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Iris Tomlinson
Reports Secretary

15th August 2016

Dear Iris,

I hope this letter finds you well. I had an amazing experience at Anna Halprin's Summer Workshop and am writing with my report on the workshop and my experience and thoughts.

The week long workshop took place at Anna Halprin's historic Mountain Home Studio which is on the slopes leading to Mount Tamalpais in California's Marin County, just north of San Francisco. The workshop ran from the 20th- 24th June 2016.

During my stay I was put up by a local writer and performer, Toni, who often rents out a room in her apartment to students of the Tamalpa Institute. The Institute was very helpful in supporting my trip, putting me in touch with Toni and setting up a carpool to get to and from the studio. I found these relationships to be extremely valuable throughout the week.

I was keen to capture my experience as near to the time as possible and my report is therefore a collection of edited posts from my blog, which I wrote whilst I was in California or just after I returned. I wanted to portray the mixture of my personal journey and internal struggles alongside relating the actual content of the workshop. As a result, the document is a little longer than intended. Unfortunately, whilst I did take some photos, we were asked not to circulate these beyond our personal blogs. I understand that they are rather protective of images of the space and of Anna herself as she is looking very frail at the moment.

Whilst putting this together I have since begun work on a new research project and have found many of Anna's ideas coming through in this work. A key learning is the idea of RSPV cycles as a process for developing new work. This involves defining resources, setting a score, performing the score and then evaluating it to generate further resources that then go back into the cycle and so on. I've also found myself returning to Anna's statement on feeling stuck. Anna says you need to just think to yourself: "I've been collecting resources, now what can I do with them".

I am hugely appreciative to the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund for supporting this journey. I have gained so much from this experience. In particular it has opened up to me the possibility of extending my artistic practice beyond the confines of the dance studio, and allowed me to be fully aware of my emotional presence in my work. I'm sure that I will continue to find new ways in which it has impacted on my work and life as time progresses.

With very many thanks,

Marguerite Caruana Galizia

Arriving

Gate 1. As you enter and pass through the gate leaving the driveway and leading to the studio, become aware of descending, of a procession and a change of atmosphere.

It's Monday 20th June. After 5 hours in airports and 11 hours in the air, I arrived in San Francisco last night. The word 'gate' is a loaded one. I think about the gates I passed through to get here: tube gates, departure gates, arrival gates, the invisible policed gate that is border control, the Golden Gate Bridge and now this one. You cannot travel to the US without becoming excruciatingly aware of the politics of gates. "Do you have your papers?", "how much money are you carrying on you?", "do you have proof of a return flight Ma'am?"...Lest you forget, let us make it absolutely clear that you are not welcome to over-stay your stay...oh and welcome to the US.

Anna's historic Mountain home studio is nestled into a forest of redwood oak trees on the west slope of Mount Tamalpais in California's Marin County. A long staircase takes you down from the driveway to the lounge area. A sign at the side of the entrance invites you to consciously attend to your descent: "walk slowly, pause periodically, look, listen, breathe, smell, touch." It's immediately clear that the users of this space revere the environment as much as they do the history of the studio. When Anna moved here with her architect husband, Larry Halprin, he knew that she needed a space to continue to develop her movement work. Together with Arch Lauterer (Martha Graham's lighting designer), Larry designed the outdoor studio which was built in 1948 and later the indoor studio in 1950.

Anna and Larry's work sought to redefine social structures in art and life. Their home studio became a seedbed for postmodern thinking in the 1960's, attracting artists from all over the US to the West coast. This is how I had placed Anna's work. Historically she is one of the founding artists of post-modern dance, a title she naturally refutes, along with the idea of choreography altogether. "We're all choreographers", she says.

By 10am a group of around 30 of us have assembled in the lounge area, a hut space with kitchen and bathroom set on a lower level to the studio. Tomoko, one of Anna's assistants, leads us up to the studio through a dance. Barefooted we're invited to hold hands in a long line. We enter the space like a procession, ascending the stairs to the outdoor deck. In the far corner a frail Anna sits in a wheelchair. A minor injury means she's a little less mobile, but she's OK, they assure us. As we file passed Anna she asks each of us for our name and where we come from, and "please speak up 'cause I'm a little deaf".

A leaflet they gave us on arrival spells out the significance of this space. It's history is not lost on those of us present. A sense of reverence for the environment, for the people who have been a part of it and have literally sweated into the deck, takes over each one of us. As Anna explains:

This place has a long and fascinating history. It is here that the Dancer's Workshop did its early experimental work... Artists who are now well known started here; dancers like Simone Forti, Trisha Brown, Meredith Monk, Yvonne Rainer,... Merce Cunningham, Min Tanaka... all performed on this deck... And of even greater importance are all the many talented and wonderful students and teachers who have shared so many creative dances and laughed and cried together here. I believe there is a field of energy that keeps growing, bringing the past into the present, and giving this space its particular beauty and sacredness. – Anna Halprin.

