

The experience of discourses in dance and somatics

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Abstract

An action research consisting of somatic education classes within a bachelor program in dance has showed how dancers negotiate the dominant dance discourse and the marginal discourse of somatic education in relation to the complexities of body and health issues. More specifically, the students appreciated the approach of the Feldenkrais Method that favoured a pedagogy compatible with health concerns and with Foucault's concept of technologies of the self.

Keywords

health
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Introduction

I will remember this action-research because it was an opportunity for me to question myself about my dance practice in day to day life and its effect on my health and wellbeing. It raised many questions and also allowed me to stand up and make clear choices. I realize again that I resist change or what is new when the results are not immediate. My vision of the body has changed. I have been able to take a personal position, but I've also had the opportunity to better understand and to perceive the milieu in which I am entering.

(Claudine)

These words express one student's reaction at the end of an action-research with a group of pre-professional contemporary dancers.¹ The action-research was initiated because our previous studies revealed the extent to which the pursuit of an ideal body, and the pressure of infallible performance, can provoke great challenges for undergraduate dance students in terms of their health management. Though many authors have shown that the body is constructed by means of different dance practices, few have attempted to understand how dancers negotiate these practices in relation to the complexities of body and health issues. The action-research took place within a bachelor program in dance and consisted of somatic education classes in which we included discussions about the results of empirical studies on dancers' health. As such we hoped to offer a platform to challenge students since we believe that dance students are active participants in the

1. This study has been partially published in French by Fortin, Vieira, A. and Tremblay, M (2008).

2. We hesitated between using the word 'body' or 'soma'. The later refers to the body from a first person perception and encompasses the various aspect of our living experience (physically, psychologically, socially, intellectually, spiritually, etc.). Although it better reflects our positioning, we hesitatingly decided to keep the former word of body to maintain consistency; it would have been clumsy and confusing to continually swap the word body in the context of the dominant dance discourse, with the word soma in the context of the somatic discourse. Experience is produced in languages and it is not an easy task to step away from a binary view of the human experience. Elsewhere I have exposed my attempts to overcome this binary view in the context of integrating somatic education within dance technique classes (Fortin, S., Long, W. and Lord, M., 2002).

construction of their body, provided they have access to different discourses and the various possibilities that these can offer.²

According to Foucault (1963), discourses are systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, beliefs, courses of action and practices that enable, just as they constrain, what can be said or done at particular times and places. Discourses construct current truths and what power relations they carry with them. For example, we can distinguish both a dominant discourse and a marginal somatic discourse in dance training. Each discourse proposes different perceptions of the body and training modalities. In general, the dominant discourse of dance values an ideal body where aesthetic criteria of beauty, slimness, virtuosity, devotion and asceticism prevail. On the other hand, the somatic discourse promotes body awareness to allow individuals to make choices for their own well-being, thus counteracting the fantasy of an ideal body, which is so often removed from the concreteness of the lived body. However, these different and sometimes opposing discourses may be confusing in the student's experience. In order to understand this in more depth, in the first part of the article we will briefly examine Foucault's idea of discourse, this will help to understand, in the second part, why some elements of the discourses are used and others rejected.

Foucault's notion of technologies of domination and technologies of the self

In his first works, Foucault has demonstrated how institutions can discipline individuals into docile bodies, through surveillance and auto-surveillance. He developed the concept of technologies of domination, which refer to modes of knowledge production and organization that determine the conduct of the individuals and limit their choices in such a way as to foster activity and productivity towards a continually increasing profitability. In such situations, power relations are rather immovable, spaces of freedom are constrained and an objectification of the subject predominates. At the end of his life, Foucault recognized that he had insisted too much on the technology of domination and power, and he became interested in how individuals act upon themselves.

In his last writings, he developed the concept of technologies of the self by which individuals constitute themselves and recognize themselves as subject. The technologies of the self, made up of attitudes and bodily practices,

permit individuals to effect, by their own means or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

(Foucault, 1988: 18)

These operations that individuals may draw upon in their self-construction make a greater state of autonomy possible, enabling them to resist domination. However, self-construction does not happen in a vacuum – unfettered by context and the constraints of the surrounding discourses. Technologies of domination and technologies of the self are always interrelated, and contribute to our constructions, deconstructions and reconstructions of ourselves in the world.

