

In the
Aftermaths of
MA Dance
Performance
Taste of
Purple

A Reflection Paper

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Memory of Reflection

She is standing in front of the mirror that is placed on the floor. The others are sitting at the table somewhere behind her, a little bit to the side. It is evening and they are eating bread with liver pâté. She is not hungry this late and at the age of three she already knows that she does not like liver. She is conscious of the others, but what occupies most of her attention is the person in front of her.

The following is a reflection on my MA dance performance, *Taste of Purple*, performed at Oslo National Academy of the Arts on March 28th-31st 2023.

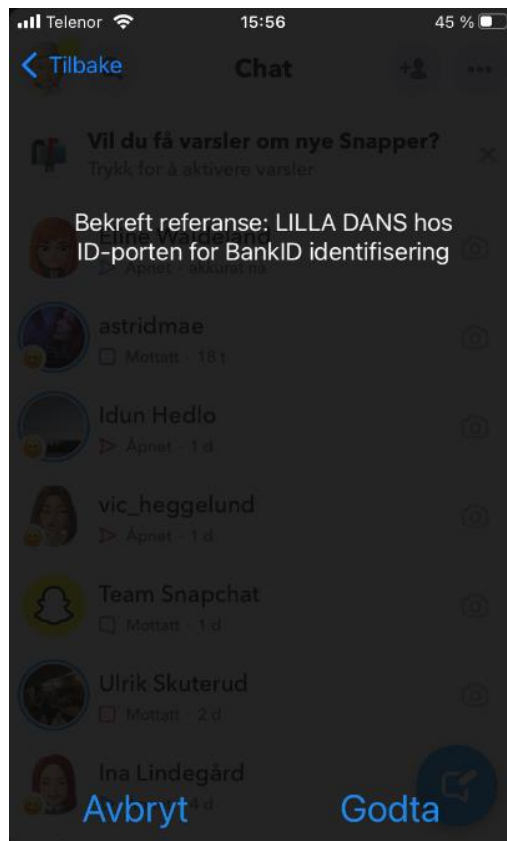
I want it to be precise and soft.

Using What I Have

Using what I already have has been my main principle and something I could return to when needed, while developing the performance *Taste of Purple*. One could say it has been my ground rule. The rule goes hand in hand with the movement practice I call PUN, “Praksis uten navn” (more about PUN later), and with my initial resistance to creating. When first entering the MA program in august 2021, I was interested in deconstruction and destruction, taking away, and breaking down, anything I thought could describe an opposite to creating. If I had to choose a place to dance at the time, it would be somewhere off the traditional stage, where the dance would come together just as much from the things happening around as the dance or movements themselves. When I think about it now, from this post-performance perspective, I think that these interests were expressions of the need for a more defined context. For me, to create in relation to a defined context means to not create out from my own head, but to have something to respond to and react on.

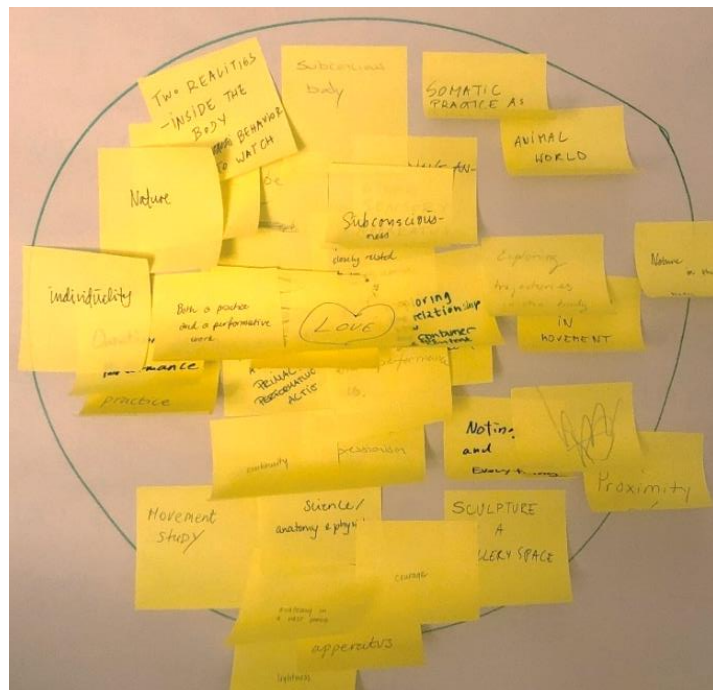
I think this conflict concerning creating and context is related to a feeling of not having that much important to say. This is a feeling that was emphasized when entering the school. In the meeting with the other students and their backgrounds, their contexts and their urgent questions, concerns or desires, a sense of lack of importance in my work was triggered. When being exposed to literature through Professor Bojana Cvejić, other lecturers, and students that contained complex and often deeply problematic situations (texts like *In the Break* by Fred Moten, *A Phenomenology of Whiteness* by Sara Ahmed, *Necropolitics* by Achille Mbembe, and *Extrastatecraft* by Keller Easterling), I could sense an enormous distance between my life and work to the reality of others, realities that to me seemed much more urgent, loaded and important. Also, during the second semester my artistic partner over several years and I stopped our collaboration which forced me, or rather gave me the opportunity, to figure out for myself what I am interested in and want to use my time doing, without that familiar constellation. All these are reasons why using what I already have has been and still is so important to me. It puts me back into my context, or closer to my own situation, which is the place I am interested in creating from at the moment.

