

## EMERGENT IMPROVISATION CURRICULUM

In order for a person to advance in the practice and performance of emergent improvisation, an individual needs to have a diverse and original movement vocabulary, an attention to composing on a local, regional and global ensemble level, an ability to focus on particular patterns, an understanding of spatial relationships, a tracking of the amplification of movement information as it is relayed throughout a space, and a knowledge of compositional development over time while making choices in the present.

This teaching begins with the development of a solo practice that includes the building of an individual's movement vocabulary, an understanding of embodiment based on a cultivation of body sensation, a finely tuned attention to the spatial and sound environment and the ability to focus on the particular. The goals of a solo practice are to advance in the skills of invention, articulation, attention, versatility, and virtuosity.

**THE SOLO PRACTICE** includes the following:

### **Sensory work:**

interoceptors in the organs, exteroceptors in the skin  
proprioceptors in our awareness of our bodies in space,  
special senses ( touch, smell, hearing, taste, vision) to explore the environment  
moving from the breath  
body scans  
body mapping

### **Developing physical vocabulary:**

practice skills in balance, turns  
jumps, extensions, falls

initiating from body parts

rhythm and musicality

phrasing and timing

deconstruction of phrasing:

the same phrase with changes of level, repetition, focus, retrograde, speed, texture

body geography: mapping, creating landscapes, carving the space,

speed

attention to detail

initiating from internal imagery

### **Energy States/Levels of Intensity (based on LeCoq Theater technique)**

1)barely alive

2)casual, relaxed

3>alert, attentive

4)intense, passionate

5)ecstatic, extremes

### **Fluids/Textures(based on Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's work)**

1)synovial: rag doll

2)lymph: exact articulation & focus

3)arterial: expanding high energy

4)venal: swinging and rebound

5)interstitial: sensual and flowing

6)cerebro-spinal:moving from center

**Attention to spatial environment and sound:**

Seeing, observing the physical space

Finding location

Understanding foreground and background

Moving phrasing through space

Across the floor with walking, stillness and focus

Listening for rhythms, sonic textures, atmosphere, musical forms

Building relationships with sound structures

**Focus on the particular:**

Choosing specific movement material

Theme and variation

Skills of focus: far away, close up, multi-focus, laser beam

Practice of beginnings, moving to development, practice of endings

Building of particular phrase material

Attention to full embodiment in performance: imagistic, architectural, rhythmic

**THE ENSEMBLE PRACTICE IN EMERGENT FORMS**

**The Ensemble Practice is where the individual begins composing with other individuals. This does not involve a compromise of autonomy or movement material, but a sharing of information, an ability to connect with physical and sensory signals in order to create a new structure where the self-organization of the dancers creates a complex system or form. The first part of the ensemble practice is learning pattern in groups. Examples to practice are:**

accumulation

shadowing

unison

repetition

waves and eddies

washes

paths

stillness

freeze and replace

solo / chorus

framing

charges

sudden changes: contrasts, counterpoints

retrograde

beginnings

endings

entrances and exit

initiator, responder, framer

interruptions

referencing

spatial patterns

rhythmic patterns

narratives/images

## **EMERGENT ENSEMBLE FORMS**

Currently, there are four emergent ensemble forms, two of which are fully developed and two that are in the early stages of development.

**THE COMPLEX UNISON FORM** (based on Stuart Kauffman's concept of "order for free" and Gerald Edelman's concept of "integration and differentiation")

A structure with three sections:

- 1) **Flocking: Walking, Stillness and Focus** - the ability to create an ensemble
- 2) **Simple Unison: Ensemble phrasing based on shape, timing, spatial relationships and focus** – the ability to initiate, assemble and dissolve group relationships, amplifying similar information through the space, creating tableaux in a series of landscapes
- 3) **Complex Unison: building more complicated phrasing among the ensemble, creating reference points, raising the intensity, holding the integrity of the connections while creating variation, tracking local, regional and global composition, attention to development based on initial information and how new emergent idea proceeds and concludes**

**THE MEMORY FORM** (based on Gerald Edelman's concept of "the remembered present")

A structure based on the memory of the ensemble as they reconstruct an event that they have created. Memory in this context is complex; it is built on an original description of time, space, and gesture and develops more variation based on relationships, subtext, and selection of valued information.

