

**January 2012**

Dear LUTSF

**The 5 Obstructions Project - Henrietta Hale**

The Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund supported part of the travel costs for me to undertake a choreographic residency in Athens with Greek artist Zoi Dimitriou at the Duncan Dance Research Centre from 01 – 13 August 2011. This was the first stage of a series of comings together in contexts outside our comfort zone between two very different choreographers. It has since developed with further research periods and will continue in 2012/13.

This stage was very much about establishing a ground and methodology to work with that could allow us to create something together, whilst embracing our differences. For me it was also about seeing how a different context or culture could affect my practice.

Both these aims were achieved in very interesting and rewarding ways. The only aim that I felt wasn't completely fulfilled was that of experiencing the dance scene in Athens. Unfortunately due to Zoi's and my other work schedules we were restricted to carry out the project at a time when the Athens Dance festival had just finished and there was a dearth of shows or contemporary cultural events to visit, as it was deep in holiday season.

However, as we were very immersed in our work for the entire two weeks of the project I did not come away disappointed but found instead that I could gain some interesting insights into the city's culture just through my day to day travel, shopping and eating routines.

A particular highlight was my arrival, having come from a hectic schedule of UK touring, to be confronted by a wave of Athens heat and feel a sense of space and lightness fall upon me in the knowledge that these two weeks were a fresh new and open start without conditions imposed or pressures to deliver yet. The other highlight was meeting some Athens based artists at a sharing event we held on the last day, presenting a construction of material we had worked on and talking through our process together in which we received some really positive and helpful feedback on where we had got to. On return to London we presented the same showing at The Place's Touchwood season of works in progress in September 2011.

We have plans to continue this process with further European residencies in Italy and Berlin next autumn 2012 and create a new production that deals with the comic and metaphoric aspects of mis-communication.

Regards  
Henrietta Hale

## REPORT – The 5 Obstructions Project

**A two-week residency at The Duncan Dance Research Centre in Athens to explore collaborative practice between two choreographers, Henrietta Hale and Zoi Dimitriou.**

Zoi and I are practicing choreographers at similar stages in our careers who had shared a respect and curiosity about each other's work for some years. Each of us has established enough of a professional practice to recognise our patterns, strengths and pitfalls and we wanted to come together to share some of our artistic concerns and questions around making work and then to see if this process could lead to a collaborative creation. The project was in part instigated by our mutual recognition that we seemed to operate very differently as artists and had very different strengths that we had a desire to try and learn from each other. Zoi's work has a confidence and skill in its crafting, with a great sense of musicality yet sometimes lacks the space for layers to emerge, whereas I can easily get lost in states and philosophical quandaries and really wanted to find ways to seek out clearer structures and boundaries to work within.



Our plan was to each put forward an existing recent work for one or two people and re-examine it together as a springboard to start developing new themes together. The work that I put forward was a solo for myself that I had made in 2009 called *Safe/Unsafe* that questioned what it was that made me want to push out of my comfort zone as well as what it was that gave me a sense of safety. Zoi's work was a duet she had made in 2008 entitled *Goddesses in*

*Exile* which explored notions and stereotypes of femininity. Our first agenda was to explore what was important to each of us about the choices we had made in these pieces, whether it was the subjects they engaged in or whether there were materials or structures that we wanted to hold on to or re-explore. Our first few days were given, therefore, to setting each other quite broad individual tasks that re-opened these processes, either looking at a section of material or a broader theme. So, for example, my first task for Zoi was to re-work a series of actions she had made that represented feminine icons but ask her to work with the idea of masculinity within the same structure. Her first task for me was the challenge of creating a sense of risk for myself and coming up with some scenario or material that expressed this risk. Both of these tasks were useful in that we would have been unlikely to set them for ourselves. Having someone else set the task was challenging because immediately we were having to negotiate each others' interpretations of what it was our original works had been about. This involved in some sense the painful experience of accepting that perhaps our initial ideas weren't as clear as we had imagined or that what we thought was the subject of our piece might actually be something else.

