

## EXTEMPORANEOUS DANCE

Raquel OLIVEIRA\*

\*INET-MD / Faculty of Human Kinetics, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

**Abstract:** This article briefly describes my doctoral practical research which resulted in (1) the creation of the soloist choreographic work “Inspiration”; (2) the creation of a personalized Dance Technique, the Extemporaneous Dance; and (3) the organization of workshops to present and transmit the knowledge acquired with the research. Focused on the Yoga relationship with Dance, a particular highlight was given to the synchronization between movement and breathing and to the awareness of the body we all inhabit and that can and should be enhanced through movement.

**Keywords:** body, breathing, movement meditation, dance, Yoga

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Extemporaneous Dance workshops result from my will to pass on the knowledge acquired with my experience as a dancer and Dance teacher since 1996, my Yoga practice since 2008 with my Yoga teacher, and the knowledge consolidated in the scope of the practical research for my Ph.D. This Ph.D. is part of the new regime of cycles leading to a doctoral degree at the Faculdade de Motricidade Humana (Faculty of Human Kinetics), that includes in the speciality of Dance an authorial choreographic work. In this faculty, “the speciality of Dance admits methodological concepts such as

practice-based research, practice-led research, [...] among a multiplicity of resources.” (FMH, n.d.). At the heart of these methodologies is the fusion between the creative and the cognitive components, with a discussion and a shift of the “factual report” into the “report with a view”, and the observation of others into the reflection on oneself. This process authorizes the experiential description and legitimates the experience resulting in its scientific value (Tércio, 2015). As a result of my practice-based research, I created the choreographic work “Inspiration” that crosses the languages of Yoga and Dance establishing a personalized artistic expression, the *Extemporaneous Dance*.

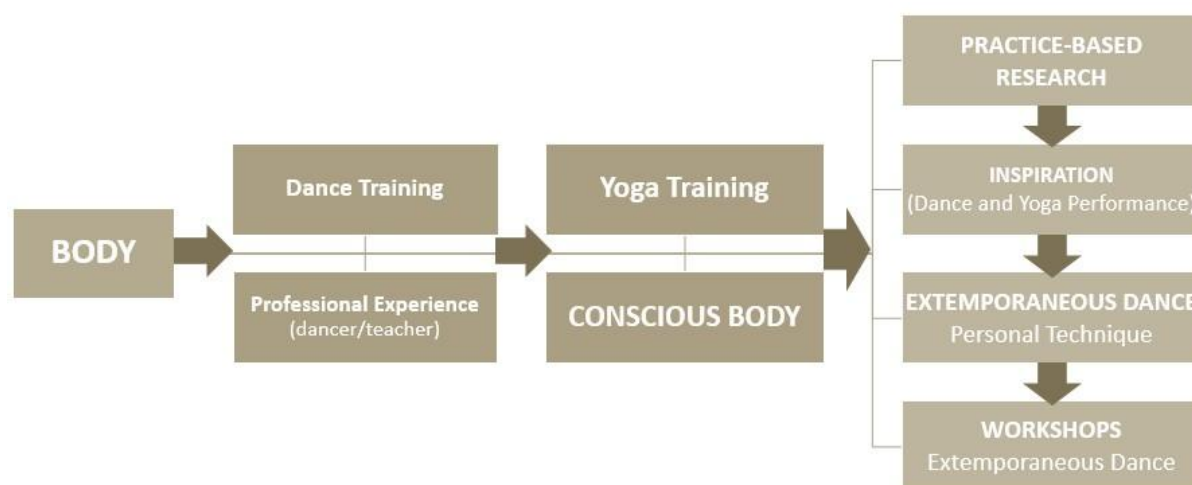


Fig.1 Practice-based research schematic presentation

## 2. EXTEMPORANEOUS DANCE – DANCE TECHNIQUE RAQUEL OLIVEIRA

The mind is incorporated, that is, thought requires a body – not in the trivial sense that we need a physical brain to think, but in a much deeper sense that the structure of our thoughts is conditioned by the nature of our body (Correia, 2013:5)

Similarly, we may say that the structure and the quality of our danced movements are conditioned by the nature and specific characteristics of our body/brain and the synergies in which we are immersed (Duarte, 2010). Based on this, the primary goal of my doctoral research was to explore and discover my body's movement. My body has its structure and anthropometric measurements, with its quality of movement, with all its constraints and adaptation and transcendent physical abilities, that went through many languages and dance techniques, but to which I had never fully given the opportunity to express its language and danced movement. Through Yoga, my body has been doing a work of cleaning movements and techniques learned over the years, experienced and borrowed from other bodies with other characteristics, particularities, and perceptions, and that had been incorporated/ embedded in mine. Consequently, the purposes of my research are technical, in the sense of exploring the possibilities of natural movement of my body and the way the movements and the typical Yoga positions can relate to movements produced by my body.

