



אימון בסיכרון מאת מאיה ברינר, גוף מחול מקום 2019, ניהול אמנותי, נטע פולברמכר, הברכה הישנה של ימק"א בירושלים, צילום: בן רייזר
Body Dance Site 2019, Choreography: Mayga Brinner, Artistic Director: Neta Pulvermacher, YMCA Historic Pool, Jerusalem, photo: Ben Reiser

Body, Dance, Site – An example of a Situated Research Practice

(Towards rhizomatic pedagogy in dance and performance)

Neta Pulvermacher

There are questions that keep me awake at night and even more so now, fundamental questions concerning life, art, thoughts, hopes, dreams and the never ending search for meaning and purpose in these times of deep uncertainty. I keep asking myself why is dance important and necessary for humanity and for the world? And, why being in dance matters now? These are questions that I

believe should guide us as we look at the way we practice, create, research, perform and teach within dance and the arts.

Having been engaged in higher education in dance for many years both in Israel and the USA, I have come to realize that most university and conservatory dance programs have been holding on to old curricular structures that no longer serve the expanding field of dance in relation to the world. I think that these old curricular struc-

tures and methods are based on ideas that there is a fixed, proven set of skills necessary for a career in dance. But, that approach fails because there are multiple and perhaps infinite ways to be engaged in the dance field, not just as a dancer, choreographer and/or teacher. More importantly most higher education dance programs fail to connect, respond and converse as a matter of practice with the changing global and local conditions. What would it take to re-imagine dance education in academia? Why is it that the most innovative artistic work in dance is not developed in universities and conservatories? So what are we teaching in our dance programs? And, why our academic dance programs are not able to provide open spaces for creative research, innovation and the production of new knowledge in dance and dance studies? These are questions and concerns that I try to address in this article.

The paths that I have carved for myself as an artist, educator, activist, choreographer, performer, community builder, a woman and a citizen of the world continuously emerge from the interactions that I have with people and the dynamic situations and conditions around me. These life experiences tickle my imagination and inspire the questions that propel me towards actions in my life, artistic practice and teaching.

Without a doubt this is the most trying, challenging and painful time in all of our lives everywhere, and this crisis is calling on us to question every aspect of our collective and personal being. The world and our relationship to it are rapidly changing: the economic, social and political effects of the global pandemic, the horrendous murders that spurred the global protest of Black Lives Matter, and here in Israel - the killing of the young disabled Palestinian, Iyad El Hallak and the continued occupation. All of these call on us to acknowledge and confront systemic injustices within our social and political institutions, including in institutions of higher education in dance and the arts. In early March 2020 the global pandemic brought the entire world to a complete halt, adding to an already palpable global unrest that is threatening to blow in our face.

What does it all mean? And what does it ask us to reconsider? What are the new approaches, roles and responsibilities personally, socially and politically that we should take, as we face the new realities brought on by the pandemic and long ignored institutional racism and injustices?

Should we sit on the fence and wait for it to go away? And - after this crisis subsides, should we just go back to the same old ways, holding on to the same values and priorities? Actually, I think we all know the answer: Its not possible to go back to where we were and to how we did things before, and I definitely believe we shouldn't go back to the old normal, whatever that is. Rather, I think it is our obligation and an opportunity to engage fully with the new situations and conditions in order to move forward towards a new reality, a new situated pedagogy and a better society.

For us in higher education and in particularly in dance and the performing arts this sudden rapture has brought to the fore the urgent need to become much better and quicker at responding and adapting to the changing conditions of the world.

However, let us not forget that the seismic political, economic, cultural and social shifts have already been in motion prior to the pandemic. I am referring here of- course to the challenges of multiple Wars, Terrorism, the Global Refugee Crisis, Racism, Climate Change, Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism, Homophobia, Nationalism, Fundamentalism and the Threats to our Democratic Institutions – and I could go on, and on. But the good news is that there are major technological and scientific advances that present new opportunities and open new ways of engaging and being in the world. We, artists, scholars, students and teachers must embrace these social and technological advances and new ways of being and become agents of change without letting go of what we have to offer: embodied knowledge rooted in experience and sensation - including the notion that everything in the world is relational to something other than itself.

