Performance art department

Contemporary dance department

BENDING THE LINE

A practice research

Critical reflection for BA-degree in contemporary dance

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Abstract:

"Bending the line" is a practice research where Kari Vig Petersen engages in movement practices that either supports a sensitive body or a tough body. By putting these different practices into her own body, she is asking if opposite movement practices and qualities can exist in one body. How does this body dance?

The interest lays in not wanting to choose either to be a sensitive dancer or a tough dancer. The wish is to own both oppositional qualities on the edges of the line. When the edges of the line are found, the exploration is to see if the line can bend into a circle. The hypotheses is that this circle will enrichen the dancing body.

In this practice research, there are two practices for the sensitive body and two for the tough. The Feldenkrais method, Gaga, The Ido Portal method and ballet. Through 6 weeks of physical work, Kari works her way through all these practices, and keeps a red thread by improvising a dance at the end of each day, as an answer to the bodily information.

By the end of the 6 weeks, the work is being presented for the public. The format of the presentation is a dancing lecture, where Kari shares through words and movement, what she has been researching.
BENDING THE LINE - A PRACTICE RESEARCH

Sensitive—Tough
Delicate—Rough
Small—Big
Lazy—Power
Slow—Fast

How can one body contain the opposite poles of physical practices, from the sensitive to the tough?

How does this body dance?

WITHOUT being defined and formulated, this question has lived in my body and mind during the past 6 months. Participating in Metamorphosis1, dance and improvisation festival in Sweden, was the starting point for my curiosity. Living in Israel for 5 months after that supported this curiosity. The range between the two opposite poles - the sensitive to the tough, is very present there, both in the social structure and in the dance world.

Why do I think this is an interesting question? Why is it of importance?

WE like to see the world in boxes, and we like to belong to one of these boxes. Boxing also happens in the dance world. You pick unconsciously or consciously what movement method, technique or quality you are more into. Then you try to become as good as you can in your choice, even a specialist. Often, within the different boxes, hierarchy appear.

I DON’T WANT TO CHOSE. It seems boring to me. I am into sensitive movement practices as well as tough ones. More than that I am into realizing that there is a line of

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1 Metamorphosis - improvisation festival in Sweden https://www.ciresearchsweden.com/
movement, between the sensitive and tough, and from there trying to expand this line. After expanding the line, I would like to bend it, hopefully into a circle so that the two endpoints touch. I see this as a way to find the full potential of the body.

In this paper I will write about already established practices that either focuses on the sensitive or on the tough. During the past 6 weeks I have been doing a physical research titled "Bending the line", where I'm putting my body through these practices. The findings from this physical research ended with a presentation. By referring to my experiences and findings from "Bending the line", as well as referring to already establish practices, I will contextualize my research.

The methods:

First, I will explain the methods I have been working with. I will write shortly about the history and development of each method, then focus on what kind of body and dancing the practice supports. I will also explain how I used these methods in my physical research. I chose two methods for the sensitive category and two for the tough. They will follow in this order; the Feldenkrais method, Gaga, the Ido Portal method and Ballet.

The Feldenkrais body:

*IF STRAIN NO GAIN*

"The Feldenkrais Method® offers a unique and practical way to realize our potential more fully. It is an educational method focusing on learning and movement, which can bring about improved movement and enhanced functioning. It is named after its originator, Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984), an engineer and physicist as well as a Judo teacher."2"
Moshe Feldenkrais was a successful and intelligent Israeli. He got his degrees in Engineering in France. During the second world war he fled to Britain. After the war he came back to Israel, and this is when he started to teach and develop further his method.\(^3\)

As many other somatic practices, the development of the Feldenkrais method started from a physical injury. Moshe suffered from chronic pain in his knee. He was about to undertake a big surgery when he decided to apply his knowledge from physics, engineering and martial arts to go through an intense self-study of his own movement habits.\(^4\) When this resulted in pain relief, he decided to share his methodical founds with others. From age 50, Moshe dedicated all his time to further development of his method, developing "awareness through movement" classes. He was the private teacher of the prime minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, something that supported his popularity\(^5\).