Dominant discourse in traditional western theatrical dance

Dance authors have explored the applications of Michel Foucault's ideas. Although, dance practices can differ drastically in their underpinning assumptions about the body and may emphasize different processes of objectification or subjectification, dance is usually a site where the subject has been traditionally objectified and health issues dismissed in favour of the aesthetics of the art form. According to Huesca (2005), classical ballet, as a historically institutionalized practice, offers many examples of technologies of domination, whereas contemporary dance allows dancers more possibilities for creative construction of the self. Dance ethnographers have challenged this point of view, showing that even in contemporary dance, there prevails a view of the body as being alienated from the self, something to be subdued and managed. For example, Long (2002) has examined the power/achievement aspect of dance teaching and learning in contemporary dance classes. Green (2001) has addressed how dance practices impose an ideal body image on women's bodies through unattainable aesthetic. Fortin and Girard (2005) have described the experience of professional contemporary dancers applying a somatic practice to their dancing. While describing aspects of the dance culture, these authors have shown that choreographers, teachers as well as dancers, are seeking distance from the dominant vision of the body as object. They are looking for approaches where the subjective sensorial experience can be used to reduce the emphasis on the external form of dancing bodies, which so often have a negative impact on dancers' bodies. As such, somatic education practices can participate fully, where dance students' health and well-being are concerned, in encouraging an empowering practice for the dancer.

Somatic education as a technology of the self

From diverse origins outside the field of dance, a variety of somatic education practices have made their way into the dance milieu. Guimond contends that somatic education proposes 'a new relationship to oneself and to others: sensing one's actions, knowing one's feelings, no longer considering oneself as an object, but as a creator of one's own life' (1999: 6). For Feldenkrais (1972) human movement is the foundation of the thoughts, emotions and sensations of a person; therefore, it offers the best means for concrete changes in life. According to Moshe Feldenkrais, individuals cannot experience freedom and be fully creative unless they are able to recognize their perceptual habits and act upon them.

For Johnson (1983), somatic practices should not be looked at solely through an individualistic lens, outside of the discourses surrounding the individual, since there is always a reciprocal play between the micro and macro. To him, a mind-body split in society resulted in a sensory disconnection affecting all aspects of our life. The dominant values of our culture' he writes, 'insinuate their ways into our muscular responses, shaping our perceptions of the world. Altering the morbid dynamics of our culture requires us to loosen their hold on our flesh' (Johnson 1983:14). In retrieving the capacity to feel and observe what was escaping their critical consciousness, individuals can allow

3. Authors such as Green (2001) and Long (2002) seem to use the terms 'internal authority' and 'somatic authority' interchangeably.

themselves to resist technologies of domination. This idea is also found in Shusterman: 'If it is true that oppressive relations of power impose a weighty identity encoded in our very own body, then these relations of oppression can be put into question by marginal somatic practices' (1992: 68).

That does not mean that somatic practices, considered as technologies of the self, are not unproblematic, since all body practices can be potentially emancipatory or oppressive (Markula 2004). What somatic practices offer is an alternative 'game of truth' to that which is predominantly validated. Games of truth are linked to accepted consensus about what is sound knowledge and the accompanying hegemonic procedures that legitimate power relations. Foucault (1988) contends that games of truth are unavoidable, but he emphasizes that the practice of the self allows us 'to play these games of power with as little domination as possible' (1988: 40). In talking about pedagogical institutions, he states that:

I see nothing wrong in the practice of a person who, knowing more than other in a specific game of truth, tells those others what to do, teaches them, and transmits knowledge and technique to them. The problem in such practices where power – which is not bad in itself – must inevitably come into play is knowing how to avoid the kind of domination effects where a kid is subjected to the arbitrary and unnecessary authority of a teacher, or a student put under the thumb of a professor who abuses his authority. I believe that this problem must be framed in terms of practices of the self and freedom.

(Foucault 1988: 40)

Somatic education as technologies of the self in dance

In the recent *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education*, Green (2007) presents a review of somatic dance research. From it, we can see that some researchers have chosen to address how dance is taught somatically while others have chosen to study somatics as an adjunct to dance training. What these different uses of somatics have in common is a recognition of the value of somatic practices to a dancer's training; these practices can refine bodily perceptions, which can contribute to improvement of technique, aid the development of expressive capacities and prevention of injuries. The subtext is that somatic education can defy the dominant discourse in dance, a discourse which promotes an ideal body, supposes an attitude of docility, maintains a normalisation of pain and endorses the external authority of the professor/choreographer as the primary holder of power and knowledge. In contrast, the somatic education discourse supports the development of an internal authority which refers to the capacity to make decisions based on sensory discriminations that accentuate the singularity of one's body.³ Looking inward can help dancers to construct self-knowledge and create more satisfying states of health and well-being. In this way, somatic education can be conceived of as a technology of the self that counteracts the dominant discourse and supports a transformation of the power relations in dance.

