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## Entangled Histories

### Part 2: Releasing the De-Generate Body

Thomas Kampe (Ph.D.), Bath Spa University

#### Introduction

This second part of writing on the research project *Releasing The Archive*, undertaken by Carol Brown and Thomas Kampe in collaboration with dancers of New Zealand Dance Company (NZDC), aims to discuss notions of contemporary somatic-informed re-embodiment and transmission of The Bodenwieser Method as an vulnerable and historical act ‘between remembering and forgetting’ (Guilbert 2009). This essay suggests that the three main practitioners discussed - Gertrud Bodenwieser (1890 –1959), Bess Mensendieck (c.1866–1957), and Moshe Feldenkrais (1904 -1984) - were aiming to construct embodied and enworlded practices concerned with emancipatory perspectives on 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western personhood. Rather than merely re-embodiment choreographic material our research is concerned with releasing processes of re-discovery of world - or worlds - inherent in or stimulated by the corporeal traces of the practices of Gertrud Bodenwieser. It is also concerned with the transmission of embodied processes of world-making across cultures and generations. As Glenna Batson suggests, dance making inhabits a ‘particular kind of worldly engagement. Its meaning lies in the particularities of transmission.’ (2014: xiii)

There are relevant particularities that connect the work of Gertrud Bodenwieser with Moshe Feldenkrais, whose work served as contemporary somatic modality within this project. Though 20 years apart in age, and working in different fields, both practitioners were part of a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Jewish Diaspora driven through Nazi persecution. Their thinking and practice embraced Modernist European psychology with a focus on sexual liberation, as much as embodied processes of creative inquiry through what Feldenkrais called ‘*Induction*’ (2010:42) – a process of knowledge creation through observation and trial and error. Such process of induction as process of finding matches Bodenwieser’s ethos: ‘Do not impose form - let it happen.’<sup>1</sup> While both practitioners operated in trans-cultural and trans-disciplinary ways, their work in their countries of origin or chosen homelands became marginalised. Project collaborator Laure Guilbert (Berlin 2016) suggests that German Dance never engaged appropriately in its *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* - a coming to terms with the

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<sup>1</sup> Shona Dunlop-McTavish (SDMT) Archives Notes kinetic ideas

Nazi-history of its Ausdruckstanz legacy. How do we come to terms with the past of the Austrian Bodenwieser legacy today?

This research project and essay aligns itself with current developments in Germany and Austria that aim to critically engage through practice with the articulation of a post-Ausdruckstanz discourse.<sup>2</sup> Bodenwieser's work survived and transformed as part of collective efforts of herself and her collaborators - students, dancers, musical collaborator Marcel Lorber and many others – in times of extreme uncertainty. In contrast to the legacy of Bodenwieser, the practice of her Austrian successor at Konservatorium Wien<sup>3</sup>, Rosalia Chladek (1905 – 1995), survives as a formalised and trademarked training system that is still taught in Austria today through the third generation of certified teachers. Chladek taught at Vienna Conservatory between 1942 and 1952 – during the period of German annexation and of Russian occupation- and who directed the Nazi *Meisterstätten für Tanz* in Berlin between 1940 and 1941. The Chladek®-System where inductive 'processes of discovery and receptive learning go often hand in hand' forms an unbroken legacy of Austrian Ausdruckstanz that claims to offer an 'all-embracing and balanced concept of dance-didactics [...] which seems still relevant, as long as it follows its holistic and process oriented pedagogy towards self-directed learning' (Fleischle-Braun 2011). Chladek's uneasy biography is exemplary for a generation of Ausdruckstanz practitioners whose work embraced early 20<sup>th</sup> century somatic foundations and emancipatory ethics while comfortably embedding their work within totalitarian contexts. What becomes clear is that apart from some recent recreations of aspects of Bodenwieser's work in Europe, particularly through the work of Andrea Amort, little attempt has been made to re-form her corporeal practices as an artistic *techne* or *phronesis*<sup>4</sup> - her practices still stay de-generate, as in de-generated or de-populated, meaning without a generation of articulate practitioners in Europe.

A re-embodiment of Bodenwieser's practices reveals a difficult corporeality influenced by the complexities of a Modernist Gymnastic body-coding requiring a highly flexible torso of the

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<sup>2</sup> The authors are currently working in collaboration with *Dock 11* dance production-house, Berlin, to develop the performance project 'Lost and Found – afterlives of dances in exile', which contextualises a Bodenwieser-informed practice emerging from this research with narratives of historical and contemporary dance exile. The project is supported through Tanzatelier Wien, Tel-Aviv based Ausdruckstanz scholar Gaby Aldor, and Bodenwieser archivist Barbara Cuckson in Sydney. Dock 11 has produced several post-Ausdruckstanz activities since 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Bodenwieser taught at Vienna Conservatory between 1921 and 1926, before her appointment as Professor at State Academy Vienna.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle (322 -384) defined three types of knowledge: *Episteme* -as rational, detached and scientific knowledge; *Techne* - as a skill, craft, pragmatic or technical knowledge; *Phronesis* – a reflective and ethical knowledge concerned with the 'how' and the value base of a praxis. See also Wiliam (2008)

mover. It also releases inherent traces of an ‘ethics of vulnerability’ (Gilson 2014) in both Bodenwieser’s and Feldenkrais’ work, perhaps emerging from experience of persecution and refuge, that provide an open space for a shift beyond simple recreation of forms towards contemporary relevance. Neither Feldenkrais nor Bodenwieser left their disciples a defined or fixed system. While Feldenkrais defined his method as ‘improvisation, but it has a method in it, therefore it's jazz’<sup>5</sup>, Holger described Bodenwieser as ‘ever searching for new ideas and movements [...] never to get stale [...]’.<sup>6</sup> Dunlop-McTavish suggests that Bodenwieser’s own attempts to formulate her legacy in systematic thought ‘in some inaccountable manner, seemed to elude the KERNEL of her inimitative (sic) style.’<sup>7</sup>