Examples of *what I have* goes from concrete and immediate to vaguer and more extensive: movement already existing in my body (PUN), the objects that surround me and are in my field of vision (like a water bottle in studio 12), the current emotional state I am wearing, prominent everyday occurrences, ongoing life situations, small (or big) things I notice that coincides with my process and are parallels to the other categories I just listed. In one way it is a narrowing and selective way of creating, making it easier for me to decide what to do in the studio and what to do on stage, in another way it is all-encompassing and inclusive because a lot more than studio work has been allowed to seep in and influence what ends up on stage. The side note to this rule is to go with impulses, excitement, allowing (is a big key word) and feeling of what fits. The feeling of what is fitting was intensified once I had made more decisions regarding my theme, which came quite late in the process. The theme of desire (essentially romantic and erotic desire) was present from the beginning, but it was floating around and undecided. I remember how “love” was a key word from one of my classmates already in my very first sharing, before any conscious decisions were made about that, but I remember that I liked it and that it resonated. In later sharings I introduced the sentences *Love and Other Disasters* and *De blødende hjerters liga*, the first one is the title of a movie by Alek Keshishian, the second is inspired by the title of the book *De glødende hjerters liga* by Klaus Hagerup and Tande-P. Though I liked the sound of these lines, it was another source that would become most pertinent to my final performance: *Eros the Bittersweet* by Anne Carson, introduced in the workshop *Imaginaries around an (im)possible project: A Seminar on Practical Dramaturgy and Poetics* with Bojana Cvejić and Anders Paulin during the first semester. That text was the academic support I needed to dare to go with the theme of desire. I had some resistance to choosing this. It felt embarrassing, too youthful, and self-absorbed. I did not think it was important enough.



A prominent everyday occurrence

But going back to my principle of using what I have, this was the obvious choice; to work with the sensation most present and urgent in my life at the time, which was frustrating feelings of desire, impossible love, heartbreak, and jealousy. Instead of leaving these consuming emotions at the door, I allowed it to follow me into the studio. This did not necessarily generate any specific movement vocabulary, ideas or even task, it was more like outbursts and moans. Not much I could get a handle on. With *Eros the Bittersweet*, I had access to lyrical descriptions of desire told through the words and structure of ancient Greek poems (translated to English), and Carson's reflections on them. There I found the bittersweetness of love, desire as lack, and the indecision of the lover. I could relate and as I did, I felt a shift from self-absorbed to universal. It did not necessarily resolve the problem I have with importance (that I had to work on in other ways), but it gave me an external expression of something I was experiencing and was one of the parallels I enjoy incorporating into my work (more about *Eros the Bittersweet* later). I want to say that using what I have and taking what is present has been the working method for this process and I believe this is what contributes to the expression of something vulnerable, human, a bit awkward and intimate in *Taste of Purple*.



Feedback from the first sharing in the format of DasArts

The Theatre as Center of Attention

For a long time, I was considering having the performance somewhere else than Scene 1. I wanted a smaller space to get the proximity and intimacy I desired and for the audience to see details of movement, which is something I see as essential to my current work. I was also thinking to have it somewhere that was not an obvious stage, like my inclination mentioned earlier indicates. This was before the performance had the shape it turned out to have, when my work consisted more of sensing and following impulses. I thought about having it in the reception or somewhere people usually pass by, as an addition and a distortion of a place already existing. Or what about a shopping mall, a store, or something like that, my classmates and professors imagined. Other than for the reason of quenching my thirst for context, I do think

my work could work well in such a space. But then this MA performance was part of an MA festival, and I did not want to physically remove myself from that setting.

Also, I wanted to challenge my aversion to the stage. Scene 1 (or the black box) is, like a store or a reception, already existing with a lot of expectations, it is not a clean slate, but it is different from those other places in the way that there is an assumption that one can create whatever. It is this I am fearing, that because I have not had the feeling of importance in my work, this lack will be extra obvious on a stage for whatever. I am the ruler of the black box when I choose to use the black box, more than I am the ruler of the reception when I choose to use a space as the reception. And the ruler-role was a role I had to get used to, but eventually found pleasure in taking on. When I chose to use Scene 1, I wanted to do it fully. Using the principle of using what I have, when I had Scene 1, that induced choices I would not have made in other spaces. The shape of the dance is very inspired by the stage room. I place myself in the center with the lights on me and the audience in the shadows (more about this under “See Me”). I use the big doors. I work with the lights (and light technician/designer Eirik Hegre) in a much more active and constructed way than I usually would. The *usually would* would be daylight or working lights or something that is not intentionally working to construct or control the space and attention of the audience. But on Scene 1, the ruler controls the space.



The questions became: As the ruler of that space, how do I invite the world in? Does my audience feel controlled? Or do my rules facilitate room for witnessing and being? I think that facilitation has to do with how a performer performs (I will say more about that later), but there are also the conditions set up beforehand, the frames, which I will elaborate on here. The frames give me the space to focus my attention and continue working deeper rather than further, they are for me to work within, and for the audience to have something to lean on. In *Taste of Purple*, first, we have the safe frame of the theatre, where the audience and I agree to that I will perform

for them (unlike the shopping mall for example). Then we have the music, a radio kind of music, which many people can relate to, it is not “high art” and accessible to most. The music was introduced according to the rule of using what I have; it was songs that I was already listening to or that appeared during the process and like that expanded my playlist of love songs. Because of Scene 1 and help from sound technician Olaf Stangeland I could create some distance from Spotify and radio by playing with volume and where the music came from, taking advantage of the possibilities of the theatre. The choice of costume also pulled my work in the direction of stage dance in the way that it is a clear costume and does not try to be everyday clothes or dance gear. When I think about it now, though the aesthetics of my work were important and I have specific opinions when it comes to them, they were not so important for the aesthetics in themselves, but for their functionality. The effects of the theatre space; stage, lights, sound, and costume, was in essence frames so that I could share my movement and performative work. Without downgrading them, I see them as tools to let the audience access and take in something about the performative, internal or invisible world.

