

Covering Letter Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship

Gabriele Reuter - The project (20. November 2004 – 5. February 2005)

- a 10 week-long stay with dance artist Marina Caron at Estudio Novadanca, Av 13 Maio, in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

During a year-long dance training course at the London Contemporary Dance School in 2002/2003 Marina and myself developed a very close working partnership in the field of improvisation in performance. We jointly choreographed a number of pieces for stage and site-specific and discovered very strong similarities both physically in our dancing and in our understanding of the art form.

Having decided to continue to work together, my travel to Sao Paulo aimed to establish a long-term basis for our collaboration, I also wanted to develop an understanding of Marina's professional life as a dance artist, to inform my own. A big part this learning and observation process was attending and assisting Marina's teaching work as well as gather an understanding of the contemporary dance scene in Sao Paulo by taking classes and workshops of other choreographers related to her work.

Later on in the planning process we were given the opportunity to jointly teach one of the summer school intensive courses at Estudio Novadanca in Sao Paulo. This highly positive experience has developed into the core of our entire project. The two weeks of studio research we did together around the same time concentrated on working methodologies and outcomes of the workshop in which we introduced a set of core basics of our understanding of technique, both in improvisation and set material. A written documentation of the workshop and our research time in English and Portuguese is the beginning of a body of research work we aim to develop. As a future working format we decided to meet in regular intervals in either a European country or in Brazil to teach an intensive workshop linked with about two weeks of research time. The bilingual written documentation of this and an ongoing email exchange will be the backbone of this collaboration. Our time together and especially our teaching time has left both of us confident that we will be able to realistically continue an exciting partnership across the two continents for the rest of our professional lives.

A more personal highlight for me was to understand Marina's life as a dance artist as well as the rich Brazilian culture it is situated in. It has been hugely inspiring to my work in the UK, most importantly to my teaching. Discovering the difference and the similarities in the way contemporary dance exists in Brazil and the break from the dance scene in London has also helped me to set priorities in terms of who and what I am dancing for, and somehow rediscover a focus and enjoyment that too often gets lost in the daily struggle for survival.

My advice for awardees:

Planning is important but as most of the Lisa Ullmann Awardees set out to experience something entirely new and different from their everyday routines, welcome and expect change. Things are very likely to turn out a little or a lot different than initially planned. It is usually for the better.

Report

Part One:

Weeks 1-4

- Observation and Assistance

Upon arrival in Sao Paulo I was warmly welcomed and given accommodation by Marina and her family. Due to my then very weak Portuguese and the sheer immensity and inaccessibility of this huge city I spent a good part of the first month accompanying Marina to her teaching activities, rehearsals and performances. I was also introduced to the Estudio Novadanca, which would be the main base of our joint activities in Sao Paulo.

Estudio Novadanca is situated in the central part of Sao Paulo, in the district Belavista. It is a dance school and home of two dance companies, Companhia (Cia.) 4, and Cia. 8, which are directed by two of the three partners, Lu Favoreto, Tica Lemos and Christiane Paoli Quito running the School with a strong focus on improvisation technique. Nearly all company members including the directors are teaching regular classes and performance projects there, mainly release based contemporary dance technique, improvisation and contact improvisation as well as ballet, acting and singing classes. The studio has a very good reputation in the dance scene of Sao Paulo and a substantial student body, many of them aspiring to a professional career in dance. During term-time classes and company rehearsals are running Mo-Sat all day in three studios, with frequent weekend performances or showings in the studio. The end of term student showings are among the most ambitious semi-professional productions I have attended, showing a number of evening groups working very closely and extremely hard together in a company format, producing work of very high standard. Technically many classes use exercises developed after the model of the movement researcher and analyst Marie-Madeleine Béziers, who has been quite substantially influencing the French and Portuguese-speaking dance world but is hardly known in the UK. Béziers mainly worked in Belgium, France and Portugal and influential members of the new dance scene in Sao Paulo, such as Lu Favoreto, have studied with her in Paris.



