

**The Cooperative Dance Education Centre - Pilot Project Berlin
(Hochschulübergreifendes Tanzzentrum, HüTZ)¹**

by Victoria Pérez Royo

The Cooperative Dance Education Centre - Pilot Project Berlin is a new educational program for contemporary dance and choreography in Berlin. The centre is based at two art universities, the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK Berlin) and the University of Drama "Ernst Busch" (HfS). The network TanzRaumBerlin/ Uferstudios GmbH is also a close cooperating partner.

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http://www.udk-berlin.de/sites/tanz/content/index_ger.html

Date of opening. Since June 2006

History: It was created in 2006 with the aim of realising a series of pilot projects. It started with an initial research phase, in which contents, new forms of teaching, learning and organisation for the course were examined before starting with the bachelor's and master's programmes.

Postgraduate degrees offered:

- Master of Arts SODA Solo / Dance / Authorship
- Master of Choreography

MASTER OF ARTS SODA (Solo / Dance / Authorship)

Specificity: artist-led and practice-centered master's.

It is conceived as a platform for research, exploration and production. It focuses on enabling choreographers to articulate and interrogate art-making processes and on leading them to the production of self-devised and self-performed creation.

The course structure is completely flexible, so that it can be remodeled and designed in the long run. Emphasis is placed on individual motivation and responsible independent study.

Year the degree course was founded: October 2007

Professions the degree prepares students for:

Dancer, choreographer, performer in contemporary practices.

¹ We would like to thank Ingo Reulecke and Rhys Martin for assisting us in the creation of this report.



Learning approach:

It focuses on dance and performance making within the wider field of contemporary arts practice. The MA SODA takes a practice-led, critical and reflective approach to solo work and dance making, and to the issues of authorship, collaboration and process that surround much contemporary arts practice.

It is conceived as a frame in which to learn and develop specific and individual fields of research and to share them within the community. The centre is conceived as a place for practice-based research.

Aims:

“To provide a distinctive, practice-led postgraduate level education for practitioners and graduates who wish to make dance and performance work in relation to embodied and conceptual practice, and engage with and reflect on the physical, compositional, intellectual and cultural processes involved.”²

Student Profile:

Dancers, performers, artists and makers who have already established a motivated (but not necessarily professional) practice in dance and performance, who wish to extend and develop the forms, contexts and intellectual range of their work. They have an interest in engaging with the contexts, challenges and environments of contemporary practice.

Number of students: 8

Admission requirements and criteria.

Ability to work in a collaborative dance context; artistic potential to respond to tasks in a teaching environment.

Required submission materials:

- Portfolio. Documentation or sample of their previous work
- CV
- Letter of motivation reflecting on the concepts ‘solo, dance, authorship’
- Joke (The admission process was conceived also as a part of the whole pilot project; asking the applicants for a joke it was intended to motivate some kind of performative responses; although it was quite controversial, it was also thought of as a tool for avoiding the seriousness and severity of the academy.

² http://www.udk-berlin.de/sites/tanz/content/study_courses/ma_solo_dance_authorship/index_eng.html

Admission procedure.

- Evaluation of portfolios
- Audition in the form of three-day workshops and showing their own work.

PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Duration of the programme: 2 years full-time

Total number of ECTS: 120

Modules / Structure with credits distribution

Year 1

Module 1: Negotiating Solo/ Dance/ Authorship (30 ECTS)

Module 2: Compositional Practices & Contexts (30 ECTS)

Year 2

Module 3: Independent Research (30 ECTS)

Module 4: Final SODA Work (30 ECTS)

Detailed description

Year 1

Taught Modules

Module 1: *Negotiating Solo/ Dance/ Authorship* (30 ECTS)

“This takes as its starting point the student's own practice-led, analytical and diagnostic account of their engagement with compositional and performance processes, and associated discourses. The usage of the key terms 'solo', 'dance' and 'authorship' and their relation to contemporary practice are established as a problematic. Students identify common points of departure for practice-led research, documentation, their artist's workbook and further debate.”³

It consists of a diagnostic process of the students' work that seeks to act as a frame which would permit them to position their work among the others, before starting with the block in which they get confronted with established artists.

