

Report: MAztp – Master for Contemporary Dance Pedagogy integrates physical and reflective approaches to research materials – digital tools in the curriculum.

Starting point – 1st semester:

In the first semester of the MA program (summer 2012) the students got introduced to the context and broader questions on new artist led publications¹ and projects. The group of seven students has various strong backgrounds in the dance field, from training to performing and teaching. Scott deLahunta and Ingo Diehl presented artist led researches² and materials to the group of students in order to discuss different aims, contexts, artists and researchers, institutions and new upcoming questions in this field.

Working phase – 2nd semester

In context of the Motion Bank Workshops (October 2013) we (Scott deLahunta, Ingo Diehl and Susanne Triebel) developed a “Digital Tools Lab” over an entire week with 6 intense working days. The aim was – to create a productive environment for in depth reflection on a selection of artist led researches in order to shape possible uses for teaching practices. In preparing the event, we decided to work with 4 different tools³ because of their different materiality such as: descriptions, interviews, film, photo, annotations, scores, evaluative structures, combinations of materials and so on. The chosen materials were:

Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker – Choreographer’s Score

Steve Paxton – Material for the Spine

Jonathan Burrows – Choreographer’s Handbook

William Forsythe – Synchronous Objects

Framework of “Digital Tools Lab”:

- After the 1st day each student decided for one tool to work with and to concentrate on. They were mostly coupling up by two and where continuously exchanging on and questioning the material⁴.
- The aim was – to develop a training/warm up, – based on the material, for the other workshop participants of the motion bank week. This offer was planned to happen from the middle of the week on.

¹ “**artist led publications**” refers to the artists perspective taken to research and reveals inside knowledge of artistic processes and productions, f.e. specific structures, perspectives ore context. Mostly they integrate artistic and pedagogic aspects of the work. Even though the research processes for developing the publications are “artist led”, experts from different disciplines in theory and practice are often involved. Those projects are mainly developed outside of research institutions like universities. Referring to the mission, vision and result, these publications are products of intensive researches.

² mainly highlighting the developments, processes and frameworks of different projects. By labeling them as “**artist led researches**”, the focus is on a broader approach to research, taking various discussions and developments on artistic research into account. Rethinking and inventing new methods and strategies as well as developing different manifestations in their materiality is part of the process

³ Describing the outcomes of those examples of researches as “**tools – or digital tools**” shows their specific potential and integral representation for a practical application in the field of dance ore other disciplines. It underlines the methodic and didactic manifestation, framework and clear perspective for people working with the material.

⁴ Talking about the tools – artist led publications as “**materials**” describes the complexity of their multi layered materiality. The manifestation in written, annotated, digital or any other form of documentation takes the variety of perspectives into account which are used in the research processes.

- Creating an open studio space with computers, beamers, screens and flipcharts and at the same time space to dance and move, had a strong impact on the working processes during the week. According to the needs the dance floor was used for dancing and physical exploration, table, mats or computers were taken in and out during the various discussion formats. This multi-purpose teaching and learning environment supported new and direct ways of working and communicating during the processes.
- Feedback sessions and further input from the experts⁵ of the international education group joining in this week were helpful to continuously refresh and question the process.

Getting in touch with this kind of high end materials⁶ during the semester was a strong part of the content work in two of our modules (M4 – Transfer + M2 – Methodologie-communication) The students were as well preparing classes on the material of Dance Techniques 2010 which, by uncovering documented materials to physical practice, can be related to the work with the digital tools.

Teachings:

The described kick-off process was followed by regular teaching sessions during the semester to the MA choreography students under the label of “concepts in dance”. Physical exploration was developed in relation to the specific content/materials, and the approach was getting increasingly free as well as the material/structures were used in different ways, f. e., in the case of de Keersmaeker, experiencing and exploring choreographical structures. With Burrows the teaching process was sometimes strongly related to single quotes of his book which were used for motivation or served as a more general class goal. With Paxton’s material for the spine the main approach was to bring concrete presentations of the video into practice and other movement manifestations. These results as well presented the diverse aesthetics, contents or languages within the tools.

Conference:

Together with Jason Jacobs⁷ I went to a conference in Bern on “visionary education concepts” in the beginning of February 2013. Besides presenting the process on working with the tools within the MA program, we had developed a “performative training” for this event by further researching the material on possible applications to the specific target group of the conference. Presenting the context of the material was extremely important for the understanding of the physical working process. In order to translate a choreographer’s score into a shared experience, mainly structural principles were used to create a new “metatext” in order to convey the content of *Rosas*

⁵ Sarah Whatley, Nicole Haitzinger, John Taylor visited the Tools Lab. Furthermore, exchange with other participants of the motion bank workshop was supported and part of the process.