What is Love?

Shit, every time he walks by someone kicks my chest and sends electricity through my veins. My heart starts pounding nervously. I don't want to want him anymore. And still my body gives me this response? I wonder if it's embedded and encoded into my cells and nervous system now, as a habit of uncertainty and lack and turbulence: see him and tremble. It keeps knocking me over, and I wonder: What is Love?



Photo by Yaniv Cohen

Music and Structure

Other than the music being a frame for the audience, I am inspired by the way these types of “mainstream” songs work. I see them as compressed expressions that tell a whole and usually



very specific story in a relatively short time, therefore they are intense and often generating (in different ways: emotions, associations, sensations). The songs can stand alone, as one entity, but they often make even more sense when listened to in an album. I took some inspiration from this to make the structure of my dance. One reason is because I am fascinated by the song’s concentrated and decisive expression. The other reason is that as I am doing an MA in dance and my main interest is being on stage and dancing, not choreographing, I wanted to find ways that I could focus more on the performative aspects of my dance than the choreographic. For me those two are intertwined and reciprocal, but I wanted to focus more on the first. That is why I got into the idea of structuring my dance as an album, divided into different parts that each had a version to tell about the dance’s theme and that could work as distinct parts or followed as a whole. With this primary decision as a compositional base, I could spend most of my time working on the material and expression of each segment and let additional, revised, or refined decisions about the composition and choreography just appear or follow, as a secondary focus. I also believe having the clarity of parts for myself contributed to how the audience could access the content.

PUN

I cannot write a reflection without mentioning PUN (“Praksis uten navn”, sometimes here called “practice of allowing”). PUN is a practice I have developed since 2018 and it has been my companion throughout the MA education. In brief the core of the practice currently is noticing

and allowing movement that is already present in the body, and letting it express. It comes from an experience while meditating, and the silent inward focus that made me notice (or no longer ignore) movements in my body that I was not consciously doing, but rather felt like were happening *to* me. It started as sensations of weight, pulling, circles and waves taking my body into motion in such a pronounced way that I was moving before I really noticed what was going on. While seated, my upper body did circles, waves, and flections, transitioning from one repetitive pattern to another. Thought the practice started like this, in calm introspection, its roots come from frustration with the body, pain and feeling of stuck-, stiff-, and crookedness. The troubles with and discomfort in my body has kept alive an ongoing interest in it and how to be with it. I have been obsessed with its unevenness and asymmetries.



Screenshot from video by Frida Roland

With the realization of these previously unrecognized movements and the continuation to seek them out, I soon noticed that my body wanted to do other patterns as well, different to the round and wavy ones. There were twists and rotations, extreme back and forward bending, clenching and fierce movements of the jaw, movements that to me emphasized what was tensed, avoided, and unwanted. What was different this time when addressing my unevenness was that, instead of trying to fix and hold my body into the position I thought it should have, I was curious to see what happened when I allowed it to go these places it was asking for. The idea grew from here, that as the body has a lot of intelligence and if I follow what it suggests, letting the body lead, I might become free from those very patterns that I follow. If I allow patterns to express, instead of fighting against them, maybe the body will soften its ways, not unlike anyone who needs to be seen or heard will feel relief once they are. Another perspective is that I try to be with the problem rather than avoiding it. It is interesting to see how the practice has changed over time. Some patterns have come and gone, others have stayed over a longer time, or developed. First it was mostly about following directions and pulling in the body, and after some time differentiations in movement qualities and intensities also became more apparent. More of the

face came in at some point, creating the basis for the tongue and mouth dance you see in *Taste of Purple*.

From the beginning of my MA, this practice was what I based my work on, it was my starting point, interest and focus of investigation. I have strong opinions about how we treat ourselves and how little we listen to the part of us that is physical and its sensuous language. Knowing I was supposed to make something performative, my main question shifted from what the practice could do for my body, to what it could do as an expression. Is it mainly a therapeutic and personal practice, or does it have something to do on stage? I wanted to make something about this somatic practice accessible to others, without compromising its qualities of allowing, aliveness, and attention. At the same time, I wanted to use it as a tool for myself while creating and dancing, not only to express these qualities, but to practice a type of dancing and being in the studio that I can live with for a long time and that supports my curiosity for deepening our relationship with our bodies.



However, in the beginning of the fourth semester I noticed that my interest had faded. It was no longer enough to go in the studio and do my practice, or to try to tweak it into performance mode. I needed a *something else* that could fuel my creative process in a new way¹. It had (already in the beginning of the MA) become unclear to me what “letting the body lead” meant. In the beginning of PUN it was very clear, but the more I did it, and probably because of the slightly shifted focus towards performing, I started seeing that the decisions were made on many different levels all the time. If I focused my attention on my leg, quite soon movement would appear in my leg. If I thought about it speeding up, it would speed up (not always because wanting too much I have also experienced blocks the movement). In other words, what had felt like waves of movements washing through me, had become me controlling the washing of waves. It was an interesting, but unsettling, transition of the work, as I had enjoyed taking the back seat and listening role, letting the body lead (with the curiosity of what it could tell me),