However, over the years of our career as teachers of somatic education, we have been confronted with the phenomenon that some students, despite living out their internal authority and experiencing the benefits of somatic education, reintegrate the dominant discourse relatively quickly after the end of the structured somatic classes. They return to their 'old habits' of aligning themselves with the hegemonic norms of the dominant discourse, where fatigue, pain and injury are accepted silently on a daily basis. This shows how strong the dominant discourse is. Fortunately, Markula (2004) allows us to better address this phenomenon. She explains that new bodily experiences are necessary but insufficient in the development of practices that constitute a technology of the self able to resist the technologies of domination. For the technologies of the self to be liberating, she asserts that the person must do three things: (1) foster a self open to change and constant re-creation, (2) increase critical awareness of the dominant discourse, and (3) develop an ethical care of the self that translates to ethical care of others.

Thus, it became essential that our action-research address these issues, since we wanted to find out how the action-research would encourage (or not) a subjectification process that allows one to be less vulnerable to the effects of the dominant discourse.⁴ By adding discussions based on dance research to the somatic classes, we hoped the students would increase their critical thinking and connect self-care issues to a larger perspective of the dance world.

Methodology

For ten weeks, the action-research took place as part of a bi-weekly compulsory course in somatic education for the second year students of the B.A. program in dance at the University of Quebec (UQAM) in Montreal, Canada. The study was a 'professor's action-research' since it was initiated by the three authors and not by the students (Gomez, Flores and Jiménez 1996). Taggart (1998) claims that reflective pedagogical approaches, that focus on individual emancipation, integrate well into the objectives of an action-research. For Lather (1991), the objective of raising awareness can defy the dominant discourse by opening up the space for recognizing other discourses.

Of the bi-weekly somatic classes, one class was devoted to theoretical discussion while the other class was focused on the practice of somatic education. The participants in this action-research were twenty-four French speaking students, of which twenty-two were women and two were men, with an average age of twenty-two years. They had a wide range of dance experience in terms of years (from two to fifteen years), as well as in terms of dance styles (ballet, contemporary, social dancing, hip hop) but for many of these students, coming to university coincided with their first introduction to somatic education. In conforming to the ethical code of UQAM for research with human beings, we handed out individual consent forms to each of the participants.⁵

As Table 1 indicates, the weekly theoretical classes, of one hour and forty minutes, encompassed the following: exchange of ideas about dance research results; discussions on ideal bodies; sharing of individual stories; and participation in drawing-up an institutional guide to injury management.

4. Other researchers have focussed on subjectification processes through different body awareness practices, notably in the martial arts (Boudreau Folman and Konzak, 1992), in postural education (Vieira, 2004) and in physical conditioning (Markula 2004).

5. We express our heartfelt thanks to the twenty-four students who participated in the study. The reflections of eighteen of them appear in this article. With the exception of two individuals identified by a pseudonym, they are identified by their first names because they asked for it. Where some participants shared a same first name, the first letters of their family name were used to distinguish them.

The weekly practical classes, also of one hour and forty minutes, took the form of 'Feldenkrais Method Awareness Through Movement' lessons (ATM), inspired by the original writings of Moshe Feldenkrais and his close collaborators. The Feldenkrais Method is an educational system centered on movement, aiming to expand and refine the use of self through awareness. In some countries, the Feldenkrais Method is included under the umbrella term

	Theoretical sessions		Practical Feldenkrais lessons
1.1	Welcome	1.2	Body type assessment
2.1	Constructions of health among pre-professional dancers (Fortin, Cyr and Tremblay 2005)	2.2	Pressure through the foot and how it relates to the knees and the pelvis (Alon 1996)
3.1	Harmonious and obsessive passions (Rip, Fortin and Vallerand 2006)	3.2	Movements of the pelvis (Feldenkrais 1972)
4.1	Professional dancers' construction of health (Fortin, Trudelle and Rail 2008)	4.2	Breathing process (Feldenkrais 1972)
5.1	Ideal body (Vieira 2004)	5.2	Use of the arms in turning (Shafarman 1997)
6.1	Sharing written weekly reports	6.2	Crawling (Wildman 2000)
7.1	Choreographer-dancer relational dynamics during the creative process (Newell and Fortin 2008)	7.2	Eye movement and how it contributes to rotation (Feldenkrais 1972)
8.1	Class cancelled	8.2	Standing on hands and feet (Joly 1980)
9.1	Institutional guidelines for injury management (Girard and Fortin 2006)	9.2	Twist (Feldenkrais 1972)
10.1	Discussion about the ATM and IF	10.2	Changing body tone with rolls (Alon 1996)

Table 1: Theoretical sessions and practical Feldenkrais lessons.

'alternative and complementary medicines'. However, the members of the Association Feldenkrais Québec (AFQ) do not regard it as a therapeutic intervention because they are not working from the medical model.⁶ Maintaining that there is no separation between mind and body, they are teaching students how to move better and how to improve their overall well-being.