The form is built in several steps:

- 1) **An event is created by the ensemble: attention to simplicity, detail, ability to repeat, clear focus, interesting relationships, physical intensity**
- 2) **The event is repeated within a particular spatial frame, in this case, a square, but could be any delineated frame. Dancers in the event return to the outside of the frame after the repeat.**
- 3) **The event is repeated with dancers substituting for each other's roles and they return to the frame**
- 4) **The event is repeated and multiple dancers fulfill singular roles in the event. This leads to further complexity where the linear sequence of the original is no longer important, and the real memory of the event emerges. This may take numerous paths of complicated relationships, levels of intensity and virtuosity in dancing, variations in texture and quality of original phrasing, subtexts that create new narratives embedded in the event, and challenges to the tensions of an ensemble "memory" that is constantly being negotiated.**

## **THE DYNAMICS AND DEVELOPMENT FORM (based on the concepts of Gerald Edelman on morphology in Topobiology and the developmental ideas of Esther Thelen)**

This is a new form based on the embodiment of rhythmic structuring. An individual practice of a deep understanding of timing is necessary. This practice can relate to rhythm as physically expressed through body parts, movement phrasing, punctuation, repetition, theme and variation, ostenato and patterning, spatial intervals, exits and entrances, and timing shifts of off balance and transitions. The practice of stillness is an important aspect to this form as the absence of a visible rhythm. Rhythm in this context is seen as inherently developmental. It cannot stay static, it must move somewhere, even if the dancers are in the same location, the body will be moving and developing material.

### **Possible building blocks:**

- 1) Simple rhythmic structures are introduced. They can be repeated. These can take the form of movement phrases, initiation of body parts, relationships between dancers, shift in spatial patterns. They are clearly articulated.
- 2) Simple rhythmic structures overlap and influence each other. Particular attention to spatial and physical relationships, to composing the development of the original material.
- 3) Rhythmic structures build into complexity; variation can appear in many ways, through solo material, to expansion of rhythmic phrasing among the ensemble, to selecting for shape, spatial pattern, or texture that emerges from rhythmic elements, referencing original rhythms, amplifying thematic rhythmic material, creating a global composition emerging out of layering of original rhythmic information

## **THE IMAGE FORM (based on Per Bak's concept of "point of criticality", Susan Sgorbati's ideas on emergent structuring in relation to systems design as well as structure in film imagery and visual mapping)**

This is a new form that is investigating how images get built. Attention to the entrance and exit in and out of the frame is significant. The articulation of significant difference is important, and the observation of detail. The form conveys how groups come together and share a specific visual context. The practice involves exploring the nature of beginnings, how development proceeds in image building, and at what point does it congeal at its point of criticality, and where does it resolve. Structuring elements along the spectrum of chaos and order are important. More chaotic or more ordered elements might instigate how an image is created. Images can be narratives or abstractions. An individual practice into the focus of concentrated action, immediate responses to surprises, full embodiment of physical phrasing while narratives or other levels of attention are simultaneous, and an ability for tracking the development of material in building imagery are needed.

### **Possible building blocks:**

- 1) Entering the frame with a specific physical action. The ensemble contributes to this beginning with a series of actions until the elements are established upon which the image will develop. Basically, setting the scene.
- 2) The ensemble develops the image building on these elements. Compositional tools such as point and counterpoint, theme and variation, repetition, timing, spatial and physical relationships are all utilized. Objects and costumes are available.
- 3) The complexity of the form emerges, and the image appears. It may take a variety of forms, some representational, some abstract. The nature of the image dictates the length of time it takes to fulfill itself, some images may include strenuous physical vocabulary, complex phrasing, and complicated relationships; other images may be photographic, surreal, and push typical boundaries of time.

### **Rules of Improvisation**

**Show up**

**Pay attention**

**Tell the truth**

**Don't get attached to the result**

**Katherine Ferrier from an old Buddhist text**

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