¹ “Find outer sources that inform inner forces” is a key sentence given to me on a post-it note as feedback in my second sharing. I had forgotten about it, and read it again only now while writing my paper, but that describes this situation so well.

only to realize that the division between body and everything else is not actual or at least clear. And therefore, as my awareness grew (or whatever happened) the clarity of direction and sensation was challenged, the movements became fuzzier. This does not negate the practice of PUN to me, as a practice of allowing feels very necessary for my dancing, but I suspect that its further potential as practice requires more patience and maturity than what I wanted to invest in it the last few months before my MA performance. In my body at the time, it felt like I was stopping myself (“The sensation of resistance in action is due to enacting contradictory motivations.” (Feldenkrais & Kemmey, 1985, p. 24)), concerned with not knowing what I wanted, rather than allowing what was present and being with that. I think I was overwhelmed by all the possibilities that had come with the body leading not being as obvious anymore. Now I wanted to move on, be more determined, and set clearer frames to play within, and so the practice of allowing was placed more to the side.

Though I moved my focus away from the practice this time in the process, some patterns and a lot of residues that have appeared through doing PUN over the last years remained until the final version of my performance. When appearing in the performance the patterns were more choreographed and decided upon, which are deviations from how I have used the practice up until now. This way of executing the patterns that I know comes from the practice, feels very different from doing the practice. This has been one of my challenges; how to induce the qualities of the practice together with an audience? Where I ended up in this performance was that instead of only following the sensations and pulls in my body to take me places, I decided where I was going (more or less), based on tasks that could induce some of the same *aesthetics* as PUN, and therefore have a more consistent outcome. It is more forced, less allowing, consequently, the sensation was only inconsistently present. The satisfying outcome of this determination was that I could relax more in my dance; less overwhelm, less inventing in the performance moment. This consistency created space for being present and working on the micro level of allowing instead. Noticing the tiny pulling, moving my attention around, and letting the variations happen in timing and micromovement instead, inspired by PhD Fellow at KHiO Rosalind Goldberg’s term *multiattentiveness*. The patterns or movements I can clearly find “originating” in PUN is the use of the face and mouth, rolling over the shoulder, and twists of the arms and upper body. These movements are mostly found in the first (“To let its current pass through her is what the lover wants”) and last (“Stickiness” and “The lover is the loser. Or so [s]he reckons”) parts of the dance. It was challenging to be doing it like this, somewhere between set and improvised, using PUN but also not. Also, in the parts of my performance that are not originating in the practice but have come about in other ways, I tried using a similar strategy, though I experienced that in these parts I had less room for allowing and I had to push in different ways to achieve the physicality and expression I wanted. This is something I want to continue working on; how to use this practice for performance.

Eros the Bittersweet

After loosening my grip on PUN, what I decided was going to be my fuel and inspiration, and something to return to, was the essay *Eros the Bittersweet* by Anne Carson. I have already mentioned how I came across the essay and why it spoke to me, and now I will explain how I used it. After reading parts of it during the seminar in November/December 2021, I wanted more. I continued reading, marking, and taking notes from it, and without knowing how, it became increasingly evident that the notes were to be used. At some point I started working more thoroughly through the notes and quotes I already had and was looking for words and sentences that I found particularly inspiring and movement (or composition) generating, for example: “The viscous is a state halfway between solid and liquid. It is like a cross-section in a process of change. It is unstable but it does not flow. It is soft, yielding, and compressible. Its stickiness is a trap, it clings like a leech; it attacks the boundary between myself and it.” (Carson & Center for Hellenic, 1986, p. 64) This text was used in developing the part with syrup.



Because I had worked a lot in the studio and produced some physical material already, I also did it the other way around; considered the material I had and found something in the text that could fit to it. This way the text worked as a help to modify and further develop movement. For example, the part I ended up calling “Flee the Beloved”, was first called “Dodge the Beloved” and had quite a different movement quality to it. Controlled abrupt shifts of the torso and arms as if repeatedly moving out of the way from something that is coming towards you, almost like a video game, dodging objects (or beloveds). It felt like it needed a task that had a stronger engagement with internal sensation, and instead of a character in a video game I became a bottle of water placed on the back of a truck driving on a bumpy country road, fleeing my beloved – and all the complicated contradictory emotions of desire – limbs loose as if filled with water

and tossed around. This part was inspired by “Atthis, your care for me stirred hatred in you and you flew to Andromeda,” (Carson & Center for Hellenic, 1986, p. 29) and “Eros once again limb-loosener whirls me sweetbitter, impossible to fight off, creature stealing up”(Carson & Center for Hellenic, 1986, p. 18).²

Decision-Making

Using one specific essay in such an extensive way was a big decision to me. As you might have picked up on, I enjoy when something just appears or happens to me, mysteriously or magically. (I relate this to my initial need for a context rather than figuring out everything by myself, a support system, something that confirms that the choices I make along the way are right, meaning they are getting me where and what I want). Sometimes I don’t know where and what I want, because I just want what I want to be the right thing. That’s when I find myself in trouble. When I think I should want something specific that is inherently right, rather than having the criteria for what is “right” being whether it gives me what I want. That is why figuring out what I want is crucial, and difficult, when I do not trust myself or my decision-making.

