



Conversations

Interference and Freedom

Interference and Freedom: Conversations with Connections Artists

by Barbara Simonsen and Elisabeth Gade Nielsen

In the spring of 2020, we asked the artists who had been a part of Connections between 2017 and 2020, to reflect on their experiences and outcomes of their residency period through a written questionnaire. Following up, we did oral interviews with six of the artists, and these are the interviews presented here. The artists represent six different residency projects and a variety of aesthetic approaches to dance and movement, and the interviews focus on the artistic process, development and new knowledge, and especially if and how the framework of the residency had an impact on that development.

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Photo: Anne Hübertz Brekne

Artist: **Annika Kompart**

Project: **Vintage Dance**

Connections 3.2 / 2019

A new collaboration

We were recommended for each other by Sarah's [Fdili Alaoui, ed.] Ph.D. mentor, who is a graphic designer and who worked with me. She said it would be interesting to form a collaboration between Sarah and me. So, I thought, why not, and we had a skype meeting where we just talked about art and our interests. We talked about old dancing techniques, Laban, Directions. I'm very interested in what I call my 'somatic heritage' - who has influenced my movements - and also in how dance can be made more accessible in our society. And Sarah was interesting for me, because she has worked a lot with technology, which is a big part of our society now, and this could be a tool for creating a digital archive for our dances, to develop them and pass them on, like vintage. You get a sweater from someone, and it is passed on and given new life with someone else. Recycling and updating.

And we felt our ideas coming together, writing back and forth. I've done some research with dancing to the rhythm from speech, and we included that as well. And then we wrote an application, because we felt we had something to investigate, and Connections was the obvious frame for us. It suddenly made me feel at home, because I was the one who was in Denmark! It was really the first time that, as an artist, I felt at home. Because I could speak Danish with our collaboration partners,

and Sarah couldn't. I really felt at home and felt connected to Denmark, because I was invited as the local artist, and it made me feel very appreciated.

Somatic heritage

I was in a performance, and one of the audience members said to me afterwards, 'Oh, are you a Pina Bausch-dancer?' And I said, 'No, I have never worked with them, actually.' And it was very interesting. I had also noticed, when I was in another production, that some movements were very easy for me to learn. It was as if they were already in my body, and I wondered why it was completely different for my friend. She was more hip hop, or there was just a different style that was more present in her body. To me it was very easy to do the patterns on the floor, and they were very quickly clear to me, but she was completely lost. It was really funny, because she just didn't have them inside. She couldn't see why. On the other hand, she was comfortable with hip hop and street and cool, and I was just ... you know, I try to 'fake it till you make it', but it's just not naturally in my body.

Whether it's something that the body does, or something that comes from my German background or the teachers I've had... And so I went back and looked at the dances that I have been introduced to, and they all had these German guidelines and teachers, but I never actually had direct contact with the Pina Bausch company. Until now, actually, because I got curious about where this connection came from. And I am going to be artistic assistant for a dancer in one of their productions - something that is quite a dream.

I've also taken an online course with Thusnelda Mercy, the daughter of Dominique Mercy who is a Pina Bausch dancer - in 'Kontaktthof' and 'Café Müller'. She practically grew up as a Pina Bausch child. And in that online workshop I also felt very much at home. Whatever it means to feel at home: there is a belonging and a connection, and you don't have to do very much to be in it and feel comfortable. It's as if the movements are already in my body; just like I have learnt a language from the beginning, my mother tongue. It's just inside me. I wasn't taught by Pina Bausch dancers, but maybe the culture in itself has a way of moving. The entire culture, I mean, how you move about the city and so on. Maybe that has an influence on my movements as well. I haven't investigated that more closely yet, but I think there might be something in that.

Vintage and sustainability in dance

I think it's very relevant to reuse. It has something to do with not standing still. Everything has already been made. Why not reuse it? If I make a movement, my friend can do that movement completely differently. Even though it is the same movement. And if I put it into another context it will be something different again. So if I do it with my body it is unique, compared to another body, because I have a different imprint from anyone else.

We always have to produce, produce, produce, but there is so much more that we can look at in depth, also in a movement. If I repeat it a hundred thousand times it might change and find new ways. I'm very interested in not throwing things away and just produce and produce. We can find out what more there is to this. What more can we find in this movement? Can we combine them differently to make something new? I also find that it's very important in our present time that our artistic work is sustainable. It's important to recycle. You don't always have to make a new costume for a new performance. You can reuse, exchange, barter. What possibilities are there to think out of the box? There aren't a whole lot of money in the arts, either, so how can we use these principles so that we can pay our rent and be professional about our art? And how can I contribute

as an artist to making a good society for everyone?

Making dance accessible

When you make something for an archive, it's so 'man-made', it's so perfect, so finished - and we have the power structure over it. I always find that interesting, because how can you make an archive of dance? It is a very big question. How can you do it in a way that keeps it alive, where it can change and develop, and where others can take something from it? That was exactly what we wanted to try out, a bit provocatively by being at the Reuse station. Here we had one container that said, 'Take a dance', and another container that said, 'Give a dance'. And at first, people just wanted to take the dancing clothes! Everybody was really provoked. 'What? You can't take a dance, you can't give a dance, what is this?' It wasn't something you expected at all at a Reuse station. But then some people came who started giving dances and couldn't stop. Somebody came with ballroom dancing etc. It was really funny how people reacted.

I think dance has disappeared a bit from our society. We meet to eat, we meet for coffee, but we don't really meet to go dancing. Maybe at a club or to party, but that's different. You rarely go out dancing. Maybe to take a class... So to connect it with technology I think might upgrade it and make it more visible again in our society, and more accessible. And perhaps less frightening. I think a lot of people think that they can't dance and are afraid of it. But if there is an app they might look at it and do something by themselves, and maybe that could open some doors, and they will go further with it. Also, in our archive, there are ordinary people who give their dances and explain why they find it important and how to learn it and so on. It makes it very individual and personal.