### **Somatic Realism - Body Machines**<sup>8</sup>

‘When you dance you are naked’<sup>9</sup>

Part of our shared research investigated a *re-somaticizing*<sup>10</sup> of The Bodenwieser Method through vitalising traces of early proto-somatic practices within this Modernist dance practice. Bodenwieser’s training-base focused on embodiment, internalisation and critical analysis of experiential movement principles to enable the dancer to engage with creative and psycho-physical demands of her expressionist practice. Dunlop-McTavish states that Bodenwieser ‘never wished her ballets and dances to be shown after her DEATH, as she felt that they could never be executed by dancers who have not been through her training’<sup>11</sup>. Bodenwieser’s training, as a choreographic resource, facilitated a holistic, multi-dimensional development process which aimed to prepare the dancer to engage with ‘a total art experience

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<sup>5</sup> Moshe Feldenkrais, San Francisco notes 1975: 55

<sup>6</sup> Holger, H. notes on Gertrud Bodenwieser, HH Archives, London; date unknown

<sup>7</sup> SDMT Archives Bodenwieser Philosophy

<sup>8</sup> The author chooses the term Realism here to distinguish the somatic foundations influencing the work of Gertrud Bodenwieser from a contemporary quest for natural movement or a natural body. As a systemic development and critique of Naturalism in the arts, Realism considers environmental context as part of the driving forces of organic behaviour. In the performing arts, the Spiritual Realism of Acting theorist Konstantin Stanislavski (1863 -1938) and the Social Realism of Bertholt Brecht ( 1889 - 1965) understand the desiring human organism as culturally malleable and embedded within social contexts. Mensendieck refers to her work as a cultural process.

<sup>9</sup> Shona Dunlop-McTavish notes 1942 SDMT Archives

<sup>10</sup> I am leaning on Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen’s terminology of ‘Somatization’ here understood as a process of internalisation of physiological principles through embodied experience and processes of reflection: ‘I use this word “somatization” to engage the kinesthetic experience directly, in contrast to “visualization” which utilizes visual imagery to evoke a kinesthetic experience’(Bainbridge Cohen, B.

<http://www.bodymindcentering.com/introduction-body-mind-centeringr> [accessed 27/02/16)

<sup>11</sup> Shona Dunlop-McTavish (SDMT) Archives Bodenwieser Philosophy

involving painter and dramatist, musician and poet, actor and dancer'.<sup>12</sup> Dancers engaged with complex qualitative dimensions of movement as resource for dramatic gesture and psycho-physical expression, partially rooted in the work of Francois Delsarte, Jacques Dalcroze and Rudolf Laban.<sup>13</sup> Bodenwieser credits the work of Elisabeth 'Bess' Mensendieck as one of four major influences on the development of her practice, offering a functional and analytical system of bodily education useful for the Modern Dancer (1970:78).<sup>14</sup> Mensendieck offered a proto-feminist and early somatic practice concerned with 'self-determination' ([1906]1929) of women through a '*subjective* method of bodily education' (1927:9).<sup>15</sup>

There are several key features in Mensendieck's work which parallel the post-WWII work of Moshe Feldenkrais – a social-constructivist perspective on embodiment, a focus on movement analysis and autonomy of the learner through internalisation and observation, and an emphasis on activation of the pelvis as a counter-cultural and emancipatory necessity for the Modern citizen. Fischer (1928) describes some of the teaching principles of Mensendieck which forecast processes later developed by Feldenkrais – the breaking down of whole body movements into isolated parts, the lowering of tension of the habitually contracted body, a focus on weight-shifts and balancing exercises, and a mainly light use of force within the exercises. Fischer states that Mensendieck 'training happens mainly slowly, to allow for all streams of movements to flow outwards. In this way a body is formed that can stay well educated in all life situations'(1928:214).

The affinities between the work of Moshe Feldenkrais and Bess Mensendieck are perhaps not co—coincidental. Dance Historian Gaby Aldor (2017) suggests that during the 1920's Feldenkrais studied with choreographer Margalit Ornstein (1888 – 1973) in her studio in Tel Aviv. As a family friend, he also taught there sporadically as early as 1929 - most likely self-