This became especially prominent when having people entering my process. I invited people into my rehearsals to have someone else than myself to respond to. They entered with different perspectives and left with different opinions, of course. These different opinions I hoped would give me clarity, but I noticed myself often being so strongly affected by what I either categorized



² Autobiography of Red – Example of Using What I Have

When I look behind at the shelves in the part of the library I chose to work in today (May 4th, 2023), I see a book with the letters Anne Carson. Next to the book I see, there is a smaller one, also by her. It is called *Autobiography of Red*. On the back it says: (...) Geryon, a young boy who is also a winged red monster, reveals the volcanic terrain of his fragile, tormented soul in an autobiography he begins at the age of five. (...) When Herakles reappears years later, Geryon confronts again the pain of his desire and embarks on a journey that will unleash his creative imagination to its fullest extent. By turns whimsical and haunting, erudite and accessible, richly layered and deceptively simple, *Autobiography of Red* is a profoundly moving portrait of an artist coming to terms with the fantastic accident of who he is.” “A profound love story...sensuous and funny, poignant, musical and tender.” – The New York Times Book Review. “A deeply odd and immensely engaging book...[Carson] exposes with passionate force the mythic underlying the explosive everyday.” – The Village Voice. This is an example of using what I have in the category pertinent everyday occurrences. It appeared effortlessly and as I responded to it, my curiosity grew together with the familiarity of the book’s description which, if we change *book* with *dance*, and *Autobiography of Red* with *Taste of Purple*, I wish was the description of my performance. I put the book on my reading list for later.

as positive or negative feedback, that the emotions I felt around it did not feel like clarity. My intention had been to listen to what people had seen and felt when being with me in the process and use that however I needed, instead I was finding myself close to a feeling of crisis whenever I perceived something as critique. Noticing and realizing how much other people's opinions matter to me or affect me was a bit painful, but extremely revealing. I had to remind myself that they all are right in their opinions coming from their perspectives, and that it is up to me to find what is right and interesting to me. My question became: How can one sense the difference between being challenged in a way that might feel tough, but creates development, and something that is outside one's field of interest or capacity and therefore should not be spent time on? I am very concerned with honesty in what I like and feel, but what is the strategy when that is confused by a long process, strong emotions, and contradictive opinions of people that I respect? I used several strategies to work on this.

First strategy was allowing to feel how I did about these interactions and let my emotions express in different ways. For expressing I used writing in a stream of consciousness way in my book, talking to people I trust, and/or letting the reactions I had unfold as sensations in my body. Sensing is maybe the most important thing I can do in my life and work. Sensing the body's response to what happens around me (the context, the circumstances and parallels, other people's contributions) and in me (my own choices in relation to all this). In this regard it is appropriate to mention that somatic practices have been essential to my work and how I dance. I have had a lot of input through dance education and workshops through the years, but during this course it has mostly been self-study through reading and doing exercises described in books³. How I see it, somatic practices can give us greater access to more of ourselves, and I believe that can, in addition to engender a receptive body, can be a support for making decisions.

Second strategy is a bit like the opposite; just do and sense later. This meant making actual decisions and repeating them. It was very different from the more open improvisations I had been doing up until the beginning of February 2023, and though I had been playing with some more set material and tasks already then, I had not committed to them, and was still spending a good amount of time considering which direction to take it. I needed structure and firm decisions to find the freedom to dance and work deeper into the material, to keep it alive, and to have resilience in my work so I could continue also when I lacked trust in it. That is why I started insisting on a shape, without knowing exactly what I wanted. In this case, video was a good tool (that I used a bit, not too much). It was as simple as filming the decisions and using the video to make changes and adjustments from a visual perspective.

Third and fourth strategies also has to do with perspective. After Cvejić saw one of my rehearsals in early February, she suggested finding other ways of staying in the mood of my project in addition to performing in the studio. In other words, creating more conditions for my project to live and this way building resilience for working. Now, writing a poem, watching a performance, or listening to music could be work, also. My experience is that an artistic process often starts like that, but then gets more and more narrow the longer one works. This dispersal

³ *The Potent Self: A Guide to Spontaneity* by Moshe Feldenkrais, and *Sensing, Feeling and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering* by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. I also read *Authentic Movement: Essays by Mary Starks Whitehouse, Janet Adler, and Joan Chodorow* as I suspected some similarities to PUN and that it could inform me further.

of activity was a re-widening of perspective at the time, and it brought me some needed lightness. Then it was the voice work I did with Assistant Professor Marius Holth from Academy of Theatre and my classmate Fie Mygind during this process. Though I ended up using much less voice in the final performance than expected, it supported me in the way that I had dedicated time to enter my work through a different entrance. Usually with my current situation as the point of departure, my voice and the guidance of Marius was, through changing perspective, also a strategy for identifying motivations, becoming clear, and making decisions.

Thankfully I developed when it comes to taking responsibility for my choices during this process. The biggest decision I made was the theme of desire. Before deciding the theme, I see my work as a physical and subconscious searching. After the decision of the theme, I see my work as a distinct universe, a package. It took time for me to realize what I wanted to tell, and it took time to cultivate a feeling of importance. The importance felt like a consequence and by-product of becoming specific and motivated; discovering my motivation and my specificity was like discovering importance. Deborah Hay read a quote aloud in our workshop today (10.05.23) that I found relevant to this:

“At the end of the day, we have to manufacture our own meaning, our own purpose – we have to manufacture coherence... to make sense of existence. And when you manufacture purpose, that doesn’t make it artificial – that makes it so much more noble than accepting purpose that is thrust upon you from the outer world.” (Greene, 2020)

