

*The Body's Memory Archives in the Process of Generating
an Aesthetic Movement and `Flow Experiences` for the Audience
in the Production of the Performance tXc -TOXIC
(after F. Richter's play Rausch)*

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Abstract: The present enquiry is particularly interested in the performer's body archiving memory while generating poetic movement on stage. The main site of investigation is a theatre-dance performance and the work engaged by the performers of tXc-TOXIC (after the Falk Richter's play *Rausch*, an Insula Creative Hub production, directed by Cristian Grosu, choreographed and co-directed by me). The focal point of my argument is that, with proper and sustained body training, performers can easily incite and produce aesthetic movement after engaging the CI (contact improvisation) means of accessing movement and body memory.

Keywords: (Non-toxic) body archives, aesthetic experience, embodiment, dance, performance

Introduction

In the following article we will attempt to present an overview of the body's own efficient archive system in generating poetic movement on stage, and the selected production for this type of enquiry is tXc (Toxic, as we named it) - a theatrical poetry in motion created after an idea extracted

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from F. Richter's text *Rausch*. In the realization of this production, based on joined direction settings by Cristian Grosu and Raluca Lupan, with the choreography supervised by the author of this article, the act of archiving bodily movements had a huge impact on the creational processes. The main directions in engaging with the creative forms of embodiment that are related to the skin's ability to archive every touch given to us from birth until our last breath for the *tXc* performance were: 1. the performer's relationship with his own body and the corporeal body memory archive system; 2. the use of repetition as an archiving process or technique in the choreography sessions.

In the beginning, we need to clarify that the use of the body as a unique system of archiving movement and choreography is a notion used by the performer on stage as practice, either regarded in the training and rehearsal process, or in some specific moment of the performance. In the case of the performer's relationship with their own body and other bodies present on stage, we tend to think of the body's capacity to memorize motion and to use automated reflexes in order to produce and generate a certain type of poetic movement. When it comes to the body's capacity to archive movement, we take into consideration that the alternative fictional reality created on stage is not a mere reflection of bodily movements, but it is seen as a differential participation of all creative means present on stage. In this article, we are tracing the artistic work of the performers in relationship with concepts like: the embodied reflection, body memory, and body archiving systems in dance phrases and choreography. Engaging all these concepts in the practical, or rather physical, work of the performer in this particular dance-theatre performance had a huge impact on the entire artistic team. It is accurate to underline that in the process of producing and performing *tXc (Toxic)* we used the practice as research method, in order to document and archive our creative journey. We have identified three important phases in delivering the artistic product that will be discussed and reviewed in the following pages. In order to enhance understanding of the artistic and production processes, we must firstly spell out the conceptual and corporeal concepts linked to this specific performance.

1. Archiving movement and generating poetics on stage

For this research, we were captivated by and worked with two central ideas: firstly, the moving body on stage that has to be manipulated with particular attention, so as to sustain a constant movement flow; secondly, the human being's potential of archiving and repeating movement. These two ideas were an important part of the creative process. In addition, the lived absorption of body moving structures on stage, and the *somatic flows of movement*² are "all reflex-responses, however rapid are always gestural and condemned to meaning- and hence determined by culture as well as nature"³. These ideas are linked to the latest discoveries in the neurosciences and the most recent investigations in dance studies. So, in this light of perceiving the somatic movements of the body, we can operate with a new practical knowledge: the performer's movement on stage will always be connected to culture and nature, and it has the potential of becoming a moving poetic discourse (seen as a flow entity). The thinking flesh, bones and internal organs of the performer are able to construct, with appropriate and specific *biograms*⁴ (bodily memory of movements), adaptive and poetic movement on stage. Therefore, with a *response-able* body, we can enact, react to, and create the type of movement we need on stage.

Through activating body memory and sensory archives and by being sensible to touch and actively spatialize movement, the performers can come closer to generating a specific type of movement with the use of movement techniques. So, the functionality of the possibilities in the performer's body can engender an aesthetic experience in the audience, and therefore a representation of the body in a poetic moving form.

For the first step of our enquiry, we need to review our conceptual lexicon and the ideas that we have been operating with. In this regard, we are going to take a further dive into embodied cognition and reflection and

2. Yotam Shibolet, "Bodyminds in Movement: Embodied Cognition in the Practice and Discourse of Contact Improvisation," *Junctions: Graduate Journal of the Humanities* 3, no. 1 (March 1, 2018), 76-78.

