleum or wooden floor. If the floor is too hard or slippery it can cause injuries. It is also essential that there are no obstacles or sharp objects on the floor.

Ambient temperature: in case of high temperature in the dance studio, remind your participants to hydrate their body, mainly with water, to help their own cooling system (sweating). A dancer can become dehydrated or suffer muscle spasms as a result of exhaustion.

In case of cold temperatures, it is advisable to wear appropriate clothing and to warm up beforehand to avoid muscle injuries. It is important to air the room in order to have a suitable temperature for the practice of dance.

Health: If a participant has a cold, it is advisable to cancel his/her participation until he/she gets better. In this way you promote a healthy hygienic environment.

HEALTH AND SAFETY TIPS FOR DANCERS

In the following are some considerations the teacher should mention at the beginning of each session:

- ➔ Always assign a time beforehand for a proper warm-up.
- ➔ Maintain the level of concentration throughout the session and avoid over-fatigue.
- ➔ Each participant should be aware of his or her own physical potential and preferably avoid attempting extremely difficult movements, which may cause injury.
- ➔ In case of lifting, use proper lifting techniques.
- ➔ Hygiene is important especially when working in a group.
- ➔ Be aware of the number of dancers in the room, the space and the intensity of your movements.
- ➔ Remember to remove your jewellery, watches and any other clothing that could injure a partner when dancing.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDELINE

This dance guideline is designed as a support for Dance Improvisation classes. This is a special free version, in which only two improvisation tasks are presented. The original version contains 10 exercises to be explored. Each exercise has an objective, so you can decide individually how to organize and vary each one.

Each task is synthetically explained and contains:

an introduction (to start),

the description of the exercise (to do)

and advices to stimulate the reflection (to reflect).

With this methodology, space is offered to modify and individualize each exercise according to each dance pedagogue.

REFLECTION AND ASSESSMENTS STRATEGIES

Personally, as a dance artist, I consider it important to follow a pedagogy that contains reflection enabling the dancer to express his/her feelings. This is why reflection is also part of this guideline. I find it very important to encourage the ability of the dancer to reflect through dialogue on what he/she observed or perceived while dancing. In this way, reflection becomes an integral part of the improvisation process.

TASK & TOOLS

#1 "MY NAME"

To start

This task is ideal to introduce a new group of participants to improvisation. It is an individual task and facilitates, on the one hand, that each participant can introduce him/herself in a playful way. On the other hand, it helps new participants to get in contact with a new group and a new space. It is also an excellent task to introduce dancers to improvisation, allowing them to improvise without having to think on what they need to do. With this task they can create movement material on the spot.

To do

Firstly, begin the task by asking the group to form a circle, stretching out their arms and taking equal distance on both sides, right and left. The circle needs to be as big as possible so that it is large enough to dance.

Secondly, ask the dancers to say his/her own name one by one.

Thirdly, each one says his/her name out loud, and draws the initial letter of his/her name, in front of him/herself, as if painting with a brush, with one or both hands, in a movement that they like. This action will be performed one by one by each participant.

Fourthly, ask the dancer to repeat the letter three times in a row. The group will observe the first time of each one, and then copy the dancer's next two times. Finally they all can move freely in the space painting their own name as they want.



To reflect

The instance of reflection in this first exercise should be short and can be guided in the form of a dialogue with the person on the right side.



Advice

In this exercise you can activate the discovery of your own body and space. You can experiment painting the letter on different levels of the space and with different parts of the body, for example on the floor, paint with the foot, or with the head.



#2 "FOLLOW YOU, FOLLOW ME"

To start

This task can be used as a warm-up in a group, since on the one hand it activates the heart rate and on the other hand it helps new participants to get in touch with the group and space. It is also an excellent strategy to introduce dancers to improvisation, as they have to anticipate, react and respond in the moment.

To do

Firstly, at the beginning, organize the group in a line. Start the task as a follow-the-leader game, in which one dancer moves around the space and all the other dancers follow and copy his/her actions. It is necessary to guide dancers, mainly at the beginning, as they may have difficulties in choosing how to move.

To stimulate movement, guide the dancers to perform an action, for example, evading imaginary objects in space, for example in a natural context, in a jungle, seeking to execute movements with their arms, crawling, jumping from one stone to another in a river, hanging from a tree, etc. It may be the first time they perform this task, therefore it can be that the dancers feel a little shy.

Secondly, you can let them decide when they change the role of leader by saying "now me", so the other dancers will re-organize and follow the new leader.

Thirdly, you can incorporate learning the main body actions into this task. For example, to focus on three body actions at a time: balancing, turning and moving slow.

Fourthly, for an advanced variation, have the dancers play “follow the leader” in smaller groups of four or five. One group might play with gesturing, turning, and moving; another might play with falling, moving, and standing still; and another might play with balancing, jumping, and gesturing. This way, the groups may have to go through, around, over or under other groups. You can create the obstacles by having half of the groups stop at a certain point while the other groups keep moving in the space.

To reflect

The reflection can be guided, first with the whole group, then in small groups. Reflect on how each student felt when performing his or her role as a leader on the one hand, and then how he or she felt as part of the group. It is not necessary for each participant to express his or her opinion, perhaps only three participants, so as not to stop the flow of the session.

Advice

If you have a group you know, you can let them decide when they change the role of the leader by saying “now me”, so the other dancers will re-organize and follow the new leader. In a more advanced group, the leader can change without saying anything, just assuming to lead the group. Another option is to define from the beginning who wants to be the leader. It is helpful to give a time limit of 1 to 3 minutes, depending on how it works best for the group.



LITERATURE RECOMMENDATION

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CREDITS

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CONTACT AND INFORMATION

You can purchase the Dance Improvisation guideline the following way:

- you can order it directly online on my website
- participating at a Dance Improvisation workshop for dance teachers

If you are interested, please send me an email to:

info@danza-urbana.de

More information about workshops:

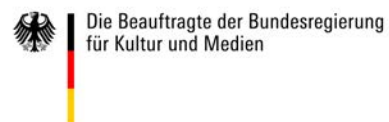
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