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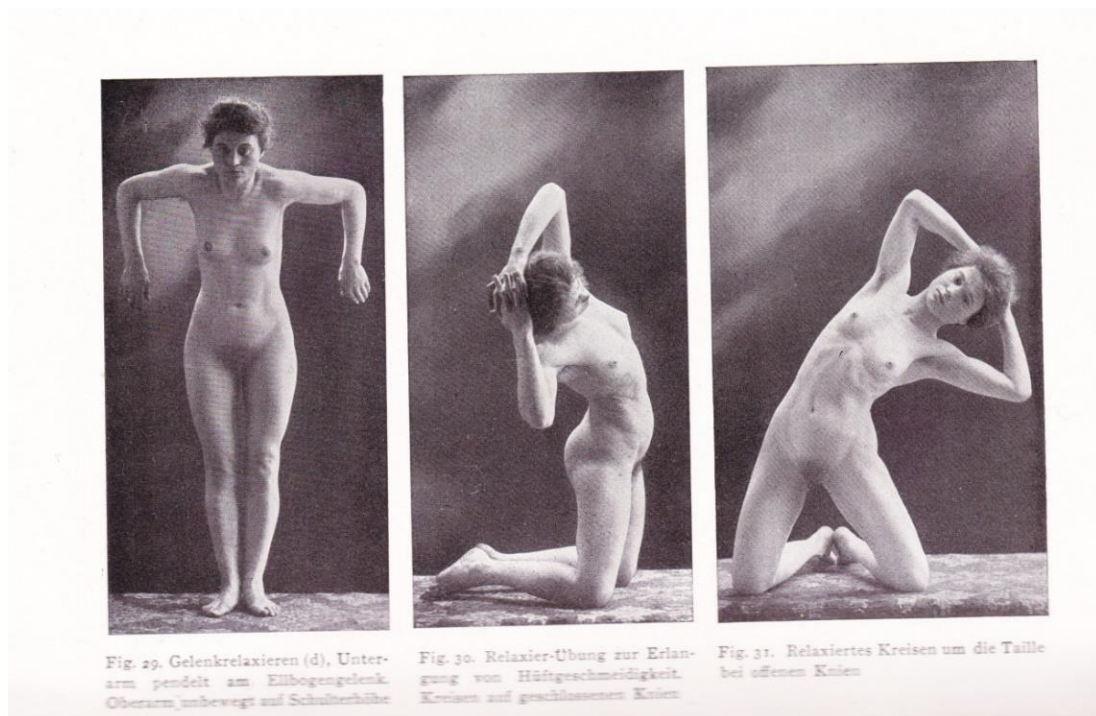
<sup>12</sup> Denise Puttock, former Bodenwieser dancer in Australia, in: Puttock, D. *The Technique class of Professor Gertrud Bodenwieser of Vienna*; Hilde Holger Archives, date unknown, most likely 1960s

<sup>13</sup> Both Amort, A. (2009, 2001) and Oberzaucher-Schüller (in Vernon-Warren 2001) suggest that Bodenwieser's private school founded in 1921 was an accredited Laban school. Barbara Cuckson confirms Bodenwieser's influence by Laban's Icosahedron and her own variations of basic figure of eight forms (Cuckson in: <http://www.thesourcecode.de/lines-of-lineage.html#the-last-student-of-gertrud-bodenwieser?page=1> accessed 27/02/2016)

<sup>14</sup> In her book *The New Dance* (1970) Bodenwieser writes in length about the influence of the work of Francois Delsarte, Jacques Dalcroze, Bess Mensendieck and Rudolf Laban on her work. This is evidenced in the 1930's notebooks of her dancers Hilary Napier and Shona Dunlop. Oddly enough the influence of Mensendieck on Bodenwieser has been omitted in other writings on her work.

<sup>15</sup> Veder suggests that Mensendieck's work 'served a new kind of expressivity, forged through a new degree of bodily efficiency' within the emerging European Modern Dance Practices (2011:818).

defence lessons (Aldor 2012). Ornstein had been a student of Gertrud Bodenwieser and Bess Mensendieck in 1920s Vienna, and taught Ausdruckstanz and Mensendieck-informed Gymnastics.



Dr. Bess Mensendieck demonstrating her ‘Relaxier’- work in *Körperkultur der Frau* (1908)

Dr. Mensendieck’s revolutionary book *Körperkultur des Weibes* (1906)<sup>16</sup> depicts her demonstrating exercises unclothed, and theorizes her practice based on an understanding of the ‘reciprocal relationship between body-life and cultural life’([1906]1929:1). Body is not understood as a ‘natural’ entity but as culturally malleable construct within a patriarchal and growingly urban cultural context. Mensendieck advocated a bodily-culture where the individual mover develops ‘a capacity for self-critique’ (1927:13) and an emerging curiosity for self-directed learning as a cultural practice. She proposes that ‘the body suffers through the influence of culture, and it can be perfected through culture’ ([1906]1929:1). Mensendieck aimed to develop a ‘reliable, science- not fashion- based system of teachings’ as an embodied and accessible resource for women (1927:14), and acknowledged that prior systems of bodily training had been solely designed and available for men, predominantly through army drill exercise. Her work was designed to improve awareness and functioning of any existing part of ‘the body-machine’, where students ‘should be familiarised with the

<sup>16</sup> Later published as *Körperkultur der Frau* (1908). Due to censorship laws the book was not published in the US until 1931, then with clothed models under the title “It’s Up to You” (New York: Mensendieck System Main School )

single parts of the machine, because such teaching can of course be gradually and intelligently woven into the exercises' (1927:11).