Make no mistakes, nothing around us is fixed or stable anymore - if it ever was, and the rate of change is getting faster and faster. But the positive side of this process is that this acceleration of technological advances, the expanding role that social media plays in our interactions and lives and the development of AI and other breakthrough technologies force us all to re-imagine what higher education should or could be and what purpose does it serve as we live in a destabilized world.

The cultural theorist and curator Irit Rogoff encourages us to “become research” to move away from the traditional research practices that are based on the the idea that there is a fixed and stable body of knowledge, whose validity is universally recognized. She encourages us to move into a new kind of situated and relational research and pedagogy where we converse and negotiate with the global and local situations around us.

“Today our problem lies—it seems—in the fact that we do not yet have ready narratives not only for the future, but even for a concrete now, for the ultra-rapid transformations of today's world. We lack the language, we lack the points of view, the metaphors, the myths and new fables.... In a word, we lack new ways of telling the story of the world” (Olga Tokarczuk 2018).

It means, I believe, that we must re-learn to be agile both personally and on the level of our institutions. This is key, to embrace change and transformation as a matter of practice. I call this approach and method “choreographic thinking” and it can apply to any field of inquiry – because it speaks of the role of imagination as we construct what I call “Imaginables” and find meaning through our shared actions, thoughts, and experiences. The act of imagining something is the first stage of bringing the imagined into existence.

“In Doctor Faustus Thomas Mann wrote about a composer who devised a new form of absolute music capable of changing human thinking. But Mann did not describe what this music would depend on, he merely created the imaginary idea of how it might sound. Perhaps that is what the role of an artist relies on—giving a fore-taste of something that could exist, and thus causing it to become imaginable” (Olga Tokarczuk 2018).

For the past three months most of our interactions with each other have taken place in virtual, liminal spaces via zoom and other

interactive communication technologies, and we adapted to this new way of interacting with ease and lightness, we didn't realize we were capable of. We all entered this brave new world and simply started walking learning, teaching, researching, experimenting, and making. We had to. And, its complicated and scary – I know, I feel it too. But look around you: We are seeing a sudden burst of creativity: virtual live and pre-recorded digital performances, as well as complex international collaborations in the arts, and the sciences, all of which would not have been possible without embracing new technologies and possibilities.

“Early mornings were quiet in our children's house, if you'd entered it then, the only sound that would greet you, was the soft, soft breathing of our sleep, I remember this sound and I remember lying in my bed half a wake and half a sleep wanting this quiet moment to go on forever” (Text from my work Five Beds/Children of the Dream 1993).

This is a real memory, my memory, and when I revisit this description of the brief sweet time between the warmth of my bed at the children's house, barely awake and the impending action and potentiality of the day ahead, it strikes me in retrospect that even as a small child on the kibbutz I cherished the threshold space of in-betweenness. These special times of the day that are windows, doors, and skins between the world and our experience of it.

When I was 13, my first and favorite dance and choreography teacher, Ariela Peled brought with her to our weekly class in Tel Hai - a beautiful twisted root. We looked at it together with wide eyes, and Ariela then said... go to work, you have the time of one cigarette (she smoked, yes), it was allowed in those days to smoke in the studio, she said go make a root dance while I have my cigarette... and so we created many little root dances and embodied the roots and rootedness in our bodies and souls. Ariela never said: “Look at this exemplary root and copy it exactly or else your dance is not a worthwhile root dance. As the true teaching artist that she was, she directed us to notice the twists and turns of the root and how one root branch was hugging another... she opened our eyes to natural forms, and to the ideas and questions that they suggest with a sense of play and delight. Her classes had the smell of fresh paint, discovery and laughter and from her I learned the funny and irreverent mantra: A dance a day keeps the doctor a way.” Try it – Its true.