When you go and see ballet, I mean it is *so* far from ... anything human. It's just ideology, shown on stage. And that's fine, so are fairy tales, and fantasy. But it's so far away, somehow, that we can't connect to it. I'm trying to make something that is a bit more tangible, something that will make everybody dance somehow. Of course, there are professional dancers and that's important - but I don't want to miss that part of dance, the fact that you can meet to dance, and you can do something good for society with it. And this norm of thinking that you have to understand what they are showing - no, maybe it just evokes a feeling, maybe it just affects something in the way that I think, maybe it gives me ideas, maybe I can just relax and not understand.

The exchanges

It was very exciting to meet the Somali dancers. They were a bit shy about showing their dances, because they don't consider themselves professionals. So we had to find a way to make them feel comfortable, also because the whole concept was a bit strange to them. They had danced at a couple of shows, but this idea of us taking their dance to make our own... Because we did take their dance and made a hip hop version of it. At first they were a bit skeptical, but then they thought it was quite cool, to take a folk dance and turn it into hip hop. It ended up being a good balance. First, we visited them, and then they came to us in the studio, and that was good. It created a professional frame where we could share our dance.

I found it very moving when I showed them the Pina Bausch dance and saw how they did it. It was really heart-warming to see others do your movements. Very beautiful. And I think they enjoyed seeing us trying theirs. You become quite vulnerable when you move and try out other people's movements, and it means that you make an effort to try to understand each other. It's like when you try to speak another language. Of course, you make mistakes and it's not perfect, but they can see that you are trying really hard.

Having the Indian dancers with us was lovely, too, and it was yet another way of exchanging dance. You could tell that they were used to being in a studio, used to teaching and explaining their dance. The Somali weren't familiar with showing their dance in a pedagogical way, they just dance. They brought a song book and said, 'This is how we do it', and then we just entered into it. So we were just in it right away. In Indian dance there are a lot of figures that you make with your hands, and they have a certain meaning - and it's a bit more complicated than learning a folk dance where everybody can join in from the start. It took longer to learn, and they weren't quite satisfied with what we did! But they were very sweet and clever and good at showing it to us. And wearing their costumes was fun, because they are a big part of the dance. You take on a role.

I think, like me, they all found it moving that we tried their dances. You could feel that. And I think it made them feel safe that we chose to be the vulnerable ones first and learn their dances so that they could see how much we struggled. After that it was easier for them to learn our dance. You get to know someone in a different way than by saying, 'Hey, what's your name, what do you do...' You can tell from the body what they have to say. It was very beautiful. And all these dances also went into the archive.

Not having to produce

It means that you can keep going. Without thinking about having to make a conclusion. It means you are not thinking about producing, but about investigating. Opening rather than closing. We have of course documented what we've learnt, and we also made a showing to sort of frame the whole thing. Or to mark the completion of phase one. As a sharing process, for us to realize what we have been investigating, and to benefit from the feedback you get when you make a showing for others. But I think it's very beneficial to have the premise that you don't always have to have a product, but that you can really go deep and continue working. It can be scary, too, to not have something that's fixed - but we got so much out of it. I enjoy working like that. And I also enjoyed rounding everything off to thank for what we have achieved so far.

Without the premise of investigating rather than producing, we would definitely not have been to the Reuse station and discovered how people reacted to the vintage concept. I also don't think we would have been to Gellerup and met the interesting people there. To meet like that and experience their openness. It was a lovely, lovely experience that I would not have missed for the world. And also important to be in the studio together, dancing together. I thought that was absolutely amazing. Connections made that connection. It would have been something extra in a production that you would usually dismiss. It was really something extra, and it was a huge support that Anne [Hübertz, project manager of Connections, ed.] made those connections and created those possibilities for us, because it means you can continue your artistic investigation without worrying so much about practicalities.

Continuing the work

The archiving process is difficult, because who controls it, and who has access to it? We decide that, and it ends up being not so accessible after all. We haven't found a solution to that yet. At the moment Sarah is in charge of our archive and has the access code, so she has the power. And there has been an interest from a few companies, who asked her to come and archive their repertoire.

I'm sure this method - exchange, reuse and archive - can be used in the future. Especially when we include the technology, because it means that you can invite and activate young people who can take it further and create a future where dance is more accessible.



Photo: Blag Popov Photography

Artist: **Sebastian Pickering**

Project: **Still Photography and Dance**

Connections 2.2 / 2018

Dance and photography

It started with a research project that Iris initiated while we were at school [ArtEZ University of the Arts, NL, ed.] together. I came on board very early on, and we both had the same fascination of the contrast between live dance/theatrical dance - where nothing ever stands still, where there is always movement, always something happening, always life - and photography, which of course is the opposite. It might look very life-like, but it's not moving at all. That was the original fascination, and when we wrote our application for Connections, we felt that it would be really interesting to work with a photographer. Our background is dance, and none of us has any professional knowledge about photography as a medium. In the application you had to include a local collaboration partner, and it was ideal for us to bring in a photographer. So we ended up collaborating with Chris [Christoffer Brekne, ed.], and our whole residency was very much based on that collaboration. He was usually there three times a week, making images with us, taking photographs of us. We would use those photographs to develop the work further, and then he would photograph us again, so it went back and forth all the time. And it was great for us to let Chris take care of the photographic element, and to have complete freedom to play with what it meant to us. To be moving or not,

to copy an image or - all the different possibilities that we could find. It ended up being the basic method for our work.

We were surprised at how much meaning, how much storytelling there can be in something that doesn't move at all. It's hugely fascinating to me that when you see an image, or even more, when you see a still image on stage you immediately start to imagine things about it, because you don't exactly know what it is. Like with all the images in a comic book, where you combine them through your own imagination and fill out what happens between them. And it's really interesting to use still images as a contrast to movement. You question movements less, but on the other hand dance is often much more abstract. A photograph can be abstract, but mostly you can make a qualified guess as to what is going on in it - whereas with dance sometimes you have no idea what it is you're seeing.