Mensendieck exercises performed by students of the Hagemann Schule, Germany <sup>17</sup>

Mensendieck designed simple exercises for women to strengthen the pelvic region, most notably a pelvic-rocking exercise she named 'the pelvic-seesaw' (1927: appendix). Bodenwieser confirms Mensendieck's influence on paying 'greatest attention to the position of the pelvis' where 'we lift the front of the pelvis and lower the back of the pelvis' (1970: 48). Mensendieck states that

'The most important thing is that one begins again to mentally engage with a bodily area, which predominantly has become so degenerated, because through wrong moral values one believed to have to exclude the whole region from our thinking, and therefor made space in this whole area for a resulting neglect'. ([1906]1929:198 translated by T.K.)<sup>18</sup>

Her radical writings advocate a call for a re-visioning of existing moral values through embodied emancipatory processes.

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<sup>17</sup> Originally reproduced In Fischer (1928)

<sup>18</sup> The relationship between moral codes, bodily perception and function of the pelvis is discussed in similar ways in the early writings of Mabel Todd in her essay '*The balancing forces in the human being: It's application to postural patterns*'(1929). It would be interesting to research further into possible influence of Mensendieck's earlier work on Todd : 'The first part of the structure to consider in the human being is the pelvis [...] Psychological factors and sensory appreciation are responsible for our varied postural patterns(...) we must first have an intelligent understanding of the mechanical adjustments necessary for economical functioning of the body, not allowing old postural ideas, based on moral notions, to influence our understanding' ([1929]1977: 56 & 58)

If one thinks, that the bodily middle of the woman is understood as the most important part of her organism, and if one considers that the moral codes through which she shall switch off her thoughts towards this important part of herself are an invention of the male sex, you want to shout out: “It is time, you women, that you construct your own bodily ethics, with moral values that are aligned to the reality of your bodily functions!”<sup>19</sup>

Such call for an act of collective somatic realism as the rejection of patriarchal cultural conditioning, towards a re-conditioning aligned to bodily functions, forms the driving force behind her profound influence within the emerging early 20<sup>th</sup> century European Körperkultur. It embeds a non-conformist stance towards self-construction similar to Feldenkrais’ concerns with facilitating conditions for embodied processes of ‘de-conditioning, the liberation, in which we develop a self-active part which liberates the individual from his subjective enslavement.’(Katzir, in Feldenkrais 2010: 173.) In her ‘last words’ to young dancers, Bodenwieser describes the path of the modern dancer as a fight ‘in the great revolution of freeing the human mind’ (1970:98). Like Mensendieck and Feldenkrais, Bodenwieser understood this *freeing the human mind* as an embodied subjective and choreographic process of self-activation.

Mensendieck published a summary of her principles under *Motto for Mensendieck Exercises* in her book *Bewegungsprobleme* (1927). These principles consisted of a systemic perspective on movement education that embraced notions of agency and judgement of the learner within a body-mind process that aims to construct ‘an intellectualisation of the flesh’ (1927:17) where the human will power can direct muscular effort and functioning. She lays out her motto as processes of:

**No drill -like activity**  
**Wiring together of muscle action and brain**  
**Observing**  
**Internalising**  
**Thoughtfully Comparing**  
**Judging**  
**Only self-achieved judgement is of value**<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> [1906] 1929:198 translated by the author

<sup>20</sup> From appendix Mensendieck 1927, translated by the author



Mensendieck aimed for a non-reductionist emancipatory pedagogy which guided the autonomous mover 'to be able to *construct* exercises themselves, instead of merely copying drill-commandos' (1927: 11). Her motto articulates a proto-somatic analytical ethos akin to key principles inherent in The Feldenkrais Method concerned with self-observation, a felt internalised sense of self, and notions of choice of the autonomous learner based on experience, differentiation and trial and error. However, her work appears problematic for several reasons. Mensendieck sought for a wilful construction of an ideal machine-body, as a normative or 'normal body' (1927:13) who's perfect functioning is linked to perfect beauty. 'Unbeautiful' is understood as 'destructive' (Ibid:10) in habit or adaptation to environment. Her writings reveal a eugenic position where 'illness is shameful - health is duty!' ([1906]1929: 107). It paves way for a racial hygienics that is highly questionable, but that underpins much of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Western body- and dance culture.<sup>21</sup> This stands in stark contrast with Feldenkrais' non-corrective and non-normative practice and ethos of 'restoring human dignity' of the learner (2010:68) at the heart of his practices.

The vision of a transformative education through bodily training as already articulated by Mensendieck emerges repeatedly in the writings of Bodenwieser-dancers Shona Dunlop-McTavish and Hilde Holger. While Dunlop-McTavish suggests that a Modernist dance and movement education delivered to children 'results in a much more integrated person. A person who has ideas and thinks for himself' (1958), Holger suggests that 'Modern Dance [...] develops the individual as a whole and creates a connection between the intellect and the emotional aspect of the self. [...] it forms three of the most important structures of our personality: expression of the body, the mind, and the soul.' (Holger 1947, cited in Hirschbach & Takvorian 1990:73).