Anna's words spin in my jet lagged head. I have no idea what time zone I'm in. I find the outdoors overpowering and cannot feel my body. Worst of all my feet are so dirty it looks like it will take a month of hardcore scrubbing to get them clean again. As Anna says, life and art are never separate, and here I am on this creative journey negotiating with an unfamiliar space whilst a part of me frets about the Brexit vote. The Entry Score provides a welcome direction for my unsettled brain. The rules are clear, inviting engagement, framed/ held together by years of other entrances down those stairs. All gates have entry scores, I think...

Scores and Resources

Anna Halprin's experimental workshops that began in the 50's influenced the artists who later went on to form the Judson Church group in 1960's New York. I am not a dance historian. I travelled to

California not to understand Anna's work intellectually but to experience it, to embody the space, her approach and her ideas. Anna's work has underpinned much of the postmodern dance practice that has been filtered down to me through my teachers and their teachers. I came here to get to the source and what I'm relating now is the slightly haphazard collection of thoughts that spilled out from this frail but determined 96 year old.

Choreography is a strong word... I've spent my life rebelling against it. When you choreograph, you create. When you use scores, others create. That's how I don't burn out. I make space for others to be creative, I tap into their potential and I learn something from what they do with my scores. So I never burn out. – Anna Halprin

If Anna's creative approach could be summed up in one word, that word would be "scores". We walk into the space through a score. We relate to each other through a score. We create individually through a score, we dance together through a score and finally we eat together through a score. A score is a set of rules that loosely hold together an event, allowing an individual to devise freely but still remain engaged in a specific dialogue.

But the score needs support. Anna draws strongly on the RSPV cycle defined by her late husband Larry Halprin. The R stands for resources. What are we working with? A resource could be the environment, our bodies or any object, idea, stimulus that informs or moulds our dance. Resources are the raw materials of the creative process. If we define them and become aware of them they can enrich our practice. S stands for score. These are the rules of engagement. P stands for Performance, the enactment of the score using the resources. V stands for Valuation. Like an evaluation of the performance, this is an opportunity to look at what happened in the performance to generate further resources that will then inform the next execution of the score and so on in an endless cycle. **Even the working process can be a resource. "Don't worry if you feel stuck", Anna says, "Just think to yourself, 'OK I've been collecting resources, now what can I do with them.'"**

Anna approaches the body as a resource. She identifies two ways in which this resource can be used. Firstly it is a point of sensation, what do I feel through my physical body? Anna says that as an artist working with the body, her aim is to try and access the most authentic movement possible. If movement is authentic then anyone can empathise with it. Inauthentic movement, like ballet, she says, is like decoration. "It's not bad, but it's not authentic. It's a style."

Anna tells her assistants to pull out all the cushions from the studio. She instructs us all to lie down with the pillow under the upper back. "Let your jaws relax or you'll hurt your necks." We lie there for a good 15 minutes gradually circling our arms overhead to which she exclaims "Oh my goodness Colin I'm very worried about you. You need to do this every day!" Colin is not a dancer, in fact most of the people here are not dancers. It's a testament to the reach of her work that such a wide range of people have been drawn to this workshop. We then placed the cushion under the pelvis, creating traction in the lower back. "Could all the assistants please develop eagle eyes", she yaps. Her old-school manners sometimes come across as quite harsh.

I was relieved to hear her talk about her two favourite muscles: The trapezius and the gluts. Her largely self-taught knowledge of anatomy was quite impressive. She asks us all to raise our arms upwards by rolling the chest backwards to access the lower trapezius. This is sky. She then instructs us to drop and ground through our feet to create a connection to earth. The centre is your horizon, the point of intersection between sky and earth. If sky and earth are two polarities then the horizon embodies both qualities. **I think that's a really interesting perspective on the centre, not as a fixed point, but as a dynamic interplay between the polarities of earth and sky.** Anna insists that we feel the earth polarity in our bodies. So she instructs us each to focus on grounding, whilst another person attempts to lift us off the ground. Obviously none of us budge. Then she tells us all to do it again and "just think about what you had for breakfast". Lifting us off the ground this time round is a piece of cake. Wow! So it's real! Anna stands up from her wheelchair. To give you some context, this 96 year old recently slipped on some dry leaves sending her shin first into the deck, which cut across her shin bone. To avoid putting her weight onto it she started to walk differently, which then led her to fall, fracturing her lumbar vertebra. So though still able to walk, she's been instructed to keep it still and is in a wheelchair much of the time "for the next 6 rather than 8 weeks, because I have too much to do" she says. As we're all trying to feel grounded she lifts herself up to standing, plants her two determined feet into the ground and gets her assistant to try to lift her up, fracture and all. Her face looks furious "You Won't Lift Me!" she shouts. Surely enough Rosario cannot lift her.