The concept of working from photograph to dance to photograph to dance, in a reflective process, as we did in Aarhus, became the foundation to build on for us. Before that we had been working with external photographs, looking at the form, looking at the meaning, using them as inspiration, but in the process with Chris we started using photographs of ourselves, which gave a new dimension to the copying. We become image, and the image becomes us.

After the Aarhus residency we have learned more and more that you have to be careful which images you put together, or you end up with something more confusing. Again, because dance is abstract you don't want the audience thinking, this should mean something, but it's very hard to see... And it's difficult, we search for that balance where it makes sense to use the still images without just making a comic album effect.

Not having to produce

It was very beneficial for us. We both went into the residency with the idea of having part of a performance at the end of it, so we still had the aim to make some sort of product. But it was incredibly nice not to have to stress about making 30 minutes or one hour of a show, or presenting it in a theatre. It gave us the possibility to try out several different things. Our final presentation consisted of four small sketches, none of them super fixed, but each of them based on a different idea. It was great to be able to jump into different things instead of just picking the first and only thing you've come up with during the first week.

I think practically everything we did was something we would not have explored if we had had to make a finished product. It's interesting, actually, last year we had a residency in Holland of the same length as Connections, but where things were the opposite. It was a performance residency and we had to create a performance of about 12 minutes to present by the end of the four weeks. And it was very clear that we spent the first week on our exploration and the next three weeks on finishing our performance. Whereas in Aarhus we spent the first three weeks exploring and playing around and the final week putting some things together to present. And what came out of it was far, far more productive and interesting.

Discoveries

It seems a bit funny to say this, because naturally in anything you spend a long time on you will find an enormous amount of possibilities: But after the first week we realised that this could have a thousand different forms and expressions and that this whole idea of working with photography and dance, stillness and movement, was much more than just making one performance about it.

That it could be the basis for many performances and for an entire working method. And that's what it has become.

I never found the many possibilities challenging, or only in a good way. On the contrary, what I'm always afraid of is to come in in the morning not knowing what to do and then spend five hours feeling like I should be doing something, but not having any ideas. So, for me it was excellent to get up in the morning thinking, ok, we can do this or this or this - what sounds like the most fun? Let's do that. And at the end of the day to find that it had turned into something completely different that was also cool and that we wanted to continue working on the next day. For us I think the challenge of being selective came later on. After we had wrapped the work up and taken a break from it, we met again about a month later and said, 'Okay, are we going to make a performance?' And then we had to pick one of our ideas and go with that. That was much more challenging, because you take some of the playfulness out of it and make yourself focus on one thing. But that was later.

There were a lot of small aha moments, for example dramaturgically, when we got feedback from Chris and from Barbara [Simonsen, dramaturg, ed.]. Since Iris and I create our own things and dance them ourselves it is sometimes difficult to see them from the outside. They saw things that were completely different from what we had expected. And how you take that feedback says a lot about how you work. Very often I thought I had a pretty clear idea about how a certain sketch worked, what you would see, what was interesting - but then Chris or Barbara would come in and point out something completely different. That was very useful. And challenging, sometimes, because it forced me to work in a different way than just from my own point of view. Remembering that at the end of the day other people have to see this and understand it and get something out of it. There wasn't one big aha moment, but a lot of small moments where we were surprised at what they saw in the things we were doing.

Three levels of dramaturgs

Barbara was the reasonable voice in our research. Without her thoughts, suggestions, advice and presence we would only have created non-sense which no-one would care to watch. She encouraged us to consolidate our material and her honest and intuitive feedback always pushed us in new directions and played an important role in building more concrete sketches from our material. I think what Barbara did really well was that she sees things as theatre. Especially since we are working with still images that are concrete, that create associations. For us dancers it is easy to just say, 'Yes, that looks good, and then we can do this...' The strength in Barbara's feedback was that there were things she understood and things she didn't, and it was very useful to hear. She had a great eye for small details that we would have skipped over, thinking they weren't that relevant in the whole. Where she told us, 'When your facial expression is like this it really makes sense, I'd like to see that again' or 'Where that small movement is less precise than you want it to be, that's where it's interesting'. I don't know if this is true, but it seems to me to be a more theatrical way of looking at it, looking for the small details that make sense instead of looking for something big and nice and dancelike, so to speak!

Without Chris, we would not have had the opportunity to work with (live) photography and light tech which ended up being main components of our research. He also shared and helped us develop ideas throughout the process. On one hand he was just as big a part of our small collective as Iris and me and a big part of the creative process with a lot of ideas about lights and so on that we used. On the other hand, he was not there every day and could still have something of the

outside eye function. And when I think about it, it was funny to have both sides - all three people or functions: Iris and I who are there all the time to give ourselves feedback; Chris who is there about half the time to be a part of the project, but also being able to see it from outside; and Barbara who was there a couple of times a week to give feedback, but not part of the creative process. And then Anne [Hübertz, project manager of Connections, ed.], who was like the dramaturg one step further out. She was there a lot for the practical things - costumes and driving us around and helping us on a daily basis - but she also came to watch us and give feedback, maybe once a week. And that was interesting too, because her input was different: 'Ok, last week you were doing that, this week you are doing something totally different - and this is how I see a connection'.

Interference

Iris and I have to know how to take the feedback. Are we going to say, 'Oy, that's a good idea, now we'll change the entire piece' - or do we hold our own without becoming defensive about it, saying, 'There is an idea to this, it just isn't developed enough yet'? Again, not having the heavy obligation of producing made the feedback process work very well. We had complete freedom to try out new things inspired by the feedback, and we also had complete freedom to keep what we had without having to make a quick decision to go in one direction or another.