Å gi litt faen

Reading some old notes on my phone recently, I was reminded how influenced I have been by the novels by Herbjørg Wassmo; *Dinas bok* (1990), *Lykkens sønn* (1992), and *Karnas arv* (1997), all which I read during this MA. In my notes from August 2022, it says: “Jeg liker at Herbjørg Wassmo ikke alltid skriver fullstendige setninger. Hun gir liksom litt faen. Tar seg friheter. Det hun skulle ha sagt blir best sagt sånn. Jeg [derimot] har alltid vært så nøye med fullstendige setninger.” Like I experience Wassmo does with her writing, I wanted to use my dance in a way that prioritized expressing a certain atmosphere, and not care about any “correctness” or being smart, whether I enter clichés, or use “incomplete sentences”. As long as I stay true to my decided purpose, and within my atmosphere. A word that was with me a lot during the last weeks before the performance was the Norwegian word *uvøren*, meaning something like reckless. I used it to describe how I wanted to feel and act, both when making decisions and dancing. It can be confused with careless or arrogant, but the feeling I think I am often looking for in my life is more that of an “ofcourseness”. When I think about it now reckless is also a word I would connect to the courage, overconfidence, or just crazy prioritizing one often does when being in love. When you have a motivation so strong that other reasoning diffuses or falls away, it becomes obvious how to act.

Niki de Saint Phalle

In the same way as reading Anne Carson and Herbjørg Wassmo pulled me in and played on my heartstrings, so did the retrospective exhibition of Niki de Saint Phalle’s work at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter that I visited in October 2022. While I was experiencing her work, I found myself both entertained, inspired, and excited. That I could feel this and relate at the level I did, while

at the same time imagining people who would be uninterested in that type of art gave me a reminder that I am not making something for everyone, but something that will interest some more than others (obviously).



Artwork by Niki de Saint Phalle at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter

In addition to her beautiful interpretations of female bodies I was very intrigued by how she incorporated private life into her work. In some of the pieces I was most drawn to, she shared personal and diary-like stories, emotions, and thoughts in what I perceived as a sincere and effortless manner, through drawings and handwritten text. The drawings depicted clearly recognizable figures and the writing was straightforward. This combined with the collection of elements on the paper, and how the familiar shapes and situations were strongly colored, ornamented and unrealistically dimensioned in an art-brut way made me experience it as a strikingly simple but deeply going drama of hopes, memories, and desires.

de Saint Phalle showed me a way of using her private life in art that I was mesmerized by. Like *Eros the Bittersweet*, this exhibition helped me finding permission to do what I want through others. What I wanted regarding private life was to find a way of sharing something that felt close to me while keeping it accessible to others. I touch upon this in the following three parts: “Performativity”, “Surprised by Familiarity” and “See Me”, without coming to any conclusion, because I believe it is more a question for working than for being solved.

Performativity

One of my main questions from early on, along with and related to the concern above, was: How can I use the initially therapeutic practice PUN, in a performative way with an audience? Having audience in my sharings during the process, I perceived the practice differently than when I was alone, and it changed its expression. That is what brought me on the track of having more set conditions and material than before as a frame to support my practicing. Whether the material was completely preplanned and repetitive or more loosely framed my performative work happened in how I could allow myself to be inside of it.

Associate Professor Janne-Camilla Lyster said the last time she saw a run-through before the performances, and it really stuck with me: “Now you just need to find ways of keeping the contact with the work (even when there is audience, performance mode, nerves, etc.)...because if you can keep the contact, you don’t need to keep the control.” This resonated in a profound way because to me it speaks of a softer approach, without willpower of controlling, more space to allow what is present, using what I have and letting the work breathe. One very satisfying development that happened from the first runs of my performance to the last ones was that I had more and more space to allow the sensations and practice of PUN to enter the material. This represents one version of “more contact, less control” to me.



Photo by Frida Roland

The days when I had more surplus, I imagined, mostly in the minutes before the audience enters, how it is *being* Eros. What type of body is that? How can I feel desire while I dance? What is the difference of being the desirer, the desired or desire itself? These thoughts usually faded as people were entering and my attention shifted towards more concrete physical occupations, like taking more time (as my external supervisor Pernille Holden kept reminding me), noticing the sensations in my body, the materiality of my costume, the burning in my thighs, the weight of

the bottle and the stickiness of the syrup. Therefore, the impact of those questions was not really tried out while performing, but was more like a pre-performance preparation-game, to get me situated in *Taste of Purple*.

I got some comments from supervisors and classmates that they experienced a confirming of already known stereotypes in my work and that I was emphasizing archetypical femininity. Did I want that? Maybe not exactly that. But I had a sense I could reach something beneath what they were seeing and naming, something I could work on as a performer and not take away, but maybe transform, within the shapes I had. Not despite the familiarity, but because of the familiarity. How successful this was, I do not know. But it was an interesting challenge to solve through performativity; like working with timing or how I see the audience, but especially practicing PUN within the material. Therefore, it resonated when Deborah Hay said during the workshop something along the lines: “Choreography is a trap. And how you practice in the choreography is what solves the trap.” The set material is not only a support, but also a challenge (trap) that helped making and keeping it interesting to myself.