Another resource is how we relate, because “**you cannot exist without being in relation to others**”. Anna describes two more polarities, Active and Passive. We work through scores involving touch. In the first score we’re asked to lead a partner whose eyes remain shut. We can leave our partner at times, and select someone else. “Did you feel anxious when you were left alone? Was it hard to leave someone?” We worked through different variables within this score. Both partners had eyes open, both could select to lead, to follow, to leave or hold on. “It’s important to be clear in a relationship. It’s important to recognise when it’s no longer comfortable, when the relationship isn’t working anymore.” The intersection between life and art is nowhere more evident than in this abstracted relationship practice. It created a lot of food for thought. I noticed that my dominant action was to lead and got into a few power struggles when the person I was trying to lead refused to give in, taking us both into spins.

The body is also a site of emotions, what am I feeling emotionally? Physical sensation and emotions are linked. We inhabit our emotions in our bodies and in our movement. Anna instructed us to sit back to back with a partner, giving and receiving weight in turn as we went into flexion and extension. Moving with empathy for our partner’s body. Then she gave us the following score: starting back to back with your heads touching, slowly turn around to face your partner without losing contact between your heads. This has the effect of bringing you very close to your partner’s face. In the background she played a piece of music by Meredith Monk. I think the sound will haunt me for a long time. I’m not really sure what happened. My partner was a lovely older woman, Anita, who, as we turned to face each other, put her arm around me and smiled. I don’t know if it was the kindness of this gesture or the emotional manipulation of the music, but I literally began to sob.

Physical sensation, emotion, environment, relationships. Each of these resources form part of the self. Each of these resources impact on each other. By highlighting these different resources, we create options that give us a sense of agency. If I move differently, how will that impact on my emotions? How will this changed state impact on my relationships? And how, in turn might *this* impact on my environment. Through the use of scores, Anna offers people a chance to play out these different dialogues through a process she calls the life / art dialogue. This is the basis of the work of the Tamalpa Institute.

The Tamalpa Institute

Founded by Anna Halprin and her daughter, Daria Halprin, in 1978, the work of the Tamalpa Institute uses expressive arts practices to tap into the creative resources of individuals and communities. Through what they call a life / art dialogue, this work is really an extension of Anna’s ideas from professional dance/performance making into individual and community development. Anna’s work, whilst significant in the lineage of contemporary dance, spilled into real life. Her approach addressed the politics of intra and inter-personal relationships as well as our connection with our environment. The Tamalpa Institute solidifies this relationship through a 3 year training program. During my week’s stay we explored this work in the afternoons, no doubt to take the strain off Anna. I had no idea what to expect from this work and what I relate now is just my sense and experience of it during that week, rather than a fully researched presentation.

On the first afternoon Rosario takes us through a ‘self-portrait’ process. The question Rosario poses is: “How am I experiencing myself physically, emotionally, mentally in my life right now?” We dance a little and then paper and oil crayons are provided and we draw an image in response to this question. We’re given time to write something in our journal, inspired by what we’ve drawn. Earlier in the day we were divided into ‘support groups’ of 6 people. In our groups we are now asked to dance in response to our image and writing, whilst the rest of the group bears witness to our dance. After each performance, the performer has a chance to talk about their experience in the dance, about what they were thinking or where they’re at.

I guess that the purpose of this transfer of thoughts from image to words and then to movement aimed to create more texture or room for new ideas / revelations. I feel totally disorientated. Working outdoors is overwhelming and my main concern was staying in the shade and navigating the complex personalities in my support group. The idea is that the sharing is just a one way presentation, but unfortunately members of the group take it on themselves to provide a kind of feedback. I feel a little frustrated by this, but not wanting to be bossy I just let people talk and keep my input to a minimum. Why do we always jump in to provide feedback? Why is it so necessary to give our perspective? **It’s a good reminder that sometimes just bearing witness to somebody’s thoughts, work, actions is enough, especially when we have no other context, or when our feedback is not invited.**