### **Somatic Inquiry**

'True dance for Bodenwieser meant discovery, discovery which combined the exploration of thoughts and feelings, simultaneously with the penetrating

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<sup>21</sup> See Rudolf Laban in his essay 'Meister und Werk in der Tanzkunst' 1936:

'We must experience the genius of our race, our blood, also in our dance and in the way we understand our dance'. (cited in Müller 1993:127)

study of the body and its anatomical structure and the impetus of movement as a whole.’<sup>22</sup>

Within this research project the Feldenkrais Method was placed as a somatic tool for inquiry, discovery and embodied-self questioning. Feldenkrais lessons are taught in two major ways. Functional Integration (FI) a one-to-one touch based dialogue between facilitator and learner, and *Awareness Through Movement (ATM)* lessons which are taught through verbal instruction and questioning. Lessons are constructed as complex movement ‘compositions’ (Feldenkrais 2010) designed to facilitate conditions for improvement of ‘the process of self-direction’ (1981:110). Feldenkrais uses de-familiarisation processes such as variation and manipulation of energy, time and space and of place of movement initiation, while using spatial disorientation, asymmetry in body-shaping and pattern reversal as compositional strategies to guide the learner into a heightened sense of awareness and curiosity. Lessons are steeped in an ethos of Socratic inquiry where learning is facilitated through questions asked by the teacher, here as constructed embodied processes of questioning existing patterns of behaviour.

While much of the original transmission of Bodenwieser’s choreographic material or technical studies was delivered with an emphasis on demonstration, imitation and practice of set material, Holger (1990) describes how Bodenwieser invited her students to contribute to class material in transmission situations that took place in a circle. Furthermore, Dunlop-McTavish explicates that ‘Bodie believed that rather than studying each particular movement the principle underlying each movement should be studied and practiced’.<sup>23</sup> The somatic-anatomical underpinning that Bodenwieser drew from her studies of the Mensendieck system often disappeared in the teaching of the material through the next generation such as Holger or Dunlop-McTavish. Bodenwieser’s technical material offers a difficult physicality, where large sequential whole-body movements demand of the dancer to consistently ‘reach beyond yourself’<sup>24</sup>. Dunlop-McTavish suggests that ‘Bodie always preferred the aesthetics of dance above technique’<sup>25</sup>. This was certainly similar in the transmission of class material by Holger who as an ageing choreographer left no space for information regarding alignment, nor built her classes to support technical functions through gradual learning steps.

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<sup>22</sup> SDMT Archives, notes from photographs

<sup>23</sup> SDMT Archives: ‘Notes from Ausdruckstanz Seminar by Shona Dunlop McTavish Schloss Thurnau, Germany 1986’

<sup>24</sup> SDMT Archives ‘Interview with Shona McTavish; Otago Times 14/05/2001

<sup>25</sup> SMDT Archives: info Ausdruckstanz

Observing Carol Brown's modality of transmission of Barre work and technical exercises it became clear that Brown consistently informed the transmission processes with anatomical and alignment images through pacing and modelling, which allowed dancers to engage with the embodiment of material with a sense of detail and understanding of technical principles, such as weight-transfer, counter-directional pull through limbs or clarity in movement initiation. Bodenwieser suggests a bodily poly-centricity which includes the use of the head, and even hair, as places of initiation, multi-directionality in spatial orientation and richness in variation of dynamic qualities as key to her dance praxis. Australian company member Coralie Hinckley suggests a privileging of free-flowing movement qualities within Bodenwieser's practice: 'The demands of her technique embraced the circle, wave, arc, spiral – never static- always fluid – never ending gradations of flow, rhythms, designs, expressions, with the breath as the impulse for the surge of the dance' (Hinckley 1990: 161; cited in Milne-Home 2011).

### **Expression Machines – Wide Open dancing**

'The anger, sorrow, and bitterness which followed the defeated nations after the war required a new language of movement. Distortion was required to express certain themes, while floor level and powerful leg movement and high jumps were much made of. Delicate gestures of hands and torso were required equally.'<sup>26</sup>

During the shared practical workshops between Carol Brown and myself, a body coding emerged which privileges a capacity for core-initiation. This includes the use of multi-directional sequential patterns between pelvis and skull, as affirmed by notes from Holger and Dunlop-McTavish. Holger describes typical 'Bodenwieser head movements, the head as part of the vertebrae making most use of the movements' flow. [...] spiral movements making most use of the spine. [...]', suggesting that Bodenwieser 'built up movements from the centre of the body flowing into the arms, fingers and legs.'<sup>27</sup>

NZDC dancers describe a change in their dancing which echoes the core-oriented body-coding described by Holger: 'I am learning to be more opened and lengthened spatially, also learning that there are many sides and fronts to my body, not just the mirror. A lot of contrast and openings. Movement at its extreme. Wide and Spatial.'<sup>28</sup> Such opening of torso and core-initiation is described as an internalised, felt experience by another NZDC dancer: 'A lot

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<sup>26</sup> Shona Dunlop-McTavish *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Holger notes on Bodenwieser, Hilde Holger archives, date unknown

<sup>28</sup> (XIN Ji, Dancers' Questionnaire Auckland 2015)

of expansive openings, contrasted with torso contractions and dynamic impulses. More about feeling, rather than technique or musicality'.<sup>29</sup> Bodenwieser confirms this privileging of a torso-activation in the Modern Dancer's body as 'the ruling of trunk' (1970: 82). A large amount of historical photographs of Bodenwieser dancers reveal the image of an arching and opening of the torso of the performers either in labile, off-balance, positions or to an extreme extent of eccentricity – here understood as being outside of one's centre.