The Feldenkrais method is a movement method aimed for all. By that I mean it is not only dancers or sports people that will benefit from this practice. The method supports a body that is sensitive towards the quality of any movement we do in our bodies. This sensitivity helps create more ease and range of movement. Coordination is practiced and improved, as well as finding grace in your movement.\(^6\) The Feldenkrais method is aimed to help your everyday movements, walking, sitting, running, doing dishes etc.

In my physical research project "Bening the line" I have frequently practiced the Feldenkrais method. I found great difference in my dancing when starting my studio time with Feldenkrais and when not. Approximately 60 minutes of an online guided Feldenkrais session\(^7\), allowed me to bring awareness to my body. This awareness awakens sensitivity towards my physical self. It gave me a certain quality to the way I carry my body, and the

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\(^3\) "Moshe Feldenkrais", Wikipedia, last modified 11.03.2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosh%C3%A9_Feldenkrais](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosh%C3%A9_Feldenkrais)


\(^5\) Elizabeth Beringer, *Embodied Wisdom* (California: Somatic Resources, 2010) 224


way I dance my dance. I experience a sense of ground and contentment in myself, as well as delicacy and multidirectional options of movement.

When categorizing in sensitive and tough, I would put the Feldenkrais method as a sensitive movement practice. The term: "if strain, no gain" is a clear indicator of the value of sensitivity. When talking about physicality, the method believes that you should stay within the limit of your own comfort to find development. You should never put any strain on your body as you work. Neither should you put strain on you mind as in being too strict or goal orientated. Only then you can find sensitivity and awareness, and the richness of movement existing in your body. After practicing Feldenkrais, it is becoming clear to me that the method supports a way of dealing with my physical body, a way which can be taken on in life as well.

"By increasing sensitivity, the Feldenkrais Method assists you to live your life more fully, efficiently, and comfortably."  

My question to the "if strain no gain"-mentality, is when I wish to dance with high physicality, to jump, to fall, to stand on my hands, to do acrobatics or to do push-ups. Am I then betraying my Feldenkrais body?

Reading a discussion on the Facebook group "Movement culture" regarding the same questions as I ask above gave me an interesting input. "Part of the reason for practicing the method is to do other things better." (see image 1.)

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10 "Movement Culture", Facebook group, accessed 12.03.2018, [https://www.facebook.com/groups/moveculture/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/moveculture/)
The quote above stayed with me in my physical research, "Bending the line". It became an essential statement for my process and my presentation result. Half way into the process I decided to let my research be colored by this thought. By putting my body through a Feldenkrais Methode intensive, doing one lesson every day for 6 weeks, and then doing Ido Portal training and my dancing parallel, I got to try out this question in my own body.

The Gaga body:

"a lot of it is about delicacy, about small gestures, but still being able to punch”

--Ohad Naharin

Gaga is a movement language that helps you connect to the dancer in you. It is all improvisation, though you are encouraged to play with forms that you already know. Through improvising your dance while being guided by the teacher, you will find more awareness towards your physical self, finding more delicacy and sensitivity of your movements. The gaga language trains a body that with awareness works with gravity in such a way that it is not being shaped or pulled down, nor is it using a lot of muscular tension to move. There is a state of body called floating, which is essential for the gaga language.

The Gaga movement language was developed by the director of Batsheva dance company, Ohad Naharin. It started as a self-healing research for Ohad, when he suffered from back pain. Later it became a way for him to communicate with his dancers when choreographing. Gaga is now spread worldwide, there are classes being offered for dancers and non-dancers constantly.

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11 Youtube, "Ohad Naharin discusses Gaga Movement", video, directed by danceconsortium, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGPGIQL1vJc&list=PLNc5MrHJb7zahfX1


13 "Mr. Gaga", directed by Tomer Heymann, (Israel: Heymann Brothers Film, 2015), DVD.
During the years I have put my body through a lot of gaga training. To me, there is something tasty about this movement language, and my body seems to be hungry for it. By tasty I mean something delicate and sensual, making the dancer into something delicious. In my research practice, I used what I have learned from my previous gaga training. When I was doing my dancing, I gave myself tasks in similar ways that they do in gaga. I would connect to my imagination when trying to find a dance that I was curious about. I would tap into the same state of body and concentration. I see this state as a rich place to be, where everything is possible, because in this state you become very alert and ready.