Dance for me is all those things: the body, the soul, the roots, the land, our life force, and of-course, the wings of freedom and imagination. For me to dance is to be free, physically, politically and personally. The magnificent leap of a dancer soaring in the air.... This incredible feeling that everything is possible and available. That is what I want to share with young artists and colleagues to empower them to soar and fulfill their dreams and aspirations as artists and citizens of the world.

Great poems, great theater, the music of Bach, John Zorn, the rappers Cardi B or Princess Nokia, and the works of visual artists Michal Rovner, Kara Walker and Janet Cardiff to name a few, those are all dances for me. The plays of Beckett and Lin-Manuel Miran-

da they are dances too... great art connects us to others through shared experience, and opens the doors to our hearts and minds, to our sense of self, “the other” and to our imagination.

The poet, Elizabeth Bishop writes beautifully about the opening of doors in her poem January First:
The year's doors open
Like those of language
Toward the unknown
Last night you told me:
Tomorrow we shall have to think up signs, sketch a landscape, fabricate a plan on the double page of a day and paper.
Tomorrow, we shall have to invent, once more the reality of this world.
Perhaps we'll open the day's door
And then we shall enter the unknown.

How can we transform our institutions of higher education in the arts and in particularly in dance, into spaces of “not knowing”? How can we leave ample room in our practice- based art, for inquiry, doubt, compassion and collaboration and always situate our practice in relation to the local and global realities of the world?

I think that the rapid changes of living in this world ask of us to change the modes of studies, the way we learn and teach, interact and do our research, because those cannot be rigid or fixed. The fixity goes against the working of the universe, whose only constant is change.

I believe that we must engage ourselves in developing new methodologies for “becoming research”, as the cultural critic, Irit Rogoff calls it, where we learn to negotiate between inherited bodies of knowledge, our individual and collective experiences – and the changing conditions of our lives. Rogoff identifies some of the ways in which these new modes of contemporary research operate as: “Inventing narratives, Mapping subjectivities, intervening, conversing and proposing the rages, longing, hopes, dreams, grievances, and melancholies that move up and down our social histories.”

I believe that the accepted discipline specific practices currently used in dance in higher education should be challenged while we engage in constructing new forms of embodied, collaborative and situated methodologies, because how we approach something, an idea or a question actually emulates the thing itself. It is the situations and conditions that should be the driving force of our work and methods not this or that academic discipline or set of skills. We see good examples of this approach in the high tech and technology industries. Their common method of going about developing an idea, or solving a problem is that they recruit an interdisciplinary team to address a particular question, idea or need, and they do it together. The raised question on hand, dictates the type of experts from particular disciplines who then work collaboratively on the solutions to the posed questions or ideas.

This team based research and working method points to the need for interdisciplinarity and collaboration as necessary practices that must become integral to dance studies in higher education.

I strongly object the “monkey say – monkey do” mode in which dance is traditionally taught. I think it makes for a dull and mindless kind of community, and it advocates an obedient mentality, one that suppresses intuition, inquiry and freethinking. Such a practice of obedience might have been right for “old world” hierarchies and dictatorships – but not for contemporary artists and people living in today's world. There has to be room for doubt and the wondrous messiness that makes life worth living. There is no such thing as a “mess-less” birth. The invitation to doubt, however, does not mean anarchy and/ or chaos, but rather, a willingness to be bare, messy and open in the space(s) of not knowing... to turn a stone on its head, to find what's behind that wall, or skin or muscle or eyes...to be.

When I developed the Body Dance Site, Performance Meets City project with my collaborating partners: Israeli and Palestinian choreographers, public institutions in Jerusalem (Hamiffal and the Jerusalem YMCA), the Dance Department of the Jerusalem municipality, the Jerusalem Foundation and the Dance Ensemble of the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, I had all these questions on my mind and I wanted to construct an experiential, interdisciplinary pedagogy that is question and condition driven, and collaborative, a pedagogy that is a generative research process, resulting in new performative knowledge: a public production in which we share our work, narratives, and points of views with the public.

In Body, Dance, Site – Performance Meets City, we situated dance and the moving body within, and in conversation with the multiple narratives that are Jerusalem.