Dancer Shona Dunlop as Cain, in *Cain and Abel*; chor: Bodenwieser, Sidney 1940

Such eccentric positioning of the dancer as a recurring Bodenwieser signature move demands coordination and flexibility in the dancer, challenging placement and control of the pelvis, ribs and head and mouth.<sup>30</sup> Large whole body movement such as *Wave*, *Head Circles*, *Slings* and *Arcs* place potential stress on the dancer's torso through overuse of lower back and neck. Through further inquiry into a re-embodiment of historical photographs of Bodenwieser dancers it became evident that the large Bodenwieser signature torso arching movements are supported through a Mensendieck- alignment forward trust of lower pelvis in order to allow the lower back to lengthen and spread appropriately while making space for full extension in

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<sup>29</sup> (Katie Rudd, *Dancers' Questionnaire* Auckland 2015)

<sup>30</sup> Interestingly enough Coton, in his analysis of Jooss' work as a 'historical necessity' links the emphasis on labile body codings in his work to 'the hard fact that we live in a complex and very unstable form of society: being part of this society the artist is subject to its violence and instability, and the awareness of the work around him comes out in the work' (1946:24).

hip-joints.<sup>31</sup> While the functional and expressive freeing of the pelvis supports mobility of the dancer's torso drastically, the integration of head and neck into these large patterns requires a flexible rib-areas to avoid over-arching of neck. The backward arching of torso and the use of the head as dynamic limb is supported through an open use of the mouth as expressive gesture. Such opening of mouth and jaw also allows for freedom of emotional expressivity and the dancer's availability to 'the possibilities of externalising through movement the inner responses of heart and mind'.<sup>32</sup>



Dancer Hilary Napier *Ecstase*; Photo by Margaret Michaelis, 1941

Within the process of recreating the expressive corporealities as proposed by Bodenwieser, The Feldenkrais Method offered a wide range of lessons that abandon a *stabile core* for *core mobility* in the mover, and in which potential for adaptability is utilised as a resource for creativity. Batson (2008) suggests that dominant Western dance aesthetics privileges *core-*

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<sup>31</sup> Bodenwieser suggests that 'procreation and fertility have their seat here, so in dance the pelvis must not be debarred of expression. It constitutes an integral part of the very human existence, hence it has to be included in the dancing sphere' (1970: 82).

<sup>32</sup> SDMT archives Ausdruckstanz Lecture Germany 1986 slide 4

*stability* and verticality of alignment. Feldenkrais challenges this Cartesian model of alignment by asking the mover to constantly shift place of movement initiation, and by offering movement explorations where *joint-order* relationship of stability and mobility are varied and reversed. While aiming for free flow in joint articulation and an articulate ‘culture of pelvis and hip joints’ (Feldenkrais 2005), lessons play with differentiating and varying of kinetic-chains to allow for complexity, poly-centricity, and omni-directionality in body coding. Lessons are encouraging the learner to develop an understanding of the interplay between stability- and mobility-providing corporeal organisation in relation to environment and ground.

### **Somatic Interventions**

During our research workshops I developed exploratory Feldenkrais-lessons that aimed to support the large arching and complex shape-changes of torso-movement patterns forming a recurring underlying body-coding and language of expression within Bodenwieser’s work. The lessons aimed to provide experiences that foster ‘the capacity of the individual to break up total situation of previous experience into parts’, to enhance a ‘capacity to form new responses’ (Feldenkrais 2005:196). This practice of embodied criticality – as a putting into question of existing patterns at any time – is at the heart of the creative interventional approach the Feldenkrais Method offers. NZDC Dancer Katie Rudd elaborates on the effect of such processes of de-patterning and re-patterning of large movements as helping to create ‘more opportunities in the body to achieve the Bodenwieser range of movement’ (NZDC Dancers Questionnaire 2015). Somatic support through Feldenkrais was facilitated as preparatory exercises, or as mode of intervention to support the execution of complex shape movement patterns. This included :

- Lessons in standing and walking to integrate pelvic movements on sagittal plane and in weight-shifting into the use of legs and feet. These lessons had a focus on developing choice-making possibilities towards grounding in different directions through the balls of the front of the feet and prepared the semi-on toe stance with bent knees which allows a rolling of the pelvis forward.
- Lessons in supine positions which focussed on articulating pelvis in sagittal plane and horizontal/rotary plane in relation to lower back, hip-joints and legs. These lessons focussed on flexion, extension and opening of hip-joint sideways through leverage of

legs. Lessons on hip extension with one foot standing and pushing through foot into floor to lever pelvis into rolling diagonally towards opposite shoulder were supported through partner touch interventions.

- Lessons in sitting to develop a three dimensional core-mobility from pelvis through spine and ribs into the use of the head, eyes and mouth. Here, lessons that focussed on variation of places of initiation in arching and curving the torso while resting on standing hands behind torso, were supported through partner touch interventions.
- Lessons in standing which addressed the mobility relationship between arms and torso where 3 dimensional potential of ribs and upper chest was activated through reaching, rotary and circular patterns of the arms. Auxiliary movements or constraints, such as moving with an arm framing the head to free the ribs were used in combination with partner touch interventions.