⁶ The content is described as „**high end material**“ because of the in depth results. The possibility to work with the expertise of highly qualified artists and researchers on the materials/publications is a great opportunity for dance education at this point of time. The high standard of outcomes can be used without the artists being present, creating more flexible ways of working with content especially in the field of dance.

⁷ MA student of the program

Danst Rosas to the 60 participants. The following score was shown line by line during the exploration. It represents the translation patterns of the process. It as well shows the development of further materials as “metatexts” – which are useful, even necessary for teaching and for re-/de-structuring the material. It gives an insight in process decisions for the “performative training” of Jacobs in relation to the material of Keersmaeker.

Walk, Breathe, Pose

Accumulation, Collecting Poses

Formation, Ordering, Exploration

Floor Pattern, Translation, Counterpoint

Quality, Complexity

Choreography

(Diehl, Jacobs)

Gradings:

Last semester was framed by a grading process for this group of MA students. As part of this process each student was preparing a lecture presentation of about 1 hour duration on one example of artist led researches/ digital tools they had been working with. The outcomes were multi-layered performative presentations – taking complex translation processes into account. In this framework the students reflected their individual processes and transferred, presented and/or performed their relations to the materials.

Observations and Questions:

In several feed back rounds with the students during the LAB week as well as during the semester some interesting issues came up or were raised during the discussions:

The students mainly kept attached through the different processes of the whole semester to the tools and techniques they had chosen in the beginning. One student described the need and interest to exhaust the material again and again and again in order to connect to and transform the material in his/her practice. They developed a specific expertise in working with the chosen material over a longer time span – they kind of got experts. This fact causes some general questions on the materials itself, on transmission processes to physical training and to the role of the teacher:

- Does the teacher have to know the tool in order to teach it?
- Would that be different with different target groups?
- How is it possible to explore the tool together (teacher and students)?
- What informations and timespans are necessary in order to get physical and incorporate principles and structures?

During all processes of teaching and physically sharing the material personal/individual-relations to the tool were issues. What is my approach, what is my interpretation due to my background. When is it getting mine? How much do I have to make it my own in order to physical work with the material? How much do I have to relate to the tool in order to make the process clear and so on.

In terms of the different needs for practical and theoretical processes an interesting result of the week came up: The transfer to physicality or embodiment, evolves during a different concept of time than the reflection about it⁸. This point got quite an important issue during the whole semester especially for the perspective on different processes and the question what circumstances are needed in order to work with the different materials.

The students did not expect to enter such a creative and artistic process. The close relation between the choreographic, artistic and the pedagogic aspects of the first teachings and working with the tools was a strong experience.

Furthermore the students described it to be fruitful to develop a specific eye for watching and analyzing in order to re-transmit and to relate to a historical context.

Continuation – 3rd Semester:

Now in the next semester the students will teach the BA course in the 3rd year of ZuKT– the dance department at HfMDK Frankfurt using digital tools. So the whole process from relating physically to teaching to lecturing the content will most probably provoke a next step in the process. It is actually very interesting to see the personal developments of the students in relation to the material and the changing perspectives on it.

Preparation – 4th Semester:

Closing the process off in the 4th semester the student group will teach and exchange on Motion Bank questions with the BA Dance pedagogy students of “Palucca Hochschule Dresden”. The aim is to develop a presentation and exchange format for the final lounge of Motion Bank in November 2013 presenting the latest research results. Parallel to this the student group of MAztp will develop an adequate format in Frankfurt which will continue and further the developments by working with the 4th generation of MAztp students. A wider and more flexible use of the different materials seems challenging and will probably need new formats as well as settings in order to stimulate and support this challenge.

The in depth content from Paxton, Keersmaeker Forsythe, Burrows, Dance Techniques 2010 and other materials in the curriculum is a great possibility for working in the liminal spaces of practice, theory and research. These high end materials function as pedagogical tools/catalysts; they avoid that the

⁸ This aspect of time needs further research in relation to neuro science, cognition, learning theories, or other disciplines.

students get stuck in personal hierarchies. The next period will show how much the focus on new digital publications will as well influence the research processes of the MA students within their Master theses.

(Ingo Diehl)

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