

Theatre, Dance and Performance Training Blog



Reflections on the IPPT Ghent 2018

Posted on **28 March 2018** by **Aphrodite Evangelatou**

[The International Platform for Performer Training](#) (IPPT) provides a safe and supportive space for performer trainers and academics to share their research and pedagogical practices. It is organised annually and each year hosted by a different institution. The IPPT 2018 took place in Ghent, and was hosted by the [KASK/School of Arts](#) Ghent (Belgium). The theme for this year was Movement, with particular interest in the exploration of movement that does not directly relate to or derive from the European physical theatre tradition. Attempting to widen our understanding of movement and its use in performer training, we gathered to ask questions such as: 'how does movement stand to dance or choreography' or 'how does movement stand to (spoken) language'.

Although this was the first IPPT I personally attended, it came to my attention that two very important elements were introduced this year. Firstly, work demonstrations and workshops were highly encouraged, as the main means for the dissemination of knowledge. Although paper presentations and roundtable discussions were included, they were kept to a minimum. The second initiative was that the first-year students of the host institution were invited to participate. This gave us, the trainers, the opportunity to observe the workshops, without necessarily having to participate. It also brought back into the room the people for which we develop and constantly working to improve our teaching practice.

The Platform lasted two days, and included various presentations. I believe the heart of IPPT 2018 lies in the work demonstrations and workshops, I will therefore only discuss these here. I apologise in advance for any oversimplifications or misunderstandings of the fellow performer trainers' work; work that they so generously shared with me. I do not wish to homogenise, categorise, or oversimplify. I attempt instead to make more relatable, more approachable, more usable to me, and perhaps others with a similar background. I translate it into a language or a practice that I better understand.

The Introductory presentation by [Geert Belpaeme and Mats Van Herreweghe](#) from KASK/School of Arts, Ghent invited the KASK students to explore movement in relation to space. The students were instructed to use abstract movement and avoid speech. Either on their own, or with a partner, the students explored Spatial Relationships (to the other students or to the space) and Shape (in relation to their own body, the space, or the other). This exercise was used to encourage a state of openness to the suggestions of others, as well as to creative accidents. It was also aimed at helping students develop inventiveness, and to encourage work on relationships, subsequently leading to the building of the ensemble. The exploration of Shape and Spatial Relationships, terms I borrow from Viewpoints, were not the instructions given by Geert, but rather the result, as I observed it.

[Heike Langsdorf](#) and [Anouk Laurens](#)' workshop (KASK/School of Arts, Ghent) invited us to work with a partner exploring the mover-witness relationship: one partner is freely moving in the space with their eyes closed, while the other is protecting and witnessing. After some time, the partner moving is allowed to – very briefly at first – open their eyes; experiencing little snippets of seeing. With time, they can explore longer periods of seeing. The exercise is then repeated, only this time with the partners taking the other role. As the workshop is coming to an end, we discuss in groups of four, always in the present tense. We gently press both hands against the floor to indicate we intend to speak and start our first sentence with 'I, as a witness' or 'I, as a mover.' This workshop evidently draws on Authentic Movement. AM has also influenced to some extent the following work demonstration by Pauliina Hulkko, during which the mover-witness relationship was also explored.

Pauliina Hulkko (University of Tampere) introduced the notion of Choreophony, a term bringing together the Greek words choreia (χορεία) meaning to dance or to move in unison, and phone (φωνή) meaning voice. The short lecture on the newly coined notion of Choreophony and its potential applications in training and in rehearsal was followed by a practical workshop, during which Paulina invited us to combine movement and voice in order to explore the connections between 'the perceived, the uttered, and the embodied.' We were urged to focus on the present moment, thus mostly describe what we see, what we hear, and what we feel (bodily sensations). It was pointed out that evolutionarily, both as a species and as individuals, the text is not the starting point, but rather the result of a very complicated process that begins with movement and sound. Pauliina is attempting to investigate this relationship between movement and speech and reintroduces the exploration of subtext, or that which precedes speech, through Choreophony.

The Concrete Diversity of Being, a work demonstration by [Cecilia Lagerstrom](#) and Michael Norlind (Academy of Music and Drama Gothenburg), started with a short extract from their performance that was constantly reworked, as Cecilia was introducing new tools and was suggesting new pathways for Michael. One of the main tools explored was the use of pictures, such as the powerful image of Tess Asplund defying far-right activists demonstrating in Bolrange, Sweden in May 2016. Other examples included the image of the prime minister of Sweden attending a funeral. These pictures were used for the creation of a physical score that was performed by Michael and presented both with and without music. This triggered an interesting discussion about the usefulness and power of music in performance and in training.

[Femke Gyselinck](#)'s presentation (Rosas, P.A.R.T.S.) focused on the use of text as a tool to initiate movement. Gyselinck who is heavily using text as an inspiration for her own creative practice as a choreographer, invited us to explore the link between structured language and movement. Trying to find what lies in between descriptive and abstract movement, we experimented with the use of text as a starting point for a physical improvisation. We also worked with a partner that 'listened' to our movement, responding to it by repeating either shape or intension, while at

the same time adapting and giving it a new form through the use of different axes, surfaces or directions.

The highly energetic work demonstration by Seppo Kumpulainen and Jenni Nikolajeff (University of the Arts Helsinki) brought together elements of disparate practices, such as calisthenics and Alexander Technique, while exploring the notion of the psychophysical. Seppo instructed the students to work on a number of physically demanding exercises; among them, an exercise during which each student was running towards a ladder, quickly climbing on it and joyfully exclaiming 'my life is in your hands!' before falling and landing on their fellow students' hands. These exercises were highly engaging both for the participants and the observer. However, Seppo and Jenni were more interested in what happens *after* the exercise, as the students' inner life was awakened through engaging with these demanding exhilarating tasks. Seppo and Jenni examined how the 'after' can be further explored, by asking the participants to either look at the audience and say a word that comes to mind, or to sing. Thus, the participants were allowing that which is inner to be shared with and perceived by the observer.

As a concluding remark, from reading the call one would perhaps expect a turn towards the territory of the virtuoso, but on the contrary, the event seemed to indicate a turn towards simplified, organic movement. This perhaps indicates a commitment to inclusivity. It might also be worth mentioning, that although the call was encouraging submissions that were moving away from the European tradition of physical actor training, links could still be clearly drawn between the presentations and physical theatre practitioners (to give an example, the use of images could be linked to theatre companies such as Odin Teatret or Gardzienice) or somatic practices that have for some time now been used to train actors (such as Authentic Movement and Alexander Technique). Perhaps we can ask ourselves: how easy is it to really depart from this long tradition? Diverse practices from yoga to martial arts, and from dance to acrobatics have been informing the early development of what could today be called a European tradition of physical actor training, so perhaps this cross-fertilisation was in the end celebrated rather than reconsidered during these two days of inspiring and thought-provoking sharing.

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Her practice-based PhD research examines the question of acted emotion and investigates potential pathways for the actor-student to access emotion safely and with ease. Her teaching practice focuses on acting and devising while her research interests include physical theatre, acting pedagogy, and the psychophysical.

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