Connections has been incredibly useful to us. What we started there has quite simply been the basis of what we have done for the past two years and what we are still working on. I believe we have a much clearer mutual understanding of our own work and methods - for communicating with each other, audience and peers. So, I just feel very lucky that such a short period of time has given me so much.



Photo: Christoffer Brekne

Artist: **Jernej Bizjak**

Project: **For Ludwig**

Connections 3.3 / 2019

The idea

I came here with Joan van der Mast, my professor of Laban movement analysis from CODARTS, Rotterdam Dance Academy in Holland where I was studying. We applied together, and our idea was to work with a musical composition and to convert the musical notation into a dance notation through the medium of a body.

So, I knew I wanted to visualize the music, I didn't know how. The first day I came here I worked with the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata, and I was listening to the music, thinking, what feels right here? How can I use the music in different ways? The first movement of the Moonlight Sonata is very slow, for that I just used the movement system that we developed. The second movement I used in a more traditional way, like a ballet solo. Moving on a diagonal, drama happens, the patterns in the space and so on. The third movement is the one that we did in the final showing, and there was also improvisation, because that was what the music was telling me. So, we used different movement approaches for each section. I didn't know that I was going to do that. I knew we needed to visualise the music somehow. And while listening to the music I was wondering how I could embody it, how I could be precise. I thought, let's go with the piano; maybe

that is the most doable way. A piano, then violin, cello - to capture them all is too complex. And the system we developed came out of that. It was something I didn't know I was going to do. But I thought we needed to create some kind of system that is consistent, that we can follow, that we can check on to see if it's working, if we are doing the same every time. And then we realised that we needed a labanotator to check on us. [Labanotation is a notation system for recording and analysing human movement, developed by dance artist and theorist Rudolf Laban in the late 1920's, ed.]

We connected with the German labanotator Thomas Schallmann - they are so hard to find - to establish this system. I knew the choreography, but I can't read labanotation. Joan can, so she could check on him, while he checked on me and vice versa. We were constantly testing each other. I have never experienced working with a labanotator; they are like living fossils, like these archive people that you never meet, that you just hear about. Because of video recordings they aren't used very much anymore.

We were listening to the music, we divided the notes into different categories, and then we gave those notes body parts. The body parts connected to the Laban system, and so we found a kind of common agreement on how it would be logical. For example, the left-hand notes are the pattern on the floor, the right-hand notes are the pelvis and the upper body. So, we were listening to the music and writing for example, A, Des, E, A, Des, E, with the feet and legs, and at the same time the other notes with the arms etc. And creating this specific system was a major thing that we found.

The research mode

I had heard about the Connections programme and that it was very good - that you had the freedom and the luxury of not having to produce and give a final presentation. But when I got here, I thought, 'Wow, it's even better than what I heard.' It's so important, this freedom that one gets here, because it opens you up completely and you don't feel any pressure. The discovery of this safe space to explore in was totally new to me and different from other residencies. Of course, you also want to do something in order to test things on people, or with your collaborators, but from the first day when we got here, they said, 'Don't focus on the final showing. You can just talk or show photo slides or whatever' - and they repeated this every day, and now I know why. Because it really makes a difference. So, finding out about this bubble that you can create for yourself without external pokes was the most important discovery.

You dare to make more mistakes; you dare to take bigger risks. You dare to connect with people that you don't even know, that you haven't made a background check on. You just go on a ride without knowing the destination. And the fact that you can just brainstorm and come up with ideas, like with Anne, and the production team is trying to satisfy your wishes and needs, and this can totally take you in another direction... The possibility to go to ARoS and to concerts, to Godsbanen and Katapult to see what was happening. And to meet the Connections artists - from the residency before us and the one after - these meetings are crucial to expand your vision, to connect and share experiences. To get their feedback on their residency, what it brought afterwards and what their process was like.

Everything we found was something that came out of being in that research mode. When you are in production, you have one month and a half, including the premiere - so you immediately go for something that will impress and that you think will work, and you just wrap it up. For example, the system was so hard that I felt like I was breaking down; I've never had so much pain in my brain, like a burning sensation - probably like when you study formulas - and I thought, 'It's not worth it, who cares anyway?' And they said to me, 'You know you can fail, it's okay...' And it was because

of this luxury of not having to succeed that I could go into it in such detail, really into each finger. Otherwise, I would have said, 'Let's just do this, let's not dig, let's keep it on the surface. I mean, how big is the deaf community in Denmark, maybe five of them will see this, it's good enough!' But no, it's not good enough. If you want to do it, go for it now that you have the research period. Then you will see what you will go for in the production.

The connections

One of the things that was totally new was to involve a sign language interpreter. I didn't even know that I was interested in that. I knew I liked sign language, but I hadn't thought of using a sign language interpreter as a performer. But we connected with Camilla Kristensen Røber, and she was a very lucky choice, because she has translated a lot. Not just the basic things like doctor's appointments or in court, but also in theatres and concerts, and she has been on stage with a rock group. And she became an important collaborator. After a session with her I realised that she was always placed in the corner, behind my shoulder, so as not to disturb, and I said, 'You are going to be at the centre of the stage; you will be disturbing me. Let's do everything the other way round.'

We connected with the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Aarhus University and their Delphini-1 project [a nanosatellite that has collected images from space during its orbit 2019-2021, ed.], and we visited their monitoring room. Because it was part of the visual idea to bring the 'holy' Beethoven universe back to earth and create a way to project it visually on stage. And I wanted to project photos from up there. First, I also wanted to play Beethoven music in space, but they told me that wasn't possible, because there is no oxygen and the sound wouldn't spread. And the nanosatellite doesn't have a microphone, but it has a photo camera, and so ... But yes, I wanted to play the music up there and connect to the satellite during the performance. Because you know when you are on a plane and you listen to classical music and you are on top of the world? I thought, we need to go higher, how can we go higher? And I found out that Aarhus University had launched this Delphini-1 satellite, and Anne organised a session with them. They were so happy to meet us, because the project is really geeky, you know, and normally nobody from the outside is interested ... And we got the images and permission to use them as part of the visual idea for our work.