3. Ibidem, 80.

4. Ibidem, 84.

their habitual pattern in creating movement and aesthetic experiences. The term *embodied reflection*⁵ (developed by Francis J. Varle, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch) can be viewed by the dancer or the choreographer as the human ability to bring “into inherent integrity form and matter, sense and sensuality”⁶. This human ability can be embedded into the training phases of the performers and the dancers, as a new way of creating and exploring art. When trying to find new variations in meaning concerning movement, we need to take into consideration that *embodied reflection* is connected to the habitual patterns of the performer. In a practical sense, the “exchange of information between knowledge that is already embodied and conscious perceptual inquiry”⁷ is the performer’s greatest asset on stage. This type of exchange becomes vital to the artistic process because the performer is, in a way, forced to surrender his attention to the history of former situations and the current information instated by the new artistic production. Furthermore, maintaining Ohad Naharin’s view of the concept of *embodied reflection*, the performer always is, and always should be, attached to this corporeal state that is “sensed, learned and recognized”⁸. In addition, while in training, the performer can and should learn new physical tasks “because they feel the physical sense of the tasks with their own bodies”⁹. In the pursuit of signifying with the body and practicing embodied reflection, the performer must improve his physicality by “mastering the inner familiarity with one’s own body”¹⁰.

To sum up this introductory conceptual overview, we can state the main point this article will try to analyze and observe: movement on stage is practiced with the use of embodied reflection, the body’s ability to archive sensation and movement through the use of repetition of a certain type of poetic movement that can be generated on stage.

5. Einav Katan, *Embodied Philosophy in Dance: Gaga and Ohad Naharin’s Movement Research*, Performance Philosophy (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 31-49.

6. *Ibidem*, 31.

7. *Ibidem*, 33.

8. *Ibidem*, 34.

9. *Ibidem*, 35-36.

10. *Ibidem*, 36.

2. Experienced and practical tendencies in tXc (Toxic) shared as a non-toxic artistic environment

Before we proceed with the practical analysis of the particular performance investigated in this article, Brian Massumi's words are worth taking into account:¹¹

Art is the technique for making that necessary, but normally unperceived fact perceptible, in a qualitative perception that is as much about life itself as it is about the things we live by. Art is the technique of *living life in* - experiencing the virtuality of it more fully, living it more intensely.¹²

All the members of the (Toxic) production team have kept these words in mind during the process of the rehearsal and the effective performance of the show. The team started to unfold the production process itself as a technique in order to incite the creation of aesthetic and flow experiences for the public. For this process to become a technique and a way of producing a performance that can be catalogued as poetic, flow, or affect event, we started by dividing our production process in three stages: documentation, factual execution, and conclusions.

Phase 1: Documentation

In this peculiar phase of generating a sustainable production technique, we revisited the works (plays) of F. Richter, Ohad Naharin's complex engagement in the art of dance and its shows and online workshops, the theoretical production of Brian Massumi and Alva Noë¹³ which addresses

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12. Brian Massumi, "The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens," *Inflexions* 1 (May 2008), 7.

13. See Brian Massumi et al., "Affect and Immediation: An Interview with Brian Massumi," *DisClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 28, no. 1 (December 1, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.28.09>.

concepts like *bodymind*, affect, movement, body actions and memory, and last, but not least, the corporeal technique available for theatre and dance. Alongside the artistic performers Paul Trifu and Dragoş Maxim Galbăn, we have deconstructed the basic tendencies of CI technique (contact improvisation) and Gaga Movement in order to build a specific inventory of exercises. This phase can be temporized within the range of three to four weeks, depending on several variables. Additionally, this part of the process contains the decoding and memorizing of the actual text spoken by the performers on stage. So, in tracking the theme of the body as an archiving system which creates a poetic or an affect event on stage and in the audience, this process has also entailed the re-creation of a personal version of the text by the involved performers.