On the second day the sun is so strong that we have to start the afternoon session in the indoor studio. Thankfully, I think. It's hot and stuffy but there's something reassuring about sweating again and rolling around on floor without worrying about splinters. The improvisation score takes us through each area of the body to sense what movements are available and then to track back to one area that feels most familiar and another that feels most unfamiliar. Having identified two areas, we're asked to bring these two movement scores into dialogue. I start working with the hips as a familiar area and the feet as an unfamiliar area. Of course the rest of my body was moving too but the initiation came from these two places. At the end of the process I realised that the areas I had chosen during the exercise were a reversal of my habitually difficult area (the hips) and familiar area (the feet). Ask anyone who goes to my classes and they'll tell you how much I love working on feet. My hips on the other hand have caused me all sorts of problems. If there is one area I have to work very hard on it would be my hips, as Anna would put it: I have Kangaroo rather than Turtle hips. So it's quite interesting that in that space and time, this relationship was reversed.

Having devised a movement quality, we're asked to draw an image somehow portraying a quality / idea / feeling of what we had just danced. We then get into groups of three. We each take a turn to hold up our own image whilst one person moves in response to it and a second person, the 'poet', offers a verbal response. At the end of each 5 minute performance the 'artist' has a chance to talk about the experience after which the performer and then the poet offer their perspective. I was mostly struck by the fact that the structure of artist, performer and poet gave each member of the trio an active role, so everyone's presence felt more invested in the process. We each had something to lose, and I think this made the quality of the ensuing discussion a little richer.

Wednesday afternoon. I spent the two hour lunch break trying to recover from my fit of crying triggered by Meredith Monk's music in the morning session. I'm telling myself it was the music. We're asked to consider the following life/art questions:

What in your life is opening? What in your life is closing? What do I want / need to open / close in my life?

Deep stuff. So I turn to my journal and write in all seriousness: "My feet are so dirty and I wish I could clean them. I don't really know what to write." Clearly, I think I'd decided to take it all with a pinch of salt. Earlier that morning I had announced to my car pool pals how I really didn't get the connection with emotions etc. I found it a bit of a stretch. But only a few hours later I was bawling my eyes out. These questions just seemed to press the issue a little. It took some time for me to get something out. Then we transferred the words into a drawing and then again into a dance. This time we performed in large groups of 10 people. We had two witnesses each who sat out and watched. At the end of the performance the performer spoke about their experience, then the witnesses could offer their perspective. "You have colour in your picture!" someone exclaimed later. True. So far everything I'd drawn was monochrome.

I had an interesting realisation at the end of the performance. During the improvisation performers were given the option of talking. Someone in the group had taken on this option in a somewhat more determined way. The whole performance was taken over by her monologue. I mostly spent my time trying to withdraw from the noise and pull of the group. I just wanted to do my own dancing! Then at some point I crossed paths with Dena who had taken to asking everyone questions. "Who are you?" she said to me. Instead of responding, I kept moving in my own little dance. I remember considering a response but then deciding that to say anything just wouldn't have felt authentic to where I was at that moment. So I ignored her, making her question an abstraction. **Sitting with my two witnesses afterwards I thought to myself: "what a typical bloody Londoner I am. Someone talks to me out of the blue and I assume they're mad and ignore them."**

Thursday afternoon. We cover ourselves in tick and mosquito repellent and are led into the woods. This is meant to be a dance with nature. We arrive at a spot for this enlightening process and there's the very distracting sound of a digger in the background. I first stand by a tree stump that looks a little interesting. The score is to make contact and then have some kind of a movement dialogue with nature. OK then. [Suspending judgement](#). I stand there for a good minute before realising that this particular bit of nature is swarming with mosquitos and that I probably haven't covered my legs with enough of that tick spray. So eventually I give up on my efforts to ignore it all and find a less mosquito ridden tree. It's ok to move away from something that feels hostile, I tell myself. The second tree is a large redwood oak. My dance doesn't feel hugely overwhelming. I lean into its bark, sit back and look up at it, try to see right to the top. The dialogue feels very one sided... trees don't take any notice of you.