Anne also connected us with Signe Klejs [digital media artist, ed.] and Marie Højlund [composer/musician, ed.]. Signe had a lot of impact, because we were trying to convert the music, and we needed something cheap and transportable to fill out the space in the way that music does. And she said, 'Use fog. It's in every theatre, it goes into every corner of the room just like music, and also, it doesn't just work with lights, you can actually project on it.' So, we got the footage from space and we were playing with the idea of Northern lights, fluorescent colours on the fog, and it creates the feeling that it's alive, that we are travelling. It was also a way to capture the spirit of Beethoven on stage - maybe this is him, now, here, imagine the fog is listening, it's moving ... And even though you know that it's just air, fog and some colour projected, people would go and put their fingers through it, or turn around in it. And it's nothing, it's an illusion! It's a cheap trick, but it works. And Signe showed us the way to use it. I did actually have the idea that I wanted to use fog, but I hadn't mentioned it to Signe, because I wanted to have her take on it. And so, she said, from what you're saying you should go for fog. And then she added the projection to it.

Marie Højlund suggested that we use vibrations, another idea that was totally new - and she suggested Rasmus B. Lunding [Digital Design Lab, Aarhus University, ed.] as the right person for us. It was amazing to have all this technology for free. And the possibility of bringing in people from the professional field, having a budget so that you can invite them, really makes a difference.

Perspectives

I think choreography is maybe a bit of a pretentious word for what I want to do; I'm more a kind of experience provider - because I'm interested in the multidisciplinary, not just dance. I only want to make art or projects that have some kind of impact on society, on the world. I have been in companies and projects that didn't make any sense. You know, when you move for no reason and just for the sake of executing forms on stage. I'm not interested in that. The Connections residency made that even more clear to me. I want to do more of what makes a difference. I like to flip all the knowledge around, like when Camilla shared her experiences with always being in the back, always out of the way, never hired by the institutions - and we put her in front, on stage. I mean, why do you do something if it doesn't have any purpose? Send the money to an organisation instead...

But does that mean that every production will be about inclusion and so on? I don't want to play that card or be like the guy who only does inclusion projects. There is a trap in that. I really want to ... When people say they want to change the world with art, it's so naive, but what's the sense if you don't? I just want it to make sense.

And first of all, I don't want to go into a project without having a residency first! And because of Connections I am starting a residency programme in Slovenia, with our collective, Institute 0.1 - Institute for Contemporary Art Practice and Theory 0.1. A programme to focus on the process, not the project. It's in my home town of Vrhnika, 15 km from Ljubljana, in a beautiful old renovated theatre. They are very supportive, but we need to raise the sufficient funding. Hopefully, we can make an exchange programme, a Denmark-Slovenia connection. We need this kind of residency.



Photo: Private, Marie Keiser-Nielsen

Artist: **Marie Keiser-Nielsen**

Project: **The Farmor Project**

Connections 3.1 /2019

Reconnecting

We [Marie Keiser-Nielsen, Niels Plotard, Florinda Camilleri, ed.] have known each other for many years, but have never worked together before. So, it was fantastic to find out exactly how we collaborate and how to find our individual identities within the project. It was really rewarding. It was also great to see the project take shape, because until then it had only been ideas and thoughts. The design we developed - not so much the end result but more the process or the framework we developed for future projects of this kind - I think was super exciting, because we really started from scratch. We had some idea of what we wanted to explore, but were particularly interested in exploring the *way* to do it; how this project could be carried out and unfolded.

An essential thing for me was to experience this open door into the performing arts community in Aarhus. I am from Denmark originally, but I have lived and worked abroad. So, all of a sudden to come home and find out that there are these platforms and all these potential partners, like Connections, where you are boosted and introduced to a lot of new knowledge, has been really valuable to me and has given me a really good start. It has also given me a sense of belonging to Aarhus, which was a city I did not really know. And a sense of belonging to a performing arts

community, which is something I have not experienced before.-For me personally, as an artist, it has really meant a lot to have this platform to get to know people and collaborate and just meet a lot of people.

The importance of personal stories and personal exchange

I think it was really good that our focus was on the *process*, as it meant that I was able to distance myself a little. The project came from a very personal place, but the way I worked on it was not personal as such, it was more process-oriented. Still, the moment we were in the studio and I was trying to embody some of these things, I just broke down. It was actually a scary experience, I just started to cry. Not because I am particularly sensitive, but because I was trying to embody some of the movements I knew from my grandmother and it was just too much for me. So, it was also very interesting to experience how loaded it really is.

But since I also choreographed for the two fantastic dancers [Marie and Niels, ed.], I could distance myself from it and try to see it through their eyes, as outsiders. I think that also helped to put a distance to it and make it more of a starting point for a process, rather than to bury myself in my own or in my grandmother's personal history. It became a starting point for us to work from and also just an *example* of memories and things that connect us to where we come from.

When you reach out and talk to people to ask them for something personal, I think you have to give something back, and I felt that this was a good and very open starting point. The video clip of my grandmother was a great way to open up a dialogue. If you start a conversation with something very personal and very specific, I think it is easier for other people to open up. That way, it becomes more of an exchange than if we just go out and absorb a lot of knowledge for ourselves without giving anything back. If you want people to share something personal, you have to be willing to open up yourself.

We were also interested in this specificity, so that it didn't become too general or theoretical, because it is in the personal and in the details that we recognise ourselves in each other. It makes it more human, makes us connect. So, it was important that it did not become some abstract project, but that it came to be about people.