This block is conceived as an intensive meeting during ten weeks in which the students were exposed to a great variety of approaches, coming from different personalities invited who were interested in solo work; the students were supposed to engage in a dialogue with them which was not formally or pedagogically settled beforehand. The students were intended to find their own strategies for a dialogue and to find points of interest for their own research into the different

³ Ibid.



insights the guests brought with them. As a result they should generate an artistic response to this block.

Module 2: *Compositional Practices & Contexts* (30 ECTS)

“The module focuses on compositional practices, the strategies and processes of specific artists and choreographers, and the practical, aesthetic and cultural contexts enabling and supporting them. Students engage in research through practice in relation to their own individual work. At the end of the module students prepare an initial proposal with a rationale for Independent Research in Semester 3 (Year 2).”⁴

The second semester was planned entirely in accordance with the students’ wishes: the contents as well as the learning approach were decided in negotiation, searching for a consensus between students and teaching staff. It developed as a kind of platform or colloquium in which discussion took place about the programme and the processes. As in other master’s programmes, it was difficult to find a consensus since the students came from very different backgrounds (some trained as dancers and some not, some coming from the visual arts and with very different technical levels). It was decided that no courses should be compulsory; instead the students should demonstrate an engagement with the programme.

Parallel to this the core staff continued offering classes and inviting choreographers, critics and writers to talk about their research in which the students could participate.

YEAR 2

Independent Research Modules

Module 3: *Independent Research* (30 ECTS)

Independent programme of autonomous research

“A sustained and independent programme of autonomous research which may include residencies, exchange with other centres of research in Europe and elsewhere. The students' research identifies and works with specialist areas that inform their practice and with the acquisition of specific skills and knowledge. At the end of the module students prepare a proposal for their final project in Semester 4 (Year 2).”⁵

Module 4: *Final SODA Project* (30 ECTS)

Formal requirements:

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

“The production of a solo work performed or presented in the public arena and that meets conceptual, aesthetic and production criteria that apply in wider professional arts communities and/or the cultural location for which the work is designed.”⁶

45 minutes solo programme. Actually it is possible to develop other kinds of work, but they should be justified.

It should be accompanied by a critical framing that positions the work in relation to the student's own experience and to a broader cultural and aesthetic context.

Public showing of the work: The project will be shown in external venues as a part of a negotiated MA SODA performance platform: SODA Products.

Learning methods

The MA uses both formal and informal structures; these include participation in local and international networks enabling exchange research and dialogue; seminars, as well as lectures with invited artists.

‘Pool’ platform

This is a method unique to this programme: a frame for visiting exhibitions, performances and other relevant cultural and educational activities in Berlin and being assisted in this process. The fact that the programme is based in Berlin, an optimal place to learn and attend conferences and see a great amount of works, constituted its strong basis; the students had a budget for the visits. The main point was, however, to bring these experiences, insights and interests into the group in a common discussion.

- Studio work

The students were provided with a studio space where they could develop their independent research. In the first semester they had 10 hours weekly for this individual work, which would increase in the course of the studies to 30 hours in the fourth semester. Inversely, at the beginning the students had 30 hours of seminars and work group while at the end there were only 10.

- Lecture Performances

Example: Soda Unplugged⁷

It is a series of performance lectures, designed to give a direct practice led insight into the work of artists invited by the MA SODA program, in and around the topic of solo practice. It borrows the term “unplugged “ from the music scene at the end of the last century. The series looks to explore performance not necessarily dependent on extended production facilities. It emphasizes the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ http://www.udk-berlin.de/sites/tanz/content/archive/lecture_performances/index_eng.html

intimacy and the individual presence of the artist. Above all it recognizes the necessity of experiencing live performances, in order to better facilitate their discussion and understanding in terms of the development of independent authored work.

Robyn Schulkowsky, Rosa Casado, Joanna Dudley, David Moss.