I walk back to the deck where Rosario asks us to grab our journals and consider: “What am I bringing with me from the natural world?” But unlike yesterday’s conundrum today I have a clear answer. I realise that I spend most of my life trying to meet others. I travel to my clients and classes. I feel that I’m always trying to meet someone else’s standards and needs. Trying to be the teacher they need, trying to be the flatmate they need, trying to be a useful sister, trying to meet funding aims and objectives. And here I am at the home of a woman who is known the whole world over and who has built her work around her life. Anna has been developing work in her home studio since she was 22. People travel to her, some from considerable distances. **With all the emphasis on getting yourself ‘out there’ I think we undervalue the need to create roots, to stand squarely in our own space and say “this is me”. There’s a popular saying that goes: “If you don’t like your life, change it. You’re not a tree.” Yes change precipitates growth, but you can’t grow a tree if you keep digging up its roots. Sometimes relating to people needs you to shift your perspective. But what if I stand still? Might that not allow other people to adjust and relate to me? Who says we need to spend our lives hopping around everyone else?**

It’s the final day. By this point I’ve learnt to just keep my shoes on so my feet don’t get all mucky. Rosario takes us through an improvisation sitting on the benches. To be honest my mind is not on my movement, because last night the UK voted to leave the EU and I cannot think straight, I’m so frustrated. Borders! They want *more* borders! Rosario asks us to take paper and colours and draw out something that carries the feel of the movement. I wasn’t paying attention enough really, but I trust another saying that Rosario has: “the experience is in your body in some way.” After drawing, we return to our journals and write a letter to ourselves “from the voice of the drawing”. Suspend judgement. Trust the body. Just write. And I do. When we get back into our support groups to share our pictures and thoughts someone asks if we’re reading out our letters too. Rosario says that this is just an option as letters can be hugely personal. Phew! I think. I’m not reading mine. No way! But as the first member of the group reads through her letter, and then the second and then the third, fourth, fifth, I slowly start to realise that there is sheer wisdom coming out of these insights. Not only this, but **by being authentic to themselves they have written things that I empathise with and that resonate with me.** So I read my letter too.

Final Thoughts

It's been a week now since I got back from California. Stepping back into my old shoes, I've been wondering about what I've learnt. They say that when you learn something new you need to put it into practice within a few days, otherwise you lose touch with it and the learning falls by the wayside. That's all very well when you know what you've learnt. A new exercise, for example has an obvious form, something you can take hold of and define in the short term. But very often learning is less about new tricks and more a kind of imbibing of ideas or approach. It's a kind of quality.... Whilst I write this with the intention of pinning down some key thoughts, as a means of drawing this experience to some kind of conclusion, I don't believe that this is final. This is just what stands out so far.

Scores. I've worked with scores a lot in my creative work. I dedicated my whole [MA thesis](#) to creating via scores. I found Anna's definitions and thoughts about the RSPV cycle helpful. Again this is something I'm already doing, but the clarity around the approach, the labelling and identifying of the different components, brings a little more shape to this process, even if the term 'valuation' is a little too American for me...

Collective Dances. We really do live in a world where convenience and efficiency is rated above the more undefined qualities that come through experience. In the Pilates world this translates into two things: private sessions and online resources. Before I move on, I think that both of these serve an important purpose. Some people need more assistance due to injuries, some people just don't have time to get to a class. I understand and appreciate both. But something new happens when you move as a group. I've been thinking about this for some time now, but this specific experience really highlighted the importance and benefit of being amongst others. It's not only a valuable social experience. There's something you gain from moving in groups. A quality, a tempo, a focus, a playfulness, a relationship that no amount of self-practice will ever achieve. I think sometimes we're so stuck in our own needs that we forget / ignore the power and importance of moving together.

Relationships. The biggest take away from this whole experience was not in the specific 'tools' employed. It was in the underlying philosophy that you cannot separate a person's body from their internal and external environments. A person is not a body with a head attached at the helm. A person is a point of inter-relationships, within themselves, between themselves and others, with themselves and their environment. We don't just teach bodies we are feeding information into a complex system of inter-relationships.

Life-Art. I think that the ethos behind the work of the Tamalpa Institute is that through creative exploration we access a truer understanding of ourselves. Because movement, writing and drawing give licence for the ambiguous, non-literal, obliqueness within which self-expression truly lies. I guess this is why I'm an artist. But this work has never figured in my dance training or professional practice. I have spent the better part of 34 years trying to refine an understanding of movement, to understand how to move better and create better dance works, but somehow the messy area of feelings was never really addressed. The shift from feelings to movement or dance is a big one. There were occasions when I felt that the approach was naive to suggest that the bridge could be crossed so simply. This was a tough critique to let go of. But the insights I gained from the work were actually quite profound. So there is something in there.

Home. I came home and realised that I don't really have a home. I rent a shared flat in a city that may well be getting ready to kick me out. My childhood home is all but sold, but even if it weren't, after 16 years it would be hard to call that 'home' either. 16 years of roaming. No roots. I came 'home' with an urge to create my home, a home studio where I can work and live and create my own space.

Sometimes you just have to be brave and grow roots. Anna may not have said this, but this is what I heard from that space, *this* is what I'm taking with me.