It is very exciting to work with different groups and not just artists, because you get so many different insights and perspectives to the questions you ask. You have to be good at talking with people and we really learned a lot about interview techniques - how to ask questions, how to communicate and give space for this person to unfold. And at the same time, how to turn the conversation in a direction that is interesting to us, so that you do not end up with, say, three hours about model trains - because that happened too. So, there are some things you just have to figure out, technically.

Collective nostalgia

One of the things that we found in our research in Aarhus was that for many of the people we interviewed, the idea of home was in the past. It is not necessarily a universal result, but the result of what we found out in Aarhus. Here it appeared that the idea of home was very much tied to persons and also to the past. There was a clear over-representation of past memories as something associated with home, or objects or images from one's childhood. So, there is a sense of nostalgia to it - that home is something you think back on and not necessarily a place you are in now. But I am sure that in other communities where people travel a lot or are not so local, home can be a

feeling in the present or in some future dream. It may not exist yet, but it is something you might like, something you strive for, run for or travel towards.

The database

We had set up some parameters for the interviews in advance and others we found out along the way, as we got more answers and more information. But we used some codes to categorise the answers. An example could be someone writing us a letter in which 'home' is expressed maybe as something in the past or as a place or as a family. For another person home could be like something in a dream or a place far away in the future. And then you try to categorise them like that. Of course, this took a really long time, especially because we had people talking like you and I do now, where we made some recordings that we then had to code afterwards. It is a big task, but it also means that you revisit the material several times.

Of course, it is a sort of pseudoscience since we are the ones who subjectively set the categories. But we talked to a statistician about how to do this kind of qualitative studies. Because the findings are not conclusive, and in the end, we are the ones who decide; is this feeling of home more about the parents, or is it more about the house? So, there is a qualitative and subjective assessment on our part - what do *we* perceive?

We continued our project in Malta so we now have even more statements. That means we have a database both for the Aarhus answers and for the Malta answers, but of course also a general database. The idea is to be able to look at the possible differences, but also look at the big picture on a human level. People from Malta, for example, were very connected to places and perhaps also to the sea, which is a big thing in Malta. Home is the sea, which was not at all the same in Aarhus, even though there is also water here. So, there were definitely some differences that are interesting, depending on where you are. But the idea is for this database to keep growing. It is not like now we close the Aarhus chapter and that was it; it keeps growing, adding to the wealth of material that we already have.

Artists and statistics

Science and statistics calculation is not something we would normally engage in as artists, but it was something we found out in the distribution of roles. Niels and I may have coded 10% of the material, but it turned out we have an analyst in our midst and that is Florinda. It became very clear very quickly that Florinda is actually both really good at it and finds it exciting. She has even considered continuing working on what we found, because she has a very rational and structured approach to the material.

Because we were in Denmark and many of the people that we spoke to, especially the elderly, didn't speak English my role was very much to be the face of the project. I was the one who talked to people and made contact. And then Florinda did a lot of the analytical work of sorting the material into the different categories, whereas Niels was the one who filmed, took pictures or recorded and just took care of the whole technical aspect when we were out doing these interviews. So, we were a little interview machine with very different roles.

New directions and the dramaturg

Having a mentor [dramaturg Inge Agnete Tarpgaard, ed.] and having scheduled appointments with her meant that we had deadlines where we had to account for how far we had come; whether we had kept the goals that we had set for ourselves, whether we had achieved what we wanted. This

meant that we had to formulate an answer to the question ‘where are we really in our project?’, we had to reflect on our process, and were forced to relate to our work objectively.

I think it was really good for the structure and the process that we had these milestones, where we stopped and made status. You could say, in terms of having a fourth person with us, Inge was very little invasive. She was much more listening than actually directing in any way. She just gave us space to talk about things in plenary and she asked some simple open questions in relation to our process and where we were going. It was a good guideline and kept us on the right path.

Inge also played a very important part in helping us define these roles between us, that we at first, perhaps didn't feel we needed to define. It was such a relief for all of us when we defined our areas of responsibility, because then we could simply work on what we needed to, without any uncertainty and without being nervous about ‘am I overstepping someone else's ideas or wishes here?’. When the roles are not clear everyone feels responsible for everything, and that can seem very big or confusing. I don't know why one does not want to say, ‘I am the choreographer’. It was actually how we worked, but we had not said it out loud. It was like, after we talked to Inge about it, it was just okay. Once it was said, I could let go and relax within that role. Of course, we were in it together, all the way around, but the fact that each of us had our own tasks just made it easier to get something out of the days. And we owe a big part of this to Inge, because she was the one who insisted that we say it out loud.

All of a sudden, I did not have to think about lights and statistics. I could concentrate on movement instead and I became much more productive because I was more focused. That made a big difference, it was really a relief. We had not worked together before, so it would also have been very corny to start out as a group by saying ‘you do this and you do that’. We had to find out along the way what each of us were interested in and what was really needed. So, I think it grew in a very organic way.

We didn't really have a clear direction when we started. We knew what we wanted out of the weeks, but we were not so focused. But the fact that Inge made us follow each our own footsteps changed a lot in our process. Having someone who just listens and asks those questions and makes us reflect on why we do what we do - I just think it made the whole process much clearer and simpler for us.

Structure and freedom

One of the main things I experienced - which was the special thing about Connections and the residency format as such – was the fact there are no requirements, no product. In addition, you have no financial obligations, so you are very free in the sense that you don't have to go out and find funding. So, this is really a free space without any stress.

I think it was really an eye opener for all three of us to be in such a residency and project. We were a little stressed at first and had to remind ourselves that we should have fun. If there is something you don't want to do, don't do it, because there are no strings attached. So, this pressure and stress of performing was not there. Still, it was very interesting how productive we were and how much happened organically and unmotivated without us having to push - it flowed by itself and the next step showed up when we got there.

