

People, Practice, Process

Clint Lutes has taught professionals, non-professionals, migrants, people living with Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, young, old and others around the world. His choreographic work has increasingly become centred around working with non-professionals and he uses dance as a vehicle to inform, connect and communicate. He is a participant in various scientific and artistic research projects and here he shares part of his creative journey

I am a choreographer who over the last several years has not spent an incredible amount of time 'making art' in the traditional sense. My last professional creation, *Misalliance*, in collaboration with long time bestie and colleague Monica Gillette in 2013, dove deeply into the power dynamics between stage and audience, something I often explored in my choreographic projects. We slowly coaxed the audience into our web of games and structured improvisations, granting them more and more power over what was occurring onstage.

Around the same time Monica was involved in a collaborative interdisciplinary research project called *Brain Dance*. The project explored

Parkinson's and how movement research can be used to both better understand what someone living with Parkinson's is experiencing, as well as serve to inform artistic and scientific collaborations from a non-therapeutic perspective. This project preceded *Störung / Hafra'ah*, an expanded version of *Brain Dance*, which I was luckily invited to join as a collaborator.

The year-long process gathered extraordinary artists that were veterans in process over product based dance-making (Yasmeen Godder, Matanicola). We were collaborating with people living with Parkinson's, neuroscientists, philosophers, mathematicians, families, dance-goers and others. I felt challenged to ask



more questions, to dive deeper into my practice and process, to be clearer, simpler, precise and to play.

We were asked to share our current questions and research in a series of monthly open studio sessions, combining movement explorations, discussions and performance situations. These sessions were designed not to finalize a product



Left: © J. Chapy taken during the Potsdamer Tanztage at Fabrik Potsdam. Right: Clint Lutes leading at People Dancing Summer School 2019. Photo: Rachel Cherry



Ateliers DaPoPa. Photo: Clint Lutes

or performance, rather to include the audience in the research. They greatly informed my current creative endeavours that I now understand as an ongoing tapestry of experiences, research, creation and collaboration.

I have since embarked on various collaborations (DaPoPa, Labodanse, Être et Habit(é)r, Danse au CHUM) that invest in artistic process based on improvisational and somatic practices, generally without predetermined creative and/or scientific outcomes. These projects include collaborations with migrants, people living with Parkinson's, non-professional dancers, researchers, doctors, physical therapists, people living with Alzheimer's, filmmakers, musicians and more.

These intergenerational and multicultural projects focus on communication, awareness (between body and environment), co-responsibility, generosity, curiosity and care. The various collaborations value an expanded understanding of artistic practice, social implication and physical boundaries, fuelling a cycle

of discourse and research in which everyone's input is crucial, regardless of their age, capacity, cultural background or area of expertise.

Following the Störung/Hafra'ah project came the creation of DaPoPa (Danse Pour Parkinson), of which I am Associate Artist. DaPoPa seeks to engage people living with Parkinson's in a choreographic research process, drawing influence from Parkinson's and the lives of those affected by it. The inclusive activities are open to anyone and include a base of participants of varied levels of dance experience, various ages, backgrounds, cultures and professions. The life span of DaPoPa has coincided with a broad expansion of my artistic toolkit and aesthetic.

Through Störung/Hafra'ah I met Asaf Bachrach, neuroscientist and contact improv' practitioner, and began working with his research group, Labodanse. We create and research joint improvisation situations, observing attention and perception in the various interactions involved. We play a lot, then discuss how we played

and what made us want to play more. As expected, this work has greatly improved my French vocabulary, but was not what I anticipated working with scientists would resemble.

Originally targeting people affected by living with Parkinson's, DaPoPa's activities (and my own) have expanded to working with a variety of other groups of people. The project Être et Habit(é)r included the creation of an inclusive work at a psychiatric hospital, on which I collaborated with two people either giving or receiving treatment there. This project gave me the opportunity to invest in a creative process that did envision a performance outcome and required a serious engagement of my own improvisation skills, which were tested throughout the process due to the nature of the environment where we worked and the condition of those participating.

In collaboration with La Briqueterie-CDCN de Val-de-Marne, I have led a series of movement sessions in 2019 titled Danse au CHUM in a residency centre for migrants. More

Inclusive practice

than any other project, this one has simultaneously concerned me, elated me, made me cry, inspired me and generally forced me to bring my entire toy box to the playground. And I feel like that is the situation that has emerged, a safe and caring playground for adults who have likely experienced unimaginable traumas.

In *Danse au CHUM* I prepare for our sessions, then I throw it all away. Every time. I respond to what is happening, to what I feel. Half of the time I'm not even the one leading (and I'm not sure who is). I ultimately release into the process and rely on the flow of moving and slowing and react (or not) accordingly.

My creative practice develops and expands through engagement with the various communities and their experiences. Whether working with people living with Parkinson's, refugees, researchers or dancers, engaging with their respective experiences and their humanity increases trust and empathy. This enables one to go deeper in and out of the studio, and as a result, I am finding equal value in coffee breaks and lunches with people that inspire me as I would find in the studio. I am changing as my practice does, losing shyness and building a delicious cauldron of generosity and love toward as many people in as many situations as possible. The laboratory of life experiences feeds my artistic endeavours.

How can we as artists, regardless of our aesthetics, create spaces and structures that allow for blossoming, for confrontation, for mediation, for a safe unknown? How can the knowledge linked to our years of processing and



Ateliers DaPoPa. Photo: Clint Lutes

negotiation with material, bodies and space contribute to scientific studies or finding solutions for the refugee crisis? How can these collaborations be part of an artistic process where the outcome is a staged performance or other creative work?

This past summer I squatted a session of the ongoing projects *Migrant Bodies Moving Borders* and *Empowering Dance*. The latter "aims to research if and how the practice of contemporary dance helps people of all ages to acquire and develop soft skills."⁽¹⁾ Perhaps demystifying skills associated with contemporary dance practice could lead to more interdisciplinary collaborations with a variety of outcomes, creating more audience for contemporary dance and influencing dance practice to be more socially engaged and transparent?

So, after six years of not creating a

professional work, I am now embarking on a tiny nugget of creative discovery, boost, a new solo for myself. I wonder how my creative process has changed and how this experience will affect the other processes and communities I interact with. I wonder if I'll be able to enable my own creative journey in the same way as I do for others.

In any case, I am unbelievably appreciative of the creative turn my life has taken over the past several years and feel like stability and humility have rooted themselves in my life. I'm looking forward to more coffees, lunches, studio encounters, people and safe unknowns.

Info

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References

1. www.empowering.communicatingdance.eu



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