roof terrace at Estudio Novadanca

- Assisting class:

Estudio Novadanca-

Marina was teaching two classes in the previous term, a ballet class for adults and an adult contemporary dance group. Both classes were based on the Béziers principles of movement (patterns according to spirals in body), which was especially interesting within the ballet context. Marina has developed a very informed way of teaching ballet technique, focussing on the same principles of body awareness she prioritises in her contemporary technique. At the point I entered Marina's contemporary dance group they were just working on set material and an improvisation score for their end of year showing. It was a large and very dynamic group with a number of very skilled individuals. In this class Marina used more of the information and some exercises we have both learned at LCDS. Our very much present mutual understanding of improvisation technique enabled me to give valued feedback and join the class with ease.

Escola Viva –

Marina also regularly teaches varying groups at a primary school, all in improvisation. During the last term she taught a private lesson to a blind girl, a group of 8-9 year old girls and another group of their mothers. What impressed me most about these classes was the sophisticated exercises that Marina taught to the very young students. The experience I have of the dance curriculum for children in primary schools in the UK is mainly related to very simple animated games and mime/character exercises. The exercises Marina was working with both children and mothers could equally be used on a group of university students or professionals, which proved for me the universal relevance of good improvisation teaching across all age groups and levels.

University of Sao Paulo – Performing Arts Department

The experience I had assisting the Ballet class at University of Sao Paulo was very interesting. Initially we had planned to introduce me to both of the two student classes (BA students, year 1 and 3), joining class, followed by a Q&A session about the dance scene in London, in which both groups had expressed their interest. It turned out that the bureaucracy at the University would not allow any guests into the faculty. After much discussion I was able to attend one of the classes (1st years) but for the other one Marina was not able to get permission from the head of department.

The student feedback I had after the first Q&A session was highly positive with students showing a very keen interest for information from Europe. The students were so excited about this event and the ignorance of their department heads that they organised a delegation to speak in front of the department head to complain. The head ended up giving in and inviting me, which sadly was too late for the 3rd year group, as their term had already ended.

- Attending Rehearsals - feedback

An important part of this introductory period was attending a number of rehearsals at Estudio Novadanca. I was admitted to one of the rehearsals of Cia. 8, directed by Lu Favoreto for their latest piece "Trapiche". The piece researched a very percussive social dance which is dying out together with the Indian population on a small island in the State Sao Paulo. For this piece Marina is choreographic assistant. Group dynamic and atmosphere of the company were hard-working, very relaxed, positive and playful, which was beautiful to watch.



Cia. Oito Novadanca at Rehearsals

As an off spin of Cia. 8, Marina Caron collaborates with dancer Anderson Gouvea and photographer José Romero on a duet called "Trio de Dois" (A trio of two), dealing with the failed relationship of a man and a woman. My feedback and artistic involvement was very valued in this piece, which I enjoyed greatly. For Marina it was very important to have my opinion as an outsider to the rest of the company but an "insider" to her work in London.

- Taking classes & watching performance

I took part in the advanced evening class of Lu Favoreto over several weeks. Favoreto teaches informed and clear, is a demanding observer and extremely committed to her students. The standard of the group-work was very impressive, much higher than most of the semi-professional improvisation work I have seen in the UK.

Also an important part of my introduction to the dance scene was watching a variety of dance and theatre performances. The improvisation event "Vias expressivas" of Cia. 4 held at Estudio Novadanca, as well as the end of term performances of the Estudio. I also had the chance to see the end of year performance of the degree students at the Universidade Morumbi, choreographed by Lu Favoreto. The companhia Cena 11 is based in the south of Brazil, Florianopolis and performed at one of the Cultural Centres SECS in Vila Madalena. Overall I was fascinated to see how different the dancers were to those in Europe. Although from a viewpoint of traditional dance training, the general standard of the contemporary dancers was probably not able to compete with the larger European cities, a lot of the performers seemed to inherit a sense of enjoyment, freedom and confidence in their performance that was a pleasure to watch informed my sense of priority as well as my understanding of the definition of the term "technique".