NZDC dancers commented on the effect of the emphasis on activation of torso as a place for dancerly expression, while suggesting an enhanced level of self-perception. Dancer Lucy Lynch (2015) describes the emerging changes in her way of self-direction within choreographic dance inquiries:

After week of workshopping with Feldenkrais and Bodenwieser techniques I felt an obvious change and difference in my body and also how both techniques informed my way of moving. I used to focus on using my four limbs a lot when I got to move or dance, as I thought it would be the most notable way to show my movement. After both the Feldenkrais Method and Bodenwieser technique training I felt a lot more around my back and especially my pelvis. I found both techniques can lead me to discover more possibilities of how I move around my pelvis and how I include my back movement into my way of moving. It gives me so much more freedom of how I could use my body and how I create movements in many different ways, instead of just focusing on the movement of my limbs.'

The use of the often non-goal oriented Feldenkrais lessons as preparatory practice was not always unproblematic. During the summer residency in Auckland (2015) dancers suggested that 'Feldenkrais always seemed to prepare the perfect muscles, joints and bones for whatever Bodenwieser task we would be doing that day' (NZDC Dancer Xin Ji 2015). While in the winter residency in Berlin (2016) dancers described Feldenkrais lessons as 'a gateway' where 'our experience is prepared' (Karl Tolentino 2016), questions emerged whether such preparation is sufficient for an extensive Bodenwieser-informed practice. Dancer Christine Kokiri (2016) questions the consistency of the intensity of core-mobilisation as

‘unrealistic to do as an everyday class [...] much too jarring on the back. Everything, not just in class, is at 100%. Even when it’s a slowish section, like the entangled duets, you are still pushing your body as far as it can go. I guess, that’s because to express, you feel you need to all go beyond to project your emotions to the audience’.

The integration of The Feldenkrais Method and Bodenwieser’s work, both dynamically and spatially contrasting practices, still stays an open field for negotiation and development.

### **Countless Variations**

Most of Feldenkrais lessons probed were followed by or interspersed with improvisational periods to allow for discovery and exploration through trial and error. Dancer Katie Rudd (2015) suggests an enhancement of choice making through the ‘merging of this technique with the freedom to explore it through improvisation’. Bodenwieser’s own classes and rehearsal processes included periods of improvisation and exploration where technical knowledge could be tested and applied in thematic, often dramatic, contexts. Australian dance-maker Keith Bain described his early studies with Bodenwieser in Australia: ‘She did a have a lovely skill in making movement out of movement [...] you tend to keep finding vocabulary.’<sup>33</sup> Improvisations were usually structured around contrasting themes which challenged dancer’s habitual artistic preferences.

During Feldenkrais lessons learners are encouraged to explore variations and opposition in quality, initiation and spatial organisation of proposed patterns. Feldenkrais’ focus on developing a practice for questioning the endless possibilities of ‘how’ movements can become organised through reflective practice beyond habitual choices, echoes Bodenwieser’s artistic premise ‘not to be concerned only in the *what* of movement, but more of (sic) the *how* and of the countless variations of the manner in which a movement can be executed’.<sup>34</sup> A highlighting of optionality in questioning the construction and execution of movement patterns constructs a micro-culture of co-inquiry within the process of creation, which asks dancers to author choices from within. Feldenkrais’ privileging of optionality against correctness, manifested in what he named his ‘theory of reversibility’, is rooted in his stance that ‘the adherence to one principle to the utter exclusion of the opposite is contrary to the laws of life’ (2005:18). Such practice towards becoming ‘flexible minds’ (2010) can perhaps

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<sup>33</sup> Bain 1986, cited in Milne Holme 2011

<sup>34</sup> SDMT Archives : Ausdruckstanz Lecture 1986, slide 4



serve to liberate dancers in the finding of a broad range choreographic choices and might prepared dancers to engage with a broad range of qualities of movement expression and styles that Bodenwieser proposes in her work. Dancer Xin Ji (2015) describes the combination of Feldenkrais lessons and improvisation processes as a merging of ‘choices, different options and also suggestions. Because of that I have got to try every single way to move my body without censoring myself.’

### **Empathy Machines: Touching - Entwining**



*Die Kugel (The Ball)* Tanzgruppe Prof. Bodenwieser, Wien. d’Ora Benda

During our research workshops Carol Brown introduced processes of entanglement as a key aspect of Bodenwieser's choreographic language. This entwining touch, evident in a broad range of Bodenwieser's choreographies became part of a palette of devices towards the making of duet and group situations. Oberzaucher-Schüller (in Vernon-Warren 1999) suggests that Bodenwieser repeatedly used processes of entangling or entwining of dancers as 'choreographic device'. Touch encounters within Bodenwieser's work reveal a mutual dependency in weight-sharing, an entwining and moulding around the dancers' bodies, often in close core-contact with each other, hand to hand pushing and pulling interaction, and touching of faces. Her proposed partnering approaches stand apart from traditional patriarchal lifting scenarios. Touch becomes connector, a tool for intimacy beyond machine-bodies towards a becoming of empathy machines.

Within our project Feldenkrais-based touch-interactions formed a key practice in the transmission of Bodenwieser-informed practices. The empathetic, listen touch modalities proposed by Feldenkrais transformed easily into more manipulative and dynamic whole body touch interactions. Feldenkrais aimed to facilitate a lived understanding of an emerging 'Enactive Social Understanding' (Di Paolo et al 2014:60) of learners within their lived environment, by proposing a transformative model of 'organic learning' through movement and touch. Reese (1984) elaborates that such Feldenkraisian 'organic learning is related to the physical development of the body and nervous system [as] co-dependent interaction with the outer world'. It is this co-dependency and an emerging 'relational body' (Batson 2008) of the curious-sensuate person that Feldenkrais foregrounds through his touch based practices. Feldenkrais suggests that touch can suspend boundaries and binaries between self and other, that touch can form an act of self-creation of social unity: 'through touch, the toucher and the touched, can become a new ensemble, [...] a new entity' (in Ginsburg 2010:267).