I discovered that I could use the knowledge I gained from gaga in my project, "Bending the line". Through Gaga, I found a place in my dancing, where I can use both my sensitive body and my tough body. Einav Katan writes in his book "Embodied philosophy in dance", a book about the Gaga movement language; "In order to intensify the research, the dancers might be requested to linger in the moment of when they reach their most massive sensations, and search for further possibilities of finding freedom of movement at the peak of exertion." To me, this is exactly what I found that Gaga has to offer, to find sensitivity and awareness, even in the most physical and exhausting moving.

The Ido Portal body:

**No pain no gain**

"The method is about how to take control over your own body, and to train it in a very specific way. There is a strong wish and attempt to actually manipulate the body."

I have recently undertaken 4 months of the Ido Portal method. It strengthened my body and enriched my movement possibilities. It also reinforced me with my disciplined side.

Ido Portal is an Israeli movement fanatic. He developed his own method as an answer to not finding what he was searching for, inside the world of movement. He learned and

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15 Kari Vig Petersen, "I DO essay" (Iceland: May 2017)
practiced a lot of different disciplines, from the martial arts and dance. Through this learning he wished for a method focusing on a broader aspect on movement, so that he would have to specialize and choose one discipline only. That was not to find anywhere, so Ido Portal decided to develop his own method.\textsuperscript{16}

To me, the Ido Portal method fits in the tough category. The slogan "no pain no gain" is frequently used inside their gym. The physicality they teach as well as the mindset around the training is extremely tough. You are acknowledged as a good student and practitioner if you show improvement. The way to reach improvement is only through HARD WORK.\textsuperscript{17} Hard work and consistent quality of practice is the base line of this method. It is even more valued to be a hard worker than a graceful or talented mover/dancer.

I really enjoyed this training. In my research project I am continuing the Ido Portal practice. I am putting my body through these tough movements and I am working with a disciplined mind for each exercise I do.

The Ido Portal practice consists of animalistic and acrobatic movements. Locomotion practice is something I do a lot. Locomotion is different ways of traveling on the floor, on all fours. There are both different set patterns, as well as improvisation with it. It demands a strong and connected body, to be able to move graceful in this way. Handstand practice is also a big part of the method. I would spend at least 20 minutes every day practicing my handstand. This way of moving put my body into a state of strength, control and precision.

Mostly I did Ido Portal practice after one hour of Feldenkrais. My body likes it, but my mind gets confused. Should I really push myself more? Should I stay inside my own range comfort? Is this a good kind of pain?

I found it interesting to start my dancing after one hour of Feldenkrais method and then Ido Portal practice. There was loads of contradictions and questions in my body that would keep my improvisation dance alive and rich.


\textsuperscript{17} “Ido Portal”, Facebook group, accessed 12.03.2018, \url{https://www.facebook.com/portal.ido/posts/609537642421553}
The ballet body:

I wish to shortly mention ballet as a physical practice that I used in "Bending the line". Ballet has a long history. How we know ballet today has roots coming all the way from the 15th and 16th century. Its development started in Europe, first in Italy and France. Ballet developed into being a highly technical form of dancing, perfection and precision is important. The technique of ballet supports a strong and precise dancing body, with great skills and understanding of lines, turns and jumps.

Parallel to my research project, I took ballet classes in the morning. I will categorize ballet as a tough physical practice. Ballet dance is aiming strictly towards a very specific body, with a specific aesthetic. The movements executed in the class are with high physicality, power and control.

I enjoy improving my ballet technique. I enjoy spending time in this high intensity physical practice. I enjoy trying to find clarity and aesthetically pleasing forms of the body. Even more, I enjoy and trust the fact that I can apply my knowledge and richness from the Feldenkrais Method and the Gaga language, to find new layers inside my ballet body.

"Bending the line":

"You don’t know something until you can do its opposite"

--Moshe Feldenkrais

"Bending the line" is the title of my practice research project. I had 6 weeks to do this research, and it ended up with a 17 minutes presentation of the practice research, performed twice.