Phase 2: Execution

The second phase of the process included practical experiments and intensive training sessions. We focused our session on the types of memory engaged in physical work. To underline and theoretically support our future affirmations, we turned to the works of Thomas Fuchs¹⁴ on the phenomenology of body memory, taking into consideration that the body is “the most multi-sensory object in the world”¹⁵. Here, we can now outline the participative types of archiving-body memory used in the performance mentioned:

Types of memory	The performers’ potential use of the body’s natural archiving system
Procedural ¹⁶ (senso-motor and kinesthetic faculties: patterned sequences of movement, well-practiced skills, skillful handling of instruments patterns of perception)	Out through all the psycho-physical processes used in rehearsal and performance.

14. Thomas Fuchs, “Chapter 1. The Phenomenology of Body Memory,” in *Advances in Consciousness Research*, ed. Sabine C. Koch et al., vol. 84 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012), 9–22, <https://doi.org/10.1075/aicr.84.03fuc>.
 15. Giuseppe Riva, “The Neuroscience of Body Memory: From the Self through the Space to the Others,” *Cortex* 104 (July 2018): 241–60, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2017.07.013>.
 16. *Ibidem*, 12-13.

Types of memory	The performers' potential use of the body's natural archiving system
<p>Situational¹⁷ (it extends to the space and situations in which the body will find itself also known as spatial situation that are holistic inseparable units of bodily, sensory and atmospheric perceptions)</p>	<p>Connected to the spatiality of sensation, it can enhance the spatial and situational awareness of the performer. Used in CI technique and Gaga Movement. In physical practices it has been used with the participation of the bodily senses: smell, sight, hearing, touch need to be performed alongside the immersive contribution of "synesthetic and expressive qualities of the atmospheric"¹⁸ situations.</p>
<p>Intercorporeal¹⁹ (embodied interaction)</p>	<p>Used by performers in the training process in order to enlarge the areas of the body's pre-reflective understanding. As a technique, it can be found in the CI (contact improvisation) so called "jam session". For this particular performance, the jam sessions became part of the warm-up training, and it was prolonged in the diurnal life of the performers as a mean of motor, emotional, and social development. After practicing in the rehearsal room, such training of the performers' bodies can entail another view of their own bodies – an external one. The trained body, receptive and open to all stimuli and aware of the presence of other entities in space and time, can easily become a body which is prepared to meet the audience. A body that can affect and produce poetic movement on stage and a flow experience for the viewers.</p>

17. Ibidem, 13.

18. Ibidem, 14.

19. Ibidem, 14-15.

Types of memory	The performers' potential use of the body's natural archiving system
Incorporative ²⁰ (it is the carrier of social roles and symbols)	The usage of incorporative memory was deviated in the constructions of the performer's stage characters and the deconstruction of these characters presented on stage. We have worked on assuming different social roles and symbols with the help of situational imagination and later produce the choreographic atmosphere and movements. It was also a source, as suggested at the beginning of this subchapter. Of course, in the production process this type of body memory became the <i>habitus</i> – a system of learned internalized patterns which are required throughout the activities and experience of everyday life. Imposed by their line of work, the job of performing, beyond the stage life they had to access this restrictive memory type by always pursuing their performer status in the rehearsal room. And, in addition, for the production team to always negotiate their assumed social and symbolic roles: director, choreographer, sound and light designer.
Pain ²¹ (described by the body)	Throughout the entire artistic process, a certain type of memory pain could be observed due to intensive training and past injuries suffered by the performers. This has been seriously treated as part of the rehearsal room, taking into consideration that it could generate further and deeper physical wounds.

20. Ibidem, 16-17.

21. Ibidem, 17.

Types of memory	The performers' potential use of the body's natural archiving system
Traumatic ²² (indelible impression caused by trauma)	To preserve the mental sanity of the performers, this type of memory was excluded from the artistic process. It was only discussed in regards to the characters live-on-stage situations. At a certain level, it was carried into the rehearsal room because the performers' uses of personal archiving system as what we call – past memories. We would not recommend this access to prior traumatic events, but instead the use of the imagination as the core of an artistic process.

Conclusions

In order to adjust the theoretical use of the body's system of archiving – the body memory we can affirm that all of these types of body memory have been used in the making of the *tXc* performance, except traumatic memory due to its psychological implications. The body's self-regulated archiving system (*body memory*) has been at the center of creating the performance. Using the performer's body schemata and body image in strict relationship to time and extra-personal and peri-personal space, we could technically construct the choreography and the stage direction. Adding and magnifying the use of body memory, we could, afterwards, start the final phase of the execution process-constructing emotions on stage.