During our choreographic laboratories we formalised such processes 'becoming a new ensemble' through regular periods of FI-touch exchanges amongst the dancers. Dancers commented on notions of professional intimacy that emerged through touch based interactions within their choreographic processing as 'almost a short cut where I want to be' (Xin Ji 2015); Dancer Katie Rudd (2015) suggest that the relationship 'with partners felt serene and emotionally connected, which led to moving together with ease.'

## The Body Eccentric

This essay has argued that the diasporic and marginalised work of Gertrud Bodenwieser incorporates emancipatory dimensions that can be traced within her own writings, in the proto-somatic work of Bess Mensendieck and through witness accounts from ex-Bodenwieser dancers. The essay aimed to reveal how a creative unfolding of Bodenwieser's discovery-based practices can foster dancers' psycho-physical agency within collaborative modes of creation and offer a rich terrain for contemporary inquiry. *Releasing the Archive* included trans-disciplinary modalities of knowledge transmission - choreographic laboratories, writing exercises and vocal work, workshops where young dancers transmit their interpretation of Bodenwieser's ecstatic practice to workshop participants, discussions, the sharing of visual material and gallery-like presentations of choreographic material. Such multi-modal facilitation supported a process of learning to 'how to express myself inside out' (Xin Ji 2016), and seemed to foster a reconnecting to an emotional world that dancers described themselves as 'usually disconnected' from (Lucy Lynch 2016). Dancers highlighted the importance of periods of reflective writing as a process 'to translate physical experiences and thoughts into words' (Rudd 2016), and an understanding of 'more than just movement – its ideas and principles that help to understand the expressionist dancer'(Christine Kokiri 2016). Kokiri suggests that 'the classes are a foundation to help facilitate ecstatic open dances'.



*Releasing The Archive*, Somatische Akademie Berlin (2016) Dancer Katie Rudd

During our artistic inquiries in Auckland (2015) notions of *the eccentric* emerged as choreographic topic while working from an image of early Bodenwieser dancers titled: *Eccentric Dance* (1929). Dancer Hilde Holger and colleague Lisl Rinaldini are pictured in twisted semi-supine positions with legs splayed open, wearing strange black leather like caps and straps around their bare legs. The sensuate woman body displayed seems placed outside of clear systems of visual reference of the period; limbs and costume seem disjointed, in between a mix of shiny sexual-bondage gear and cubist costume shapes. The choreographic experiments developed by NZDC dancers develop into a syncopated duet of pelvic thrusts and drops, flapping limbs, torso drops and odd changes of angles in space.

The *Eccentric Body* became a testing ground for further choreographic experiments during our Berlin residency at Somatische Akademie in February 2016. The eccentricity of the emerging practice lived through, as Carol Brown highlighted, being literally ex-centred, outside of a central axis. Reading Bodenwieser's work as ex-centred and placed outside - her preferred spatial forms of *Schlinge*, *Kreis*, *Schopfkreis* – sling, circle and head-circle all seem to orbit around an evacuated spatial axis with great sense of abandon – highlights a process of facilitating instability within our archival practice. What sort of dancerly agency and relationality are constructed through such ex-centering or displacing? What world-making emerges through this ex-centering, placed in dialogue with an intimate entwining of becoming one?



*Releasing the Archive*, Somatische Akademie Berlin (2016), Dancer Lucy Lynch

By acknowledging the vulnerability of the ex-centred artist, *Releasing the Archive* of the diasporic works of Gertrud Bodenwieser, as a practice of cultural repair, aims to resist rational notions of absolute truths - such resistance being supported through interventions of critical non-corrective processes inherent in the Feldenkrais Method. Gilson reminds us that ‘the experience of vulnerability presents us with the reality of fallibility, mutability, unpredictability and uncontrollability. We are affected through forces outside of our control, the effects of which we can neither fully know nor fully understand’ (2014:3). How can the shared archival processes proposed by Carol Brown, myself and collaborating dancers become vessel for an un-controlling of emerging affective forms and creative impulse?

In a current climate of uncertainty and flux in Europe, where economic crisis and shifts in population through migration and refuge are putting a post-Cold War order into question, the German *tanzkongress 2016* placed processual notions of ‘Zeitgenossenschaft /Contemporariness’ as its main focus. This is understood with reference to ‘the German word “Genossenschaft”—of association as a sense of belonging, while at the same time implying the interrogation of its own art form’<sup>35</sup>. Can we release a sense of contemporary belonging within or through the Bodenwieser Method? Can a creative interrogating and re-embodying of traces of the Bodenwieser Method, long excluded from the European dance canon, become part of a living choreographic reference system that embraces a shift from de-generation to an open-ended practice of somatic re-generation?

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.tanzkongress.de/en/home.html>

*Releasing The Archive* was presented as a talk/ laboratory and *clinic of repair* at Tanzkongress in June 2016,

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