- Laboratory

Artistic Reference Frame „Choreographer plus“ January 2007

Leader: Ibrahim Quraishi (USA/F), Gabriel Smeets (NL)

Project leader Prof. Rhys Martin

Artistic Reference Frame „Choreographer plus“ October-November 2006

Leader Deborah Hay (USA), Margaret Cameron (Aus), Rosa Casado (E)

Project leader Prof. Rhys Martin

The idea consisted of getting three artists from different disciplines to set up a frame of investigation; the students were supposed to ask and find ways to explore the activity of choreographing. It was not based on teaching, but rather on establishing aesthetic parameters. Some laboratories were specifically focused on experiments and on trying out different formulae of practice-based and artistic research.

Finally, laboratory schedules were carried out on a daily basis.

- Workshops/ Seminars

Sarat Maharaj, Thinking Through The Visual.⁸ February 2009

Leader: Berna Kurt

“The sessions will explore the image as part of ‘visual art as knowledge production’. But what sort of knowledge does it spawn? What makes up the ‘difference of the visual’ vis à vis modes of knowing normally associated with academic and scientific practices? The double meaning of the phrase ‘Thinking Through’ is taken up – as in thinking ‘by means’ of the visual, in the sticky thick of its material and as in unpacking its ways of operating, deconstructing its processes and logic. This takes in the discursive and non-discursive force of the image. With the former we touch on themes of migration, cultural translation, difference and diversity, the knowledge economy, changing notions of work, labour and creativity. With the non-discursive scope of the image we look at the idea of the Subjective Enlightenment and the ‘friendship model’ of knowledge creation. The above will be explored with reference to elements of image, movement, dance-non-dance (Boro, Shakira, Bollywood, Opera Jawa. etc). Also, the idea is to mull over Agamben’s Homo

⁸ http://www.udk-berlin.de/sites/tanz/content/archive/workshops_seminars/index_eng.html



Sacer and Christoph Winckler's eponymous [sic] piece and to start up a study of Chapter 1 of Deleuze's 1000 Plateaus in terms of its reading through two projects — the dansology of Koosil-ya and Thomas Hirschhorn's 'Deleuze Monument'"⁹.

- Symposium

Symposium MA SoDA Solo Dance Authorship. August 2006

In collaboration with "Tanz im August" Festival.

The three-day conference was designed as a forum for solo dance performers/choreographers, theoreticians, representatives of post-graduate courses in the field of contemporary dance/choreography and partners from other disciplines who are interested in solo dance authorship.

Apart from these courses, all others taking place in the partner institutions Ernst Busch Schule and Universität der Künste are also open for the master's students.

In turn, the specific SoDA courses are often open to the wider public, in order to facilitate student engagement with the independent artist community in Berlin.

Assessment:

The MA SODA assessment "builds on a repeating pattern in each module of work presentation, process documentation, critical framing and contextual engagement which identifies the student's developing ability to articulate their practice and situate their work within public contexts."¹⁰

It is composed of performative presentation, a talk or a performance that demonstrates research and creative processes.

- written work with increasing length and complexity in the course of the four semesters (from 2000 to 5000 words text) in which the students set the parameters for the reception of their work.
- conversation in which the students are able to articulate their practice.
- artist workbook that gives evidence outside the work itself of a research process.

All the components are gathered in a single integrated assessment towards the end of each module. This locates the MA for the student as a trajectory of research practice, and places emphasis on responsible independent study, complemented by mentoring and tutorial guidance throughout the course. There are two mentors (core staff) throughout the entire four semesters for students' general questions; besides the students have the opportunity to engage a external mentor from the professional field who is able to help them further develop their research.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ http://www.udk-berlin.de/sites/tanz/content/study_courses/ma_solo_dance_authorship/index_eng.html

Skills obtained by the student on completion of the degree:

The students are able

- to articulate their practice to themselves, to their peers and to a public.
- to conduct practice-based research.
- to identify specific learning needs in order to develop their work and understand the contexts of its production and dissemination.

MASTER OF CHOREOGRAPHY

Year the degree course was founded: October 2008

Aims:

Integration of practical work with reflection.

Orientation to the development of skills for the realisation of artistic projects. Development of a autonomous artistic individuality.

To enable the students to be precise about and substantiate their inquiries, as well as to explore methods through which they are able to develop artistic individual strategies in the choreographic project work.

Professions the degree prepares for: choreographer

Student's profile:

Students who have finished their bachelor's in the previous two or three years. They are interested in a substantial development of their praxis and work in a context free of pressure.