The practice-based research requires method, structure, organization, coherence, striving capacity in observing and understanding the illusory processes of the mind and the hostile thoughts regarding the creative process. When the energy of the emotions is fluid and observed without judgement like the waves at the ocean's surface, the structure allows attaining deeper levels of awareness and finding tranquillity without currents of thoughts, as one who dives into the ocean. Layer by layer the illusions of the past/future time become the present of inhalation/exhalation, where the here and now of creativity, such as a living flame, burns all distractions: only the breath, the feeling of the gesture and the ability to observe exist. It is the state of alert / conscious attention of the only force of life (Duarte, 2015).

In my practice-based research I used autoethnography, which “is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005 *apud* Ellis *et al.*, 2011). According to Blanco (2012), one way to see autoethnography is through the epistemological perspective holding that an

individual life can account for the contexts that person lives in.

Experiments in learning how to choreograph either single-authored or collaborative projects can present significant challenges for dance students. Early experiences of dance are often characterised by direct replication of taught material derived from codified vocabularies. It can be tempting for students to continue to rely on these formative doctrines to underpin their maturing choreographic practice (Bannon & Kirk 2014: 289).

As a dancer and Dance teacher, whenever I created choreography, for others or myself, I would look for the movements outside, in different dance techniques I had learned, avoiding the process of discovering and accepting my body and my movement, and thus create a personal language. The research I decided to do when I started my PhD, makes me realize that this creative fear largely stemmed from my training in Dance, mostly consisting of Classical Dance and Modern Dance techniques, both rarely allowing students to express their choreographic creativity.

This is ultimately how I was trained, to execute skills as defined by a certain codified way of moving, within the ballet dance vocabulary. [...] I had yet to encounter and fully explore my own creative voice as artist, dancer, and choreographer (Lussier-Ley, 2014: 15).

During my training in Dance, I had some contact with classes of choreographic composition, which should encourage the student's creativity. However, by then formatted as I already was, I rejected the responsibility to recognize my body and my movement, not so much because of the coded language of Ballet or Modern Dance, but rather immersed in the comfort of the teacher's decision on what is right and wrong regarding movement, and in the fear of not having the endorsement of the other. Besides teaching composition techniques, the teacher of choreographic composition should create safe and acceptance environments to help the student rely on their creative abilities. They should learn how to feel motivated to explore and get out of their comfort zones, trusting their view and learning to withstand the opinion of others, which is their right, but that should not undermine the student's creativity.

It was through the practice of Yoga, with the teacher Judite Duarte, in 2008, many years after my training in dance, that I started relying on my creative abilities. With the Yoga practice taught by this teacher, my body awareness has changed, and I placed more reliance in aspects such as health and the uniqueness of bodies and their movement.

I started discovering and accepting my movement. Therefore, I decided to create a soloist choreographic work that somehow included Yoga, challenging myself to choreograph for my body.

Santillano (2007:202), in her master's thesis, interviews several dancers who practice Yoga and confirms the value that the practice of this activity had in the life of each of them:

The most delightful surprise was how profoundly yoga has already shaped many leading individuals in the dance world, and how major dance departments were affected by this phenomenon.

**2.1 The Creative Process.** In my creative process, the basic elements were the body, the breathing, and consciousness. In the lonely studio work, since I created a soloist choreographic work for myself, where I was both choreographer and dancer, I often was aware of listening to the body and its movement and allowing it to be the choreographer. By being conscious of this synergy with the body, I feel I respected it and did not impose to it an ideal of body or movement, so common in the world of Dance.

In Dance, and in Yoga (Hatha Yoga), in general, the body is subjected to the technique one wants to practice and it has to adapt, bound to disintegrate to be integrated. However, all bodies are different and unique, and everyone should learn to respect and accept their body, freeing themselves from the prison of wanting an exterior body ideal, and should learn how to integrate without the need for disintegration, respecting the characteristics and limits of their body (Duarte, 2008).