Some really tricky dialogues followed each day as we grappled to understand each other in a way that was deep and complex enough to be able to be useful to one another. These early days were really about trying to build up trust in our communication. It was very difficult because we are so different in both culture and personality. I realised that I couldn't make any of my normal assumptions that my creative behaviour or comments would be understood as I intended and vice versa I had to try not to react to Zoi's manner that often I would read as being critical but was actually just passionate and 'Greek'.

In the middle period we adopted a process for two days of directing each other in structures of material – which was more comfortable because the roles were clearer and more familiar as performer and director. I enjoyed a dynamic that was starting to emerge that felt like the beginnings of the landscape of a duet piece between two women shifting between projections of the other - 'heni wants what zoi has and zoi wants what henii has but henii want zoi to be more like henii and zoi wants henii to be more like zoi'. This seemed to speak about something that both our original works had traced upon: an idea about subject and object – our constant desire to become the object of our fantasies whilst at the same time wanting to be free from the traps that take us away from just being ourselves.

During the last parts of the residency we begin to look for ways that our process could be less about a back and forth of directing and responding and more about coming to decisions together. Of course this had its tensions. We would often have different opinions about what works, or what it even means to "work" – in relation to which context etc. and we often disagreed on how to proceed.

Our last day was spent building a construction of material that we could present to a small audience. It felt much too early to be able to do this but it was actually a very interesting and revealing exercise to attempt it. The struggle that we experienced on that day to communicate and understand each other has stayed with me as a very important and essential subject of the work we intend to make. There was humour in the absurdity and a sense that we were tapping into a subject that was really relevant to broader social and political concerns. How can cultures work together and create situations in dialogue whereby differences of perception and belief do not need to lead to conflict but instead generate a vibrant sort of electricity? We were excited by the feedback we received at our sharing as we felt that in allowing ourselves to honestly observe the complex difficulties of our working relationship we had been able to use it as a tool to make something that according to viewers was very human, entertaining and truthful.

To give an example of the odd flavour of this process I have pasted in my notes list from day 3 of the residency in italics:

#### *Passage1*

*zoi - being a man material with hesitation and stuff, cooking phrase, smoking into slapping, being interviewed, interview text*

*henii - beginning again on bar, madonna phrase, telling jokes, unsafe language chair /moving, breakdance moves, man on wire*

*passage2*

*possessed*

*2 sitting in chairs, telling jokes/ interviewed, unsafe chair/man chair, possessed, slapping, possessed, hesitation breakdance moves, cooking phrase/madonna phrase, slapping, possessed*

*other ideas*

*slapping*

*rubbing lust generating electricity*

*home a house - house a trap*

*a tent or a sail*

*2 chairs a home*

*a rant -*

*poledancing?*

*being*

*disappearing*

*absense*

*its not linear, there is no cause and effect, and it cannot be reduced to one simple thing*

I have also attached a video of the sharing performance we did on the last day of the residency and at Touchwood at The Place on our return to London.

The Duncan Dance Research Centre gave us the use of their studios from midday every day until as late as we needed. It is situated a bus journey away from the city centre on a hillside that overlooks Athens and the sea. This is a very quiet neighbourhood that provides a very peaceful environment to focus into. One of the strongest sensations that have remained with me is the shock of heat and light that I experienced coming from a typical UK August into the height of Greek summer. This was surprisingly beneficial to work with. The mix of quiet, heat, lack of normal distractions and the romantic sense of history all provided a very fertile state for creative movement. I couldn't exactly put my finger on whether it was the images of Isadora that lined the walls, the cool stone architecture or the strange and exotic heat pervading my cells that put me in a state where I could tap into a more fundamental nervous system from which movement, ideas and detail could emerge with more joy and freedom than normal. Working late into the evening with lights out in the studio, the warm air and distant moped sounds drifting through the window gave the work a quality that was really luscious and anxiety free.

I am extremely grateful to LUTSF for helping to enable this project to happen. It is very rare that artists are able to give themselves the space to reflect and confront aspects of their practice that are uncomfortable and this was made particularly more possible and significant due to the very different culture and environment that I found myself.

Henrietta Hale