Total number of students: 7. It is a pilot project, no more students are admitted for the time being.

Admission requirements:

Bachelor's degree

Satisfactory knowledge of the German language

Required submission materials:

Portfolio containing:

- motivation letter, documentation of previous works, CV.

Selection procedure:

- portfolio evaluation.



- personal interview in which the students present their work and explain their expectations about the programme.
- creation of a group choreography.

Criteria:

Artistic skills, ability to present one's own work and to reflect on it; capacity to articulate one's own artistic position and its context.

Ability for working in collaboration.

PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Duration of the programme: 4 semesters

Specificity:¹¹

The program gains its specific character through its emphasis on the process of perception as the basis of every creative act. Perception is examined on three different levels:

- Reflection of perception in relation to theory and research,
- Training of personal perception,
- Understanding the reception processes of one's own work in others

Total number of ECTS: this is a pilot programme and is still not adapted to the ECTS system.

Modules / Structure with study points distribution:

Body and Movement research. 10 study points

Context and Dramaturgy. 10 study points

Choreographic Praxis. 10 study points

Final Module. 30 study points

Learning approach:

“The programme does not privilege specific aesthetics, techniques or modes of working. Instead it raises awareness of a broad spectrum of possibilities within which the students formulate their own individual artistic position by examining the diversity being offered”¹².

Modules

¹¹ http://www.udk-berlin.de/sites/tanz/content/study_courses/ma_choreography/index_eng.html

¹² Ibid.



They are not chronological or consecutive, but rather three threads of learning activity present throughout the first three semesters and that offer an education from different perspectives simultaneously.

The modules ‘Body and Movement Research’ and ‘Context and Dramaturgy’ should flow into the third and most important one, ‘Choreographic praxis’. In the course of the programme there is a tendency to progressive independence in the student’s work and less in taught modules.

Body and Movement Research

“The module is meant as a laboratory for the development and implementation of fundamental aspects of movement discovery. The students try out and reflect on methods and techniques in order to create movement material by themselves or in collaboration with partners, and from this material develop their own strategies for body and movement research. As a basis for this work, a comprehensive body of physical knowledge (knowledge about the body as well as of the body) is developed, which is strongly based on somatic practices and methods.”¹³

The work with Body Mind Centering and Applied anatomy was very successful and by students’ request it is to be continued into the next (third) semester. Following the advice of the international panel about the risk of focusing excessively on somatic practices, it was decided to work more intensively with their own physiology conceived as the fundamental basis for choreographic work, to transform this reflection on one’s own body in an artistic and creative direction. The work with Body Mind Centering was complemented with choreographic and compositional tools for discovering movement material. One of the main developments was to focus on breathing as a basis structure for the creation of movement phrases.

This training is offered daily, although attendance is compulsory only two times a week.

Additional to this training, intensive workshops with invited guests are offered. For example, Lisa Nelson led ‘Tuning Scores’, which focused compositional improvisation basing on perceptual processes. Laurent Chétouane also worked with the students in a workshop focusing on perception and presence.

Context and Dramaturgy

“This module focuses on the reflection of choreographic projects and their contexts. It seeks to expand possibilities for individual artistic projects and the further development of capabilities such as spoken and written communication about individual artistic work.

With the help of performance analysis and text work, the students learn to sharpen their dramaturgical perspective on choreographic projects.”¹⁴

¹³ *Ibíd.*

¹⁴ *Ibíd.*

Learning methods:

Lecture, seminar and work presentation

Examples:

- Dance and Theatricality. Lecture
- Embodied mind. Seminar
- *Tanzgespräche*. Interview with invited artists and open discussion. The students decide now which artists they would like to invite.
- Presentation of work processes and discussion

Goals:

- to achieve different levels of reflection on choreographic projects and their contexts
- development of skills in oral and written communication about one's own artistic work and that of others.
- Analysis of performances and text reading.

Choreographic praxis

The reflections and research on the modules “Body and Movement Research” and “Context and Dramaturgy” come together in this one. “The module explores and reflects on all phases of work in a choreographic staging of a project idea ranging from the development of a concept for artistic work, the organisation and constitution of the rehearsal process to scenery and costumes, technical preparation and realisation of performances. The contents of the courses will be put into practice as part of rehearsal activities in a movement studio and studio stage.”¹⁵

It is mainly based on studio work; there is no concrete number of hours that should be dedicated to studio work; this will not be evaluated quantitatively, but qualitatively in the results of the research process.