In the lonely work of my practice-based research, I aimed to listen and respect my body in an interior personal time, allowing it to feel harmony and natural balance. I found the respect for life in me, for the body, the great accomplice of my dance. And I found my breathing, as a stimulus for the creation of movements. In the past, it was the music that gave rise to my will to dance, but music is something coming from the outside. Thus, in this work, since the very beginning, I decided not to use music, rather just the sounds of nature such as the heart, breathing, the wind, the water. The sounds of the body. And the word. This choreographic work includes poems, and the word requests another kind of relationship with movement and breathing.

**2.2 Technical description.** Extemporaneous Dance praises beauty and simplicity of the gesture. It is connected with health and breathing. It is a moving meditation, beyond time, space and ego. According to Duarte (2016), the Extemporaneous Dance freed and diverged from the prejudices and judgements of the mind, lives the conscious

freedom, honouring life. It does not need to hurt to save, to cause sickness to heal, to deconstruct to reconstruct. It has its structure, and it is systematized with the creation of life, which allows us to focus our attention, without any tension, to transcend and commit with ourselves, and the truth. It is to make the journey, enjoying each unique moment, aware that no gesture/moment will be repeated. The characteristics of this movement result from the physical features of the author of the technique and the body characteristics of each practitioner. It is a movement to be felt by who does it rather than to impress the beholder. It is a Dance technique that, above all, respects the health of the body, and accepts it as it is at the moment, in an attempt to empower it through movement so that it reveals its true nature. The body has beauty and dignity, which is what I want to portray with the movements. These are a means to an end, a ramp for a more active and dynamic state of awareness achieved through gesture and introspection/reflection/meditation that leads us to become aware of what we already are and already have, and the added value that it is to achieve our goals from there.

**2.3 Key features.** Movement synchronization with breathing (in Yoga, the conscious breathing is a fundamental element and the movement of Extemporaneous Dance is based on the coordination of movements with breathing. Thus, in general, upward movements are made inhaling and the downward movements, exhaling);



Fig.1 Movement synchronization with breathing

Gentle, delicate, soft movement (symbolic of effortlessness and respect for the body);



Fig.2 Gentle, delicate, soft movement

Verticality (the movement has its starting point in balance and laterality standing Yoga “Asanas”, evolving to the movement/gesture from that base, rarely resorting to “Asanas” that create a relationship between the body and the ground. The ethereal connection of the body with the “air”, the element of inhaling, is intentional);



Fig.3 Verticality

Straight lines (symbolizing the focus, attention, awareness, strength, balance and the confidence of the being);



Fig.4 Straight lines

Wavelike lines (symbolizing adaptation to change and the movement both of water and air);



Fig.5 Wavelike lines

Rotations and Translations (symbolizing the movements of rotation and translation of the Earth)



Fig.6 Rotations and Translations

### 3. EXTEMPORANEOUS DANCE WORKSHOP

On a more personal level of discovering my movement and, therefore, closer to my roles in Dance as a dancer and choreographer, this doctoral practice-based research led me to question my role as a Dance teacher. As such, I have perpetuated the teacher’s legacy that only transmits knowledge, not giving the students space to explore and to express themselves (and it could not have been otherwise so far, as I had not done it with myself). The Extemporaneous Dance workshops allow me to rephrase my activity as a teacher and to put into practice all I found through research, creating and discovering other dynamics in synergy with the students. The main goal is to develop a method allowing the empowerment of the students, to give them tools to make them feel confident and safe to discover their creativity and the natural movement of the body, through the creation of customized movement sequences.

The Extemporaneous Dance workshop, focused on the relationship between Yoga and Dance, proposes through simple and accessible exercises, the contact with breathing and awareness of a body we all inhabit, and that can and should be enhanced through movement. The participants will acquire the basics of these two body techniques and learn some positions and movements from the choreographic work “Inspiration”. Emphasis is given to learning how to synchronize movement with breathing as a way to the body awareness and the personalized movement. Also to the relationship with other participants, in the moment of the choreographic composition TIME: (1) each at their pace (the pace of the movement led by the individual breathing); (2) everyone in synchrony (breathing led by the movement of a leader). Furthermore, in the moment of the choreographic composition SPACE: where different spatial formations,

distances among bodies and orientation of the bodies in the space are explored.

Depending on the level of experience of the participants and the workshop duration, choreographic sequences of Yoga and Dance may be learned (technical and choreographic memory work). Also, choreographic composition tasks through games and exercises exploring personalized movements to promote confidence and trust in the students leading them to discover their movement, the movement their body does, which is unique, simply because their bodies are also unique.

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