Surprised by Familiarity

Towards the premiere it became clearer to me that the feeling I want to create for others (and myself) is that “I have not seen this before, but it feels familiar.” To be surprised by familiarity. I had this feeling the first time I heard the song “Where Do You Go to (My Lovely)” by Peter Sarstedt (and talking to Lyster I learned that she had had the same) which I used while pouring the sirup. I think it is a feeling that reminds us that we are similar and connected. Here I want to add a section from my previous text *Desiring Transparency* which was written in the third semester in the course called *Writing as an Artist*:

It makes sense to me that everything I desire I have experienced some version of before. How can I long for something I don't know? Desire lives (and survives) in the imagination and imagination is based on what we have felt, sensed, and experienced. Do we ever experience something new? I think so, but rarely. Getting to know a new person is new, but the feeling surrounding the new relation might be from long ago. Last spring, I was in studio 12 alone, about to start my morning movement practice. I am sitting down on my knees when my right wrist enters my field of vision. It has a burn mark from dancing Flying low some days earlier. That mark was touched and caressed [by my beloved] only for a little moment the night before, I had felt the caress almost like a new soft burn(ing desire). While in studio 12, only glancing at that same mark and place of touch, a flash of something familiar runs through my body. The flash pushes my body forward, making me support myself on my arms while still kneeling. A pond of tears appears on the floor together with a violent shaking of my body. It recognizes an older and more all-consuming form of the care from yesterday. As the longing for this deep care becomes clear it is accompanied by a relief, knowing that at some point I have had what I desire already. And now I am looking for something similar again.

Accompanied by this quote: “Men mennesket glemmer så fort. Derfor vet jeg ingenting om kjærlighet. Jeg har sanset den. Med jern og blod i alle fotspor. Jeg vet det. Og likevel glemmer jeg det.” (Wassmo, 1992, p. 395)

It seems to me that if I want to say something about desire, it is almost required that it is connected to memories and something familiar. I think Kathleen Coessens puts it beautifully in a text that was introduced to me by fellow student Yaniv Cohen: “Memory and lived experience nourish desire and dream, and both often get conflated: *Desires are already memories* (id, 12)” (Coessens, 2012, pp. 457) This reciprocity I find highly engaging. Body memory is an important side of this, and I believe experiences of physical touch and moving can give access to more memories and history, as well as arouse desire. “The body-mind pattern involved has been learned and has grown with each of us for many years; it bears in it all the memories of our personal experience, that which is consciously remembered and that which we are not aware.” (Feldenkrais & Kemmey, 1985, pp. 134-135) This is also connected to PUN and other somatic practices, along with the belief that through the body I can have access to more.

See Me

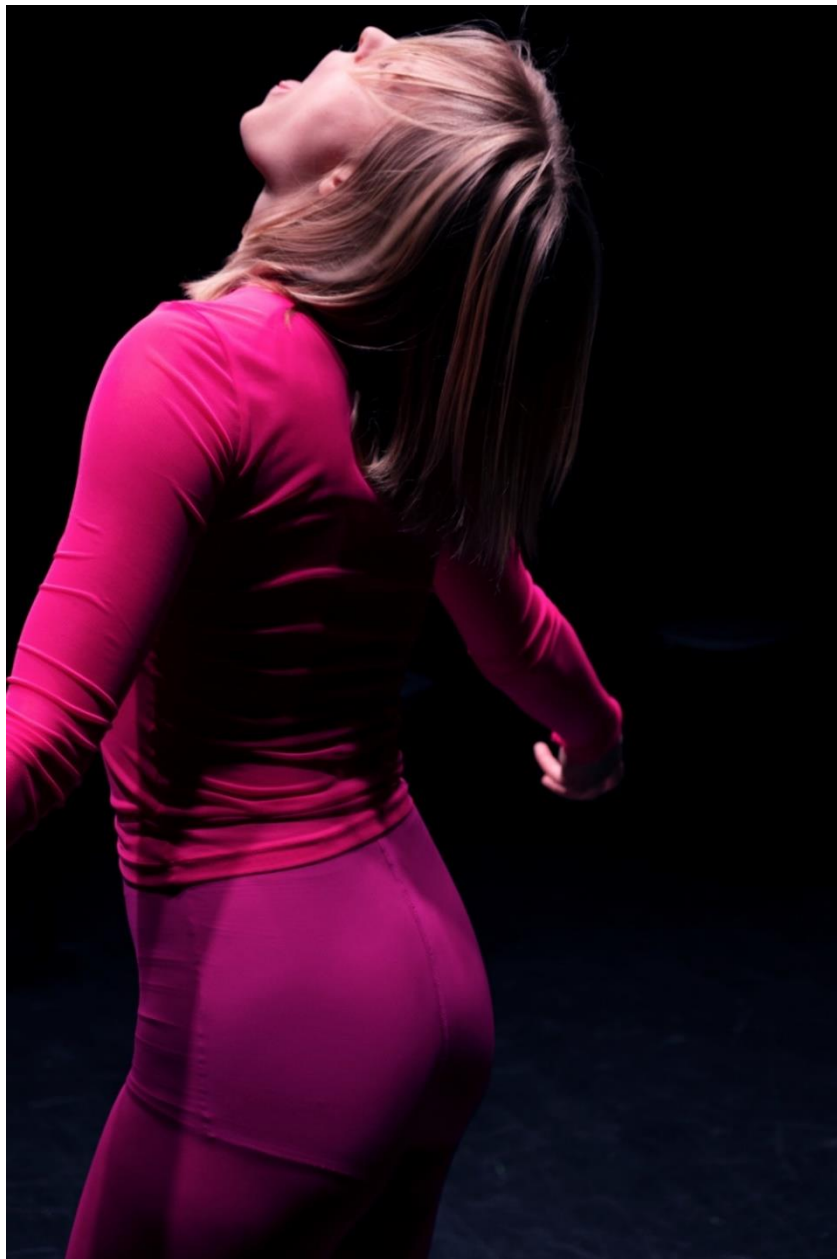


Photo by Frida Roland

The beginning of this paper is a description of my first memory of seeing myself in a mirror. In a moment of recognizing preferences – three years old Oda does not like to eat in the evening, and she does not like liver – I see myself as other to my family. This is not a “bad” memory, it might contain some element of loneliness, as individuality does, but mostly I see it as my first recollection of self-consciousness. Seeing myself. Earlier in this MA, I realized that feeling like I am being seen is one of the reasons why I love to perform. I noticed it clearly in the workshop showings we had with Rosalind Goldberg in March 2022, and I had an introspective moment of considering whether this was a motivation for dancing that I was ok with.

