

Dear LUTSF,

Please find enclosed two copies of my report for LUTSF detailing my participation in the *Dance Technique and Improvisation* workshop with Julyen Hamilton, which took place at Arlequi in Girona (Spain) between 2nd and 12th September 2009.

As I have explained in the report, the workshop not only fulfilled my original objectives but it meant to be a turning experience within my performance and dance practice. After the workshop, I started with my MA upgrade in contemporary dance performance at London Contemporary Dance School. The implications of Hamilton's work have turned out to be very important and its influences on both the written and practical parts of my MA are bigger than what I had expected beforehand.

Therefore, I would like to express my gratitude to LUTSF for helping to provide me with the opportunity to take part in this fantastic experience.

Yours sincerely,

Antonio Jesús de la Fe Guedes.

Report for Lisa Ullman's Travelling Scholarship Fund (LUTSF):

Dance Technique and Improvisation, workshop led by Julyen Hamilton; 2nd-12th September, 2009.

The *Dance Technique and Improvisation* workshop is a course given by Julyen Hamilton every year during the final weeks of the summer holidays at Arlequi, a 17th century farm house located between fields and forest in the Catalan countryside at 2.5 Km from Banyoles (Girona). This workshop deals with the practice of instant composition: "a process of practising improvisation in rehearsal and in the moment of performance." (Hamilton, 2009a)

24 different artists, mainly coming from a contemporary dance background although also from other disciplines such as street performance, physical theatre, fine arts, etc., met together (some of us for the first time although many have done the workshop previously and knew each other) to undertake 9 days of consistent practice (during the 10 days of workshop we had 1 day break, which felt really necessary and helped to settle down the information gathered along the first 5 days).

Arlequi proved itself to be an idyllic workshop venue for two reasons. It has a beautiful studio, independent to the main building, in which well recognised world-class dance and theatre artists (such as Nancy Stark Smith, Kirstie Simson, etc.) lead different workshops throughout the summer months. As well, the house includes all the necessary facilities to host the participants of the workshop and everybody shares space and responsibility of the daily activities (specially meals) for the 2 weeks of the course. These daily sharing and spirit of comradeship created a stronger sense of group and intimacy, facilitating and intensifying the work done on studio. This very special feature marked a difference respect to most of the other dance workshops I have done before. Furthermore, its practical consequences (i.e., the entailed intensification of the studio work) exceeded my expectations of the course. However, my expectations were to be exceeded even further.

As I previously explained in my application to the LUTSF, my main interest to undertake the *Dance Technique and Improvisation* workshop with Hamilton came from my involvement in a future collaboration with Petra Söör and Noemí Viana. In our new project (*Extensions and Rooms*) we will revisit a score from a previous piece (*Intentions and Rooms*). While dealing with the same subjects, *Extensions and Rooms* will be totally improvised in performance, i.e. instantly composed, unlike its predecessor. Thus, the course actually provided a very deep insight into instant composition. It gave me both tools and concepts to apply into the art of composing instantly. The concepts were essential to support and explain the tools whereas these tools were technical resources that, once compiled together and integrated as part of the improvisational practice, formed a technique for the practice of instant composition.

Hamilton's early training was not in dance since he started dancing when he was 19. Before that he had trained as an actor (Hamilton, 2009a) and his physical experiences until then had just been gymnastics and team sports (Hamilton, in Benoit 1997, p. 195). He affirms these two previous experiences probably favoured his later preference to work with dance improvisation, since both drama and team sports require improvisational skills (Hamilton, in Benoit; and personal interview). Since the 1980, year in which he moved to Holland (Mackrell, pp. 86-87), his work has dealt with improvisation and collaborations with life music and lighting. (Hamilton, 2009a and 2009b). Hence, Hamilton's present work is based on composing pieces instantly. "[His] teaching work comes directly from [his] stage experience" and choreographic work (Hamilton, 2009b) and it explores in depth how to support and facilitate the creative act in performance. "His vision of technique is one which observes how things are made, how they function and how knowledge, experience and intuition can be used to create the work we each need to make." (Hamilton, 2009a). In his own words:

[Instant composition] demands ... a thorough and constant research into 2 areas: one of COMPOSITION

- how things are made, how they might go together, and one of TECHNIQUE - abilities needed to have a close relationship between the creative self and the mind/body.