During the training part, the use of the body's archiving system through the assertion of body memory has worked to its full potential and has been the main source of making performers aware of immediate subjective sensory impressions. For further accumulation of information, we need to

22. Ibidem, 18.

address the use of episodic²³ (defined as the memory system in charge of the encoding, storage and retrieval of personally experienced events, associated with space and time context relationship encoding) and semantic²⁴ memory (which is explicit and enables the categorization of different bodies of knowledge according to their similarities and differences).

At the end of the creative process, we were able to understand that all types of memory can create, and should cooperate in, the artistic process to engender new models of behaving (movement correlated). Therefore, the use of this personal archiving system – the body memory can and will, through repetition, become a procedural dynamic in searching for new ways of thinking on stage. Moreover, activating body memory (the body's natural archiving system) and imagination in the rehearsal room is a medium of articulating poetic movement and generating flow experiences in the audience. The body has then been put to work in current conditions, imaginary as well as actual, using techniques of relations.

The logical execution of an action is an individually experienced process, and the performer is going to make personal sense of it through the actual or imaginary situations he will find himself in, either on stage, or in the rehearsal rooms. All the interconnected relational facts that will construct the performance will be brought into corporeal existence through using body memory and bodily expectation.

Repetition process (connected in the CI technique and Gaga Movement) and repetitive actions can expand the performer's awareness of the potentialities of his virtually lived relations on stage, because every action, movement, or choreography is not perceived by the body-mind unit as an "object", but as an event. In this regard, the performers must be convinced that movement is an event and be potentially open to all the interaction it affords. The body's natural archiving system will then take charge and activate body memory entirely and completely, to the point of maximum usage.

23. Einav Katan, *Embodied Philosophy in Dance: Gaga and Ohad Naharin's Movement Research, Performance Philosophy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 66-67.

24. *Ibidem*, 67.

By actively stimulating body memory and imagination in the process of creating affect events or poetic movement on stage, and also by generating adaptive movement and engaging the body in dynamic spatial relationships, we can infer that practice can surely become perception (embodied). In the creative process, dedicated attention to the constant flow of the body-mind related conceptual structures, to proprioceptive²⁵ (cumulative memory of skill, habit, posture, gesture) memory, to cellular memory (interoception or viscerality), to imagination and self-artistic affectation²⁶ (understood in the double sense of the artificial construct of the artistic self and the offering of that artistic self with affect) could be the most relevant sources for the performer, in order to create aesthetic and affect poetic events in and on the stage. Starting from the rehearsal process where the production team should commit to finding and intercepting all possible momentums or events of this type and continuing in the performative state during the actual and specific time of the show, the performers must rely on their natural archiving system, cored in the body memory, and maintain an open attitude to the stimuli that can unfold before their eyes, so to speak. The active and activated body-mind unit prepared for all that can happen on stage during a performance, applying dance and theatre techniques while taking into consideration that: "The body doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it enfolds contexts, it enfolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated. (...) How could this be so? Only if the trace of past actions, including a trace of their contexts, were conserved in the brain and in the flesh, but out of mind and out of body understood as qualifiable interiorities, active and passive respectively, direct spirit"²⁷.

25. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual Movement, Affect, Sensation*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 59.

26. *Ibidem*, 62.

27. *Ibidem*, 59.



Fig. 1: Paula Trifu & Dragoș Maxim Galbăn in *Toxic* after F. Richter,
photo by: Andrei Niculescu, 2021

As a final inference, us – the performers as artistic generators of poetic movement on stage, as presenters of aesthetic events, and influencers of the audience’s flow experiences – must pay close attention to all archiving natural systems contained by our body-mind unity. We are the keepers of the divided functions of the audience’s memories generated by the quality of the performance presented on stage. So, on an encouraging note, we can state that using intention and repetition, investing pleasure in acting and re-acting, imagination and archiving movement, using natural systems of archiving and embodied perception and embodied movement techniques, may be a performer’s most accessible approach in providing aesthetic and flow experiences for the audience.

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<https://insulacreativehub.com/portfolio-items/toxic/>.

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