Christmas/New Year:

The Christmas/summer break lasted for about two and a half weeks. During this time, the Estudio Novadanca was completely shut down as well as most other arts organisations in Sao Paulo. It turned out that this period of rest and reflection for me and the workshop and project planning time I had with Marina, were very helpful for the second part of the project to follow in January. I was also still struggling with the language. The time off therefore helped to catch up with language skills and digest the large amount of new information.

- Planning and Evaluating with Marina

Thematically, we were looking to find one single way of applying technical information within the body for both set and improvised dance. As a working objective for all our future projects, we want to dedicate our research towards a way of finding equal clarity in both.

In our understanding technique is a means of analysis of what we are doing in dance, performance and everyday life alike. Analysis and, in more detail, being able to analyse and process what we are doing in the exact moment we are doing it is a tool for greater perception. Improving perception is key to our ability to change, and key in performance.

Developing this understanding in daily practice can only happen through individual research and exchange, but very importantly also through the exchange with other dancers. In the workshop we would therefore not aim to give definite answers or tried and tested conclusions, it would rather serve to provide a new set of questions and tasks to each participant's daily training and research. This first attempt to teach a workshop as a joint research project would inform our approach for the future.

Part Two

Weeks 7-10:

- Workshop at Novadanca (17. – 20. January 2005) - Contemporary Dance

This workshop was one of the best attended workshops of the summer programme with 18 students from all over Brazil. Training levels varied within the group, with some professional dancers, choreographers or dance students, some semi-professionals and some actors.

At the time of the workshop, my Portuguese was good enough to follow conversations in class and give some simple feedback, but not to actually teach. We therefore decided on a format where we taught jointly, I would lead the exercises in English, with Marina interpreting and adding as necessary. The fact that she is a very experienced teacher and workshop leader proved invaluable at this point, enabling us to work smoothly as a team.

We gave the students three days of new information, experimented with basic principles of movement and implementing these into both a set sequence and an improvisation score each day. On the fourth day we recapped on all of the information given and build them into a longer improvisation score.

Apart from the students being very motivated and eager to learn about new methods and techniques, for me the most impressive strengths of the group were the discussions. Sometimes critical and always very analytical, these students absorbed information both physically and mentally with such a positive attitude that it really was a pleasure to teach, and learn with them. My experience in teaching workshops of such high level in improvisation is very limited, so this motivated me greatly to continue my work.

The manager of the school was greatly supportive throughout both the logistic preparation of the workshop and the course itself. She was so interested in the work that she ended up joining the course for the full week. She further expressed her excitement and

gratitude for our work again to me, linked with an offer to return to teach at Novadanca.

- 2 weeks research and development

The following final two weeks of my stay Marina and myself were able to work in one of the studios at Novadanca for a few hours every day. Together we went through the exercises of the workshop, finding more answers and lot more questions, as well as ways of formulating things in written word. Our main aim was to translate these exercises into an improvisation score that would bring us forward in our analysis and research, but also be interesting enough to show to a non-specific audience. We took short films of the improvisations to document our progress.

I had initially hoped for this research period to be full working days, and to culminate in a showing for invited guests on the last day of my stay. However things turn out differently. In early January Marina had received one of the two only production and touring scholarships awarded by the British Council Brazil, a very prestigious and also one of the only production awards for Contemporary Dance. She was therefore contracted to spend half days rehearsing at the British Council, leaving only the evenings for our work. The second week of our research time was already the beginning of the new term, so we had difficulties to book a space and time for our showing. It also appeared that work in progress-showings are not really used to invite funders or promoters to introduce work as they are in the UK. We decided to show our results in form of an improvisation score as part of Marina's first lesson of the new term to her contemporary dance students and a few guests of the Cias. 8 and 4. It became very clear to me that the planning I had done previous to the project in the UK, had been very much informed by the way things are done in Europe. So of course, although I understood the circumstances and was very happy to see Marina so successful with her work, I was a little disappointed. Letting go of these ambitions was probably one of the hardest things of my stay. I really learned to understand the importance of being flexible and tolerant within project work abroad. I also realised that being in the same situation in with my hectic everyday life in London, I would not have been able to free up so much time more Marina unless it was paid work. We therefore both came to the conclusion that we would need a different work format for future projects. They would need to be shorter, not longer than three weeks, and preferably at a location home to neither of us, so to leave us the space to work undisturbed. However, it was also clear that we needed this initial stay to find all of this out and be able to plan realistically. The chance to understand Marina's life and culture as a dancer, to make deeper connections to her environment and also to grasp a fair bit of the Portuguese language, I would never have had during a three week-long stay.