As this essay presents, my research was about putting my body through oppositional physical practices and see how my body could contain the qualities found in the different practices. The title comes from this, I imagine the physical practices being on oppositional

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points on a long line. What I'm trying to do is to bend this line, into a circle, and put it all into my body.

In the beginning I experienced contradiction and frustration while trying to embody such different physical practices. With each physical practice, there came a certain mentality with it. These mentalities were challenging and contradicting each other, which was difficult for me to contain in the beginning. Should I push myself until my body shakes from exhaustion? Or should I listen to the moment I'm putting my body through stress, and stop just before? In general, should I set goals and expectations for myself? Or should I think to myself that I'm good enough where I'm at now?

All these questions followed by the immense contradiction I experienced in my body and mind made it difficult for me to dance in the beginning. I knew that I always wanted to end with my improvisation dance, after practicing the different movement practices. This would be the place for me to look for answers to my research questions. My dancing in the first weeks felt awkward, stuck and a bit schizophrenic.

"Bending the line" is a solo project, so I spend a lot of time alone in the studio. I used my phone camera as my guidance. In week 3 I was watching my dancing, and I could see that something was starting to happen. There was something about the way I held and used my body while moving. I could see traces of the sensitive practices (Feldenkrais and Gaga) as well as the tough practices (Ido Portal and Ballet). I remember a feeling of relief as well as excitement. From this moment, I decided to trust my body to receive the information from the practices, and that it would show in my improvisation dances. I know that this feeling of trust towards what my body can contain, was an essential turning point in my research. It took the focus away from the frustrating contradiction feeling from before and redirected it towards curiosity for the richness created in my body.

For a while I thought that containing the oppositional movement practices and qualities in one body, meant to find a middle way. To kind of modify the extremes on each side, tone it down, and find where they can meet. As I went along with the practices, giving time to each of them, I realized that it was not about finding the middle way that I found
interesting. I found great pleasure in going into each practice with full focus and dedication, trying to benefit as much as I could inside this practice. I had an image of being a chameleon, being able to fit in everywhere. By being a chameleon, I would slowly expand the range of qualities and possibilities that my body could contain.

Towards the end of the process it became clear to me that the oppositional physical practices can support each other. I will mention again Moshe Feldenkrais statement, "you don’t know something until you know it's opposite". This thought applies well to my research. If I would have chosen only one of these physical practices and stayed only within that, I chose to think that I would not have benefitted from it as much as I do now. It is like "you don’t know good until you have met bad". By containing both qualities in one body and playing with the rage and the differences in dancing, there is clarity and richness in each movement. When using the tough movements and qualities, there will always be a layer of sensitivity and awareness underneath, and vice versa.

When deciding how to mediate my physical research in a suitable way, I found myself being inspired by "Talk and Walk". "Talk and Walk" is an initiative from Philipp Gehmacher, where he invites choreographers to come on stage and share their research in a moving lecture format. They talk and move at the same time, expanding the understanding of what a lecture or presentation is.

Looking into different examples of these moving lectures, it became clear to me that this was the way I wanted to mediate my practice research as well. The material I had been working with, and my founds from the research was not fitting into a "lights-music-go-performance". I wanted to share my interest in a clear way, to give the audience a chance to understand. I am very interested in the body and the importance of moving and drawing awareness towards the body, and I have a strong wish to share this interest with others. I hope to light up interest in others through sharing my interest.

The week before the presentation weekend I explored how to put words on my physical research while moving. I enjoyed, explored and played until I found what I wanted to share. My passion lead me to focus on the space in between my shoulder blades and the shoulder blades themselves, and they became the main characters of my presentation.

I presented my work twice, both times were successful. I had set my mind on being present, continuing the honest research and connecting to the audience. All of this worked, and it was a pleasure to see the audience's engagement when they were looking at me, my body and my movements, as I put words on what I was doing.

Working on my project, "Bending the line", was a great experience for me. I felt that I finally found my honest interest, and I stayed true to it. I really believe there is value and importance in my work, and I have planned to continue developing it after graduation. I see it continuing as a solo project, also I wish to try it in a duet. I want to combine the presentation with a workshop offer, to share my material even more. I'm looking forward!
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