It has certainly changed my practice and the way I think about artistic processes because it was so obvious that you do not become less productive from not having a deadline. On the contrary, your process becomes much more exciting and much more open because there is space to go in different directions and actually let your interests guide you. I definitely think we produced more

because we did not feel pressured. I think we would have felt much more locked if there had been a sharp deadline. That is the big difference from other residencies and we were surprised because we are used to working in a completely different way. So, we did not expect that it could be so free and flow so easily. In any case, it has been a gift for us to experience what it does to our process when there is no pressure.

A new way of working

The Connections residency has changed the way I think about the work process, particularly in relation to having this freedom. But also, the different stages of the work became very clear because part of our process was to *find* the process. So, there was a strong focus on what we did, when and why.

In relation to communication, the residency has made me want to create more in dialogue with other people. It was really exciting to have a lot of different partners. I think it is important not just to have an open communication about one's end product, but to have an open communication about one's process. It is super exciting to invite people in along the way and not just show off some finished result. Sharing processes and sharing the road has been really valuable. In this project, of course, it was even more evident because it is based on people's input. But the fact that people are co-creative and have a co-ownership makes the project much more valuable, because then it is not just mine, but belongs to a whole group of people who can see themselves in it. The community that was around the project, I think has been exciting and it is something I want to continue to work on. This does not necessarily mean that I want to go out and interview the whole of Aarhus every time I do something, but to share the process and get more perspectives on the questions you have with in your artistic work, I think is really valuable.



Photo: Christoffer Brekne

Artist: **Emanuele Rosa**

Project: **As if, I have missed Myself**

Connections 2.3 / 2018

Depersonalisation

The performance *As if, I have missed myself* investigates the out-of-body experience through the body itself, and the fascinating dualism of mind and body. The question how does it - how do they - how do I - work has been a personal drive for this work. When I was younger I had an out-of-body experience. I experienced looking at myself from the outside and I started to see reality also from the outside. Just a few years ago, I found out that this is a defence of the mind, for instance in situations where you are under a lot of pressure. Talking to a friend of mine I learned that quite often it is something that children experience, because children don't know what stress is. So in stressed situations in my life, it could be school or family or whatever, my brain used this defence to make me step away from that specific stress situation. I must have been five or six, and I was feeling as if I was a superhero, as if I had a special power. When you are a kid, you are not asking yourself too many questions – you are just there and you do it. I just remember the feeling of seeing what was in that specific situation. I could see my own body – I was, with 2021 glasses on, socially distancing with myself. However, I don't remember this feeling as a bad one. We started to look at this 'disorder', depersonalization, from a scientific point of view.

It is often combined with another disorder, which is more or less the same, where you see reality not exactly as it is. If this kind of disorder starts to develop, you can get multiple personality disorder and it might become a serious problem. But basically, it is about stepping away from something that you cannot understand – a defence mechanism. The out-of-body experience has been the starting point of the whole project, but it's not the main topic of the piece any more, as the project moved on. This development came about, as the questions of our out-of-body research led us on to other, bigger questions and the contradictions that exist in each one of us: the duality or multiplicity of our ways of being/behaving etc. and then the question of how to make it work. In a time where the future of humanity is questionable and uncertain, to get to know oneself, and to address our understanding of connectedness may be essential to encourage co-existence and harmony in working together towards solutions.

Body and mind dualism

Taking a personal experience and turning it into a performance was, for us, rooted in the use of the body. We were trying to talk about something so abstract and about bodies, and it gave us some challenges to depict the out-of-body experience. Therefore, we used images to try to reproduce this phenomenon of depersonalisation. Fabio and I are both the choreographers and the performers in the piece, and basically, we are using two bodies not just as a representation of the depersonalisation - seeing yourself from the outside - but also as an extension of the personalities, because that is where the project went.

We believe that somehow society brought us up to see and describe ourselves as one specific individual. Therefore, our aim is to make the bodies, the individuals in the performance, disappear. In order to do that we are using video projections to make the images take over the bodies. We try to illustrate how we move from the body and into the mind space, imagining how the mind is. Nobody knows how that can be done, though, and nobody knows where the mind is placed. We always think that the mind is in the brain – but nobody has ever found that out or been able to prove that.

If we talk about religion, it is like asking where the soul is. For some religions it is or was in the stomach, but this is different for each religion and for each person. So we open up a very, very big bag of questions. This is also the dualism that we are playing with: the body/mind aspect and the question of whether the body is a part of the mind, where the mind is placed etc. And we do not have the answers – let us make that clear. But these are questions we want to investigate in our performance.

New collaborations and the importance of latex

This residency made possible a collaboration I had wanted to begin with the Copenhagen-based choreographer Fabio Liberti. We had never physically worked together before Connections, but only shared ideas and impressions on our previous work. We decided to start digging into the main topics of *As if, I have missed myself*, however always through videos/calls and being far apart.

The residency then gave us the opportunity to work together and really get into the theme of bodies. We wanted to strip away all material layers and in the end we were faced with the naked body. Yet, there is one last element of exteriority, which is the skin. If we start to remove the skin we get inside the body and into the mind space.

And so, the moment we discovered the possibility of using latex it was a revelation. We could use this to illustrate the peeling away of the exterior layers. It was, however, quite a challenge to work

with, because we knew nothing about this type of material. But visual artist Signe Klejs, who was our mentor during the residency, gave us some tools for how we could use it. First we actually had pieces of latex, which we were too constricted in, and then we had t-shirts made out of latex, where both of us were trying to fit in, and we were breaking it, moving and turning inside it - until we reached the point of using the material directly on our skin. Then it becomes transparent, and as an audience you don't know that it is there, because you can't see it. You can, on the other hand, hear it because it is noisy and when you peel it off, it looks as if it is your own skin that is being peeled off.

It was a revelation, I would say, which then made us question if there had to be a starting point and a linear dramaturgy, where we go from the body to the mind to the concrete etc. We are still researching to see exactly how to play with that - flash back, flash forward - and we are using various elements to experiment with the flow of the performance. This is in line with the experience of getting to know yourself in a certain way and the different perceptions of your identity.