However, although time in the last few weeks was precious it seemed that the two months we had then already spent together as well as the positive experience of the workshop had created a very productive and trustful atmosphere between us, which had extremely fruitful working outcomes.

Sadly, during the last week of my stay in Sao Paulo, there was a sudden and very tragic death in Marina's family and all work-related matters were put on hold. Marina had to leave the city to help organise the funeral and the showing was therefore cancelled. These unforeseen developments were of course a difficult ending for the project and my stay on Brazil. However, we were still able to use the research time to round up and articulate our findings from the workshop which essentially successfully concluded the core of the project.

- Workshops/ Intensives:

A positive outcome of the freer time-schedule for me meant that I was able to take more summer courses and workshops. I was able to take part in a new dance workshop by choreographer Adriana Grechi, held at dance studio MOVE in the district Vila Madalena and a Body-Mind Centering Course lead by Patricia Franco at the Estudio Novadanca. Both of these workshops were very interesting, in particular the New Dance Workshop, which was dealing with very relevant information, relating to improvisation technique and the use of Marie Beziérs work. It also improved my Portuguese, as all classes were held in Portuguese and I needed to get to grips also with the technical vocabulary.

- Other Activities:

On several Sundays I joined a Capoeira community project held in the deprived area of Santa Cruz (Zona Sul). The main focus of the project was to involve young kids from poor families to occupy them and keep them off the streets. But as it was outside and on a Sunday, the entire families as well as renowned Capoeira teachers visiting from other cities joined in the "Rodas". Seeing Capoeira as what it initially always has been, a very traditional activity, including and involving all parts of the community, was very refreshing for me.

As the country was warming up for Carnaval throughout January I was able to attend a few rehearsals of Samba groups in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. This was of course only a small insight into this substantial part of national culture, but exploring the rich dance culture the country itself has to offer, will be a definite objective for my future visits.

- Future Plans:

There are a number of other activities that have directly come out of my stay in Brazil. I am in email contact with a number of young Brazilian dancers interested to come to the UK to study. I will serve as their initial point of contact, advice and encouragement should they decide to come to Europe.

I am very interested to introduce our work to students and academics in the context of higher education. I have already made some initial contact with my former University in Leicester (De Montfort) and will further pursue any possibilities as soon as the writing of our first research document is completed. Another stage of planning is of course our next workshop and research project and to find the funding for it. It is also my aim to work the documents towards a publication in the future, this will not happen in the nearer future.

I have also entered dialogue with Patricia Rianne, one of the Ballet Technique teachers a London Contemporary Dance School, to jointly translate and understand the work of Marie-Madeleine Beziérs, together with the online aid of Marina. Mrs Rianne has shown great interest in Beziérs' studies for her own teaching work. Together we hope to understand the writings and find ways of translating them into exercises for class.

In general, it is my aim to present our work whenever possible or wanted, in order to encourage transatlantic exchange in dance. A lot more interest and support could be gathered for these kind of activities, as they in my opinion greatly enrich the landscape of dance in

Europe

The nearly three months I spent in Brazil were a successful experience for me at every level. I feel I grew substantially, as much professionally as personally, and I am grateful that I have been given this opportunity through the Lisa Ullmann Scholarship. Apart from the financial support, the fact that the Foundation showed their belief in our collaboration was of great value for mine and Marina's future work together. Thank you.