This annual, multi-layered, eight-month process, culminated in 2018 & 2019 with a series of city and site specific immersive performances featuring original commissioned works by seven chore-

ographers who were selected for the project. The artists created new works in collaboration with dancers of the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance. The project situates dance and the moving body inside of, and in relation to historically significant sites in Jerusalem, asking participating artists, students and audiences to consider the possibility of a “New Jerusalem” where pluralism and diverse voices and histories can co-exist.

Body, Dance Site, Performance Meets City follows the ideas of Rhizomatic learning, inspired by the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Rhizomatic learning is a net-enabled education, where in contrast to goal-directed and hierarchical theories of learning, it posits that learning is most effective when it allows participants to react to evolving circumstances, preserving lines of flight that allow a fluid and continually evolving redefinition of the task at hand. In such a structure, “the community is the curriculum”, subverting traditional notions of instructional design where objectives pre-exist student involvement and process. In Rhizomatic learning models, the curriculum is not driven by predefined inputs from experts; it is constructed and negotiated in real time by the contributions of those engaged in the learning and creative process. The community acts as the curriculum, spontaneously shaping, constructing, and reconstructing itself and the subject of its learning in the same way that the rhizome responds to changing environmental conditions (Dave Cormier, <http://davecormier.com/edblog>).

“The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. Unlike the graphic arts, drawing or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, and constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectible, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21).



תרגיל במיפוי ממת סופיה קרנץ, רקדניות איב נסר, ספיר דוד, גוף מחול מקום 2018, ניהול אמנותי: נטע פולברמכר, המפעל בירושלים, צילום: הדור אלפסי
Mapping Exercise by Sophia Kranz, dancers: Yves Gesser, Hadar Sapir, Body Dance Site 2018, Artistic Director: Neta Pulvermacher, Hamiffal Jerusalem, photo: Hadar Alfassi



רושמת מוחקת מאת מרים אנגל, רקדניות: רקל סרנגה, רז רוזנבלו, גילי רחמקין, טיף מחול מקום 2018, ניהול אמנותי: נטע פולברמכר, המפעל ירושלים, צילום: הדר אלפסי
Inscribing/Erasure by Miriam Engle, dancers: Rakel Sarenga, Raz Rosenblu, Gili Rachamkin, Body Dance Site 2018, Artistic Director: Neta Pulvermacher, Hamiffal Jerusalem, photo: Hadar Alfassi

I leave you with the suggestion to engage in becoming research Professor in your teaching and creative practices and to consider how Rhizomatic Learning methodologies might open up new flexible curriculum structures that will enable us all to participate fully in our shared net-worked world.

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* Links to short videos that follow the Body, Dance, Site 2018 and 2019 projects.

2018: <https://vimeo.com/361537201>

2019: <https://vimeo.com/412445769>

Neta Pulvermacher, born in Kibbutz Lehavot Habashan, Israel, and graduated from the Juilliard School in 1985. M.A. from Teachers College and MFA from Hollins University. In 2013 after 31 years working and living in NYC Neta returned to Israel to become the Dean of Dance at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance where she currently serves as a professor of Dance and directs the JAMD Ensemble. Neta has choreographed over 90 works for her NY based dance company (the Neta Dance Company), and for ballet and modern companies around the world. In New York, her work was presented at Dance Theater Workshop, Danspace Project, The Joyce Theater, 92nd Street Y, The Kitchen, Central Park Summerstage among others. The company toured throughout the U.S., Israel, Australia, Europe, Costa Rica, Ivory Coast, Chad, Senegal and Canada. She currently creates interdisciplinary immersive solo works (*Its About Time*, *Utopia and the Nights*, *N&N*).

Neta's work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, NYFA, The Jerome Foundation, Mary Flager Cary Charitable Trust, Maxine Greene Foundation, The Greenwall Foundation, Dance Magazine Foundation and others, and she received a special choreography award from Bessie Schoenberg (1995). In 2006 she was invited to the White House in recognition for her international work in dance.