Reflections on the residency

The most important thing during the residency has been the physical encounters with the artists I was collaborating with. Especially choreographer Fabio Liberti, with whom I had established the foundations of the project.

Meeting the artists has been simply inspiring and most of them - or the ideas we shared with them during the residency - are still part of the finished performance. Meeting Signe Klejs and being introduced to the idea of the latex was probably the biggest surprise, and a quick encounter with Christoffer Brekne [visual media artist, ed.] at the end of the residency meant that he is now part of the team. We also had the chance to explore the physical research together with the dancers of Black Box Dance Company in Holstebro.

Also, the simple fact of having the freedom to choose the way to present the work we made during our time in Aarhus made this residency different from most of others. It did not pressure us to reach any specific result that we could present and therefore gave us the opportunity to feel very free in the everyday work sessions.

For me personally, it was three weeks of discoveries: from being in a country where I have never worked before, to the first time I shared the choreographic experience with somebody else. Three weeks of professional and human sharing with the whole team of Connections.



Photo: Nadia Sofia Karvonen

Artist: **Or Avishay**

Project: **My Piece**

Connections 1.2 / 2017

Connecting

The whole process of Augustine becoming a collective was always rooted in the processes of us meeting, making discoveries and then examining how to move on. Therefore, we have always been evolving and moving from one step to another. The same can be said about our projects, as each project led to the next. And for me, *Connections* was really about connecting our previous projects. First of all, we all needed to come together and reconnect, but it was also about connecting us to the professional field, in a way. We were of course in the professional field, but *My Piece* was bringing our work to another level, because we were creating all kinds of performative events, which made us realise that we wanted to bring our project to the stage.

Mentors and collaborators

Working with Mads [Thimmer, ed.] from Innovation Lab was condensed and it was mainly to get inspiration. However, it was fantastic for us again to see ways of collaborating from a totally different angle and another field, which is what we are curious about and researching. He brought

My Piece

us different ways of working, just sharing their methods of collaborating. It also gave a breath of fresh air in the studio and a different physical activity, to break the daily routine.

Jens [Ardal, ed.] and Morten [Kromann, ed.] from Slagteriet in Holstebro were local artists that we had the opportunity to work with. Jens gave us his opinions and his thoughts, as well as proposing visual ideas. He showed us his portfolio of what he did, and we found a lot of mutual interests. I think it is fascinating that sometimes art, even if you do not copy, has a kind of awareness that somehow passes through more than one person. We saw that he was working with things that we too were interested in and busy working with, which again made us feel a connection.

The Connections residency was also the first time that we had asked a dramaturg to come and join us. Suddenly we were thinking of the stage, and that is a different responsibility somehow. Before, we were feeling more at home in the studio and inviting people here as our guests, but not as collaborators. However, Tine [Voss Illum, dramaturg, ed.] gave us the possibility and space to feel as she helped us by being our outside eyes. We got a better view of what we were communicating, and that was important, because we had not done it before – we had only been alternating the roles between us. She was not from our field, so she brought another point of view with her theatrical way of seeing things and her new ideas about the piece, and we wanted different angles on the project. But I will say: On the one hand it was amazing to get another point of view, but on the other hand we had yet another opinion to include into our discussions. For me, it was positive, but it was also a lot of work, deciding between five opinions, and then six and then seven. She gave a lot of new ways of seeing things, but I'm not sure we gave ourselves enough time to process it. But later on, we did. It took some months to digest.

I think my biggest discovery is that it is not so easy to collaborate, but something to work on and develop. For instance, deciding on the entire framework to support you from both inside and outside, the way to communicate with each other, how to decide things etc. is a difficult process. We are fortunate enough to be five different artists who all bring their ideas and perspectives to the table, but having to choose things and bringing more responsibility towards the outer circles of our collective, and learning all those ways of creating together, makes it much harder. We always want to have connections and people to meet and to work with, but actually when you start doing it... It's great, but it also demands energy. It was challenging and a big learning process on how to do it. For me, it was very much about learning to want less to get a deeper connection.

Transparency

Before we came to Aarhus for the residency, one of the things that we agreed on was that we wanted to link the dancers with the outside world. This meant to perform not only to the dance community. Explaining what we do and inviting people in who are not dance practitioners is about finding the balance between presenting your own truth and learning how to communicate this to the outside world. For me, it was precious to hear the honest and direct reactions from people. They came with a very open mind and I think because we involved them in *My Piece* and they became a part of it, somehow they dared to share what they felt. And with it came an abundance of stories and the ability to see our own work from new angles.

So on one hand, it was amazing for me because this exchange generated a lot of material and a lot of realisations, compared to how I used to see my work. And on the other hand, it was also a lot of information that needed to be processed. It made me ask myself: Am I ready to take in this many reactions and thoughts about something? But I think many of the things that were said stayed with us. Especially the most simple and most direct reactions, when for example people

were simply saying how they felt. We let that enter. Even now, when we perform this piece or give a course on this piece, we insist on not having copyrights. This way, we give it the possibility to change and we always let it change. So it is always about what you keep and what you let go in order for the piece to keep evolving.

Not having to produce

It is essential and very important for the arts. What I see here in Israel is that processes are very much condensed, as there is not a big budget. The budgets that are accessible are reserved for a very clear product and one is expected to produce something. It becomes like a factory of mass production and this is killing the arts. I think it is very important to take your time with a project, look at it from different perspectives, make mistakes and dare to do things that are not shouted out loud and clear. It brings different qualities and then you can choose to bring those qualities to the final product. But if you are very goal-oriented you can't even find those qualities.

For me personally, I have to admit that even though we did not have to produce something, I had the final product in mind. I wanted to use this opportunity because we only meet once a year - so I could not so easily disconnect from the idea of the final product. But I think it gave us the chance to dream big and small.