PUN is partly about seeing oneself and Janet Adler describes the practice of Authentic Movement as essentially about seeing and being seen: “For the following eleven years I sat in the corner of studios, in the presence of people descending toward themselves as we together learned about seeing and being seen.” (Lovell et al., 1999, p. 142) The theme of seeing was also present during the workshop with Deborah Hay. One of the days I perceived my resistance towards doing certain things while practicing as a fear of seeing parts of myself that I do not like or think that others will not like. This was followed by the need to be seen anyways. There is a contradiction in this, and I have been fascinated by Feldenkrais’s understanding of what he calls contradictory motivations or actions as something that puts a break on everything one does (Feldenkrais & Kemmey, 1985, pp. 20, 112). I think this is interesting in terms of my decision-making process, on the level of movements and micromovements, as well as for the theme of desire: “This erotic code [poikilos nomos] is a social expression of the division within a lover’s heart. Double standards of behavior reflect double or contradictory pressures within erotic emotion itself.” (Carson & Center for Hellenic, 1986, pp. 45-46)

What excites me is “solving” some of these contradictions. For example, realizing the motivation for being seen as a motivation for dancing, made it possible for me to use it in a more intentional way, giving it space and using it, rather than letting it be a ghost that is not reckoned with, subconsciously affecting my decisions. In *Taste of Purple* the layer of wanting to be Here (for me) this felt a bit like as if pulling curtains to the side in place myself in the center of the on me, in a tight and transparent for people to be close to me, but also close to each other. They see each other across the room, in the shadows first, and when the lights open the room, they see each other more clearly. I see the audience as well. The idea of being seen is expanded from me to everyone, and from subconscious to conscious. If I allow being seen, I give others access.



Allowing desire is for me the same as letting it move; as sensations through the body, as a shift of perspective, as a calling into action or staying. “For in this dance the people do not move. Desire moves. Eros is a verb.” (Carson & Center for Hellenic, 1986, p. 36) But despite allowing it, desire is full of contradictions, I would argue, otherwise we would have had everything we wanted already. Even in the simple words *see me* that you think you want to tell your beloved, there is both the need to be seen and the fear of being seen. When I say to a beloved: See me!

or: Do you see me? or: Can you see me? or: You will never see me again, I am demanding, teasing, begging, and protecting, and it might not be far from one to the other.

What is Next?

Continuing from here I want to practice PUN in the open form it started in, with more time and less demands for results. I think there is potential for experiencing and learning here, especially because where I left this open version was in a place of confusion, with a suspicion that I do not know what it is anymore. It feels like a vast space with invisible bubbles that I need to touch with my body to burst them and receive the knowledge they contain. This is an interesting status quo because the trajectory is unclear and can take different directions. I also want to attain a greater understanding of how PUN can work in performance through set material and tasks like I did in *Taste of Purple*, possibly by doing *Taste of Purple* again, but also other material, whatever material. In cases where I see it fit, I will work on how to apply the practice in process with other artists' proposals as I believe it is an important addition to the sometimes forceful world of dance. This practice has grown out from a need to be with my body differently than what I have learned, and it has developed through this recent process, amongst other processes, into an interest of how to perform differently. I think both tracks of the practice will continue to develop alongside each other, and I predict that the investigation of one will influence the other, but in what ways remains to be experienced.

Though I have a long section about decision-making in this paper, I am now in a post-performance state where I do not think making the "right" decision is such a pressing concern anymore. What I find more interesting is being where I am (like using what I have), and if that is a place of conflict, indecisiveness, or uncertainty, then the decision-making process can come as a result from any need surrounding this, rather than being a set of strategies, as formulated in this paper. The strategies did come from necessity, but I do not want to keep them as a formula as the needs might be different the next time.

When being in the process, I thought I did not want to make my own performances after all, but mainly work as a performer in collaborations and other people's projects. Now I feel inspired to continue my own specific journey as a creative dancer and write applications for my own projects as well as joining those of others. I feel like I have gained some confidence and explored more of my own voice as an artist, which I remember was one of the motivations for enrolling in this education. It will be interesting to see how I will experience this voice when I soon embark on working as a dancer outside the support of an institution. I think one thing I learned and will continue to practice is cultivation of the feeling of importance through working on motivation and becoming specific. Suddenly realizing another part of my own motivations and how this can lead to becoming more specific by itself is a satisfying experience. But that does not happen all the time. What do I need at different times to keep me engaged? In relation to this I am still interested in want and desire as guides in the artistic process. If wanting and desiring is the direction setting initiators (backed up by a growingly clear motivation), then the continued investment in interests is what creates the wider field of different activities that I can go to, so the work can be sustainable.

Interests from this round that I think will follow me on my continued path as a dancer, performer and artist is the search for ofcourseness and what this does to performing, the possible trinity of familiarity, being seen, and connection, what is private life?, and the ever-working curiosity of what I can learn from my body.

Also, like I said earlier, I will be reading *Autobiography of Red* (1998) by Anne Carson.

Video

Video documentation from Wednesday March 29th, 2023:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/qxsq3nshmevgf2y/Taste%20of%20Purple.mp4?dl=0>

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