(Hamilton, 2009a)

Thus, based on this statement, the model followed by Hamilton throughout the entire course divided the day into two sections normally delimited by the lunch break, with a technical section before lunch and a compositional one after it. In the morning, he would supply information and lead us into physical exploration (generally by improvising individually) in order to help us to gather and understand the concepts in which his technique is based. Furthermore, the physical practice allowed us also to apply these technical concepts into action serving as training in his technique. In the afternoon, the workshop would turn into a more creative exploration, by making short group pieces. Obviously, these pieces were composed instantly. Hamilton would use them as seminal studies to explain the use of the technique in real performance and would analyse them (or invite us to do so by ourselves) under a compositional and analytical eye. The concepts studied in the morning would recur whereas we were encouraged to distil, both from inside and outside, the pieces' composition; i.e., to understand what the piece is about, what the logic of the piece is, which atmosphere has, which events happen, etc.

However, the idea of technique for Hamilton, as he repeated many times during the course, its not the one of a codified and forever-fixed one. For him, techniques must evolve; otherwise they will eventually crystallise and therefore become a dead entity. Hence, any technique, however useful may be initially to improve performance, will stop being a challenge. Eventually, the technique will be not only useless but also counterproductive. Hamilton's is an *evolving technique* that he keeps on developing and updating, and the material of the course changes from one year to the next.

Hamilton's terminology is vast and complex. The concepts he explains interrelate creating intricate connections. Nevertheless, I found these concepts and technical resources not only applicable to improvisation but also to any other kind of performance (e.g., performing a set piece). Therefore, the course not only turned out to be very valuable for my original motivation. It also became an inflection point of my whole experience as performer.

One of the concepts that have influenced me the most is his *improvisational state*, although here the word 'improvisational' is perfectly exchangeable with the word 'performing' because its definition is suitable for any kind of performance other than improvisation. The improvisational (or performing) state is a state of full availability of the integrated body/mind. The body/mind is ready to perform any action needed to come next in the piece which is being composed instantly. In this improvisational state the body/mind navigates. While navigating our attention is open, we continuously readjust our actions in order to achieve our aims while achieving them (i.e., in the process of doing it rather than once it is done) within an ever changing environment. Hamilton would say that we all have the tool which helps us to navigate successfully while improvising. He calls this tool: the *sub(an)atomic(al) navigator*. Without the navigator we would not be fast enough to intellectually respond to the external changes and so successfully complete our aims. This navigator resides within our body awareness, but it cannot be corporeal. Hence Hamilton's choice to call it sub(an)atomic(al) (both sub-anatomical and sub-atomic). If we focus on the body, this would overwhelm our intellect and we could not see anything else. We could neither know what we are producing nor perceive what happens in the space outside the body. Thus this awareness has to be of a virtual scale, still within the anatomy of the body but smaller than an atom. Then, the navigators would stay in an unconscious level and the intellect would be freer. In fact, Hamilton thinks the navigator is what leads us into this state of availability of the body/mind.

The workshop resulted in an improvement of my self-confidence as performer too. I found that the knowledge delivered by Hamilton felt just right, like part of an internal wisdom I possessed myself but had not articulated externally yet. Hamilton's methodology was as if he would help us to give birth to those concepts.

Right after the end workshop I started my MA upgrade as continuation of my PG diploma in contemporary dance performance at London Contemporary Dance School. I found that this idea of the performing state as well as many other aspects of my experience during the workshop were very valuable for my research related to my MA independent project, which is about the use of imagery and perception of the sensuous experience in order to achieve a state of integrated body/mind in performance. The notes and memories of the workshop will be a very important part of my resources for the written section of my MA.

In summary, what the *Dance Technique and Improvisation* workshop has meant to me has exceeded all expectations. Even before my travel to Arlequi I felt the content of the workshop might have some significant relation with my MA. However, it turned out to be an indispensable preparation for my practical work and very important source of information and reference for the written part of the MA. And beyond this, the impact of the course has been a great influence of my whole practice, helping me to evolve as independent dance artist.

References:

- Benoit, A. (1997). On the edge/Createurs de l'imprevu. *Nouvelles de danse*, 32-33.
- Hamilton, J. (2009a). From <http://www.arlequi.de>
- Hamilton, J. (2009b). From <http://www.julyenhamilton.com/JULYEN%20HAMILTON/julyen%20hamilton.html>
- Mackrell, J. (1992). *Out of Line: The Story of British New Dance*. London: Dance Books Ltd.