Apart from these courses, all others taking place in the partner institutions Ernst Busch Schule and Universität der Künste are also open for the master's students.

Frequency of education:

Regular training and workshops occur within the so called ‘Block weeks’. Training takes place daily from 10 to 12; any other workshops and seminars start from 1pm and usually occur in the first three days of the week. In the second term, with more individual work only the first two days of the week are dedicated to courses.

Two or three times per semester the “project weeks” take place and are designed for workshops by invited guests. Only training continues, while all other courses are suspended.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Final Work

Formats:

The final module is composed of two parts: the practical work (up until now the work presented by the students at the end of the modules have been performative-oriented) and a portfolio documenting their work and which should contain their reflections on the themes and points which they considered relevant for their artistic research processes. The format of the portfolio is not fixed: the students must find their own way of reflecting on the master's.

Financing: HüTZ

Public showing of the work

Assessment:

Every student has a certain number hours at their disposal for individual mentoring; they can select one or various mentors from the permanent staff as well as from the associated working team.

Evaluation of the student work:

The learning and research processes developed during the semester should be reflected in the portfolio. This is the basis for the evaluation and assessment which takes place at the end of each semester; another relevant element for the assessment together with the portfolio is a personal and individual conversation between student and the module leaders. The rest of the staff is also available for interviews.

Evaluation board:

Internal staff (four people) for the first three semesters. For the fourth term it will be also composed of external members.

Competencies obtained by the student on completion of the degree:

The students have trained sensory capabilities and have a broader awareness of movement processes and images of the body, of dramaturgical structures and theatrical formations. They are able to communicate and evaluate phenomena in a precise and well-founded way.

TEACHING STAFF

Required professional qualifications:

dependent on the work they are going to develop in the programme: master's or professional experience.



Departmental structure:

There are three main departments, associated with the three degrees offered by HüTZ:
BA Contemporary Dance, MA Solo/Dance/Authorship. MA Choreography. Core staff of these departments are three or four people. The associated staff and visiting guests are more numerous.

Financing:

- official funding by the two institutions in which HüTZ is rooted: Ernst Busch Schule and Universität der Künste.
- public funding by Tanzplan Deutschland e.V. (until 2010).

CONTEXT

Academic network:

The students of these master's programmes are able to take courses in the partner institutions. The specific courses of HüTZ are in most cases open to the wider public.

Professional network:

The contact to the professional community is a main element in MA SODA. It “draws on the input of an extensive local, national and international network of dancers, choreographers, theorists, performance makers, artists and mentors to enable students to engage with and contribute to the field of contemporary arts.”¹⁶ The contact with the professional network is also very important for the MA Choreography, which facilitates it by means of the invited teachers and artists to lead seminars and give presentations about their work.

Organisation of events

- deMONTAGe - Max geht durch. Arbeiten zur Frage "Was ist Choreographie?"

Series of talks with choreographers organised by the students of Choreography taking place on the first Monday of every month.

- Student's work presentations at the end of each semester.

-SODA works

Regular and continuous presentations of the students' work at very different venues (Tanz im August, Sophiensaele, Uferstudios, Halle)

¹⁶ http://www.udk-berlin.de/sites/tanz/content/study_courses/ma_solo_dance_authorship/index_eng.html



INFRASTRUCTURES

Rooms for theory classes with video and audio facilities, studios for individual work, video and recording studios, a stage for student projects, library.

SELF ASSESSMENT

The MA Choreography has developed a structure which has become an essential tool for self assessment: Jourfix. It is a compulsory plenary meeting of students and teaching staff during two hours and that takes place once a week. It has an open format and enables to early detection of and reaction to possible points of dissatisfaction. It allows to improve and evaluate the programme in collaboration with all participating people. SODA, as it was already mentioned, developed from the second semester on a platform in which discussion took place about the programme and its processes. Otherwise feedback is given informally within the frame of the discussion in the courses.