In the group classes, the teacher of the Feldenkrais Method (who is the main author of this article) verbally directed students through movement sequences and various foci of attention to enable discovery of new choices. In addition to the group classes, each student also benefited from two individual lessons given by certified Feldenkrais practitioners. In the individual lessons, called 'Functional Integration' (IF), the practitioners use their hands to guide the movement of the student with the aim of learning how to eliminate excess effort and move more easily.

The Feldenkrais Method of somatic education was chosen for many reasons. Firstly, the authors have a solid experience in this method. Secondly, there is literature supporting the method's contributions in dealing with health and dance issues.⁷ Finally, the method has been examined from a post-structuralist point of view and it has been suggested that it contributes to a process of subjectification (Wright 2000).

Data collected from the students included five elements: (1) individual written descriptions of their own 'body history', (2) a weekly report of their experiences related to body and health issues, synthesized at the half-way point and at the end the action-research, (3) weekly answers to an open question relating to the theme of the ATM lesson, (4) transcriptions of group discussions in the theoretical classes, and (5) the researchers' notes of each class based on video or audio recording.⁸ The data was analysed according to an adaptation of grounded theory (Paillé 1996). The entire corpus of data was analyzed inductively by multiple readings and discussions between the researchers in order to allow categories to emerge out of the data, rather than having them imposed prior to data collection and analysis. Trustworthiness of the results is linked to triangulation of the multiple sources of data and to the debriefing of the researchers on a weekly basis. The results are presented in two sections; first, the student's appraisal of the action-research process, and second, the students' ways of negotiating the dominant discourse in dance and the marginal discourse of somatic education.

Appraisal of the action-research process ***The practical Feldenkrais lessons***

At the beginning of the action-research, in the Feldenkrais lessons, some students experienced moments of discomfort and pain which slowly progressed into moments of discovery, comfort, and feelings of connectedness. Here is Caroline Ca' experience:

At the beginning, I was exhausting myself by putting so much effort into it [...] Through time and everything we were discussing in class, I started

6. Association Feldenkrais Québec : <http://www.feldenkraisqc.info/>
7. For a compilation of Feldenkrais research: <http://www.psych.utah.edu/feldenkrais/research.php>
8. Most of the corpus of data was part of the students' assessments since the action-research took place in the context of a mandatory university course. Well aware that there was no perfect solution to the constraints of conducting an action-research in an academic setting, and in order to lessen the possible conflicts arising out of using the students' work for both the action-research and the course assessment, we discussed the situation with the students, who decided that the grades would be based on a formative assessment including self-assessments throughout the fifteen weeks of the semester.

to listen to myself more and I learned to take breaks and to take the time I needed so that I could benefit. I think you have to persevere.

As researchers, we interpreted students' signs of agitation and discomfort as an attempt to find their habitual physical references. This tendency lessened and, later we observed more calm, a greater acceptance of new sensations, and a growing capacity to pay attention to oneself. It is important to note that the pedagogical strategies of the somatic education are mostly opposed to those traditionally found in a dance class (Fortin 1995; Fortin, Long, and Lord (2002)). For Claudine, the Feldenkrais Method offers a welcome counterpoint to usual teaching practices: 'Feldenkrais sometimes contradicts the teaching that we get in other classes, but I find that therein lies its strength'. In many somatic approaches, no demonstration on the teacher's part, slow rhythm and reducing effort in the execution of movements are indeed considered teaching priorities in order for the students to develop the ability to discriminate between physical sensations. This unusual approach awakened reactions such as this one of Caroline Ch's:

I dance now with more respect for my body. In Feldenkrais, the goal is exploration and not performance. By applying these principles elsewhere, I realize how my stress is reduced, and how I approach events with more calm. I perceive them less dramatically.

The theoretical classes

For many students, the theoretical sessions were destabilizing moments as Lea expressed:

The discussions were very satisfying and useful to my personal understanding. All the subjects raised led us to reflect and question our beliefs in very important ways. (In dance) taboo subjects are avoided and we try not to worry about them, even though they're still very present. Sometimes I didn't want to go to class on Tuesdays out of fear that I would leave too shaken up by all sorts of self-questioning [...] The discussions always brought me back to an awareness of the dance milieu in which I grew up and I questioned myself on my future path as well as on my past process.

This kind of comment reveals ambivalence between, on the one hand, the desire to become aware of current situations in the dance milieu and, on the other hand, the discomfort that this causes. As Geraldine wrote, even when the theory classes raised known issues, the students appreciated the opportunity to position themselves:

When I am in this class, the subjects raised are never new to me. Nonetheless, what I draw from them always is. To listen to others express themselves on these topics that touch me helps me crystallize my opinions. Often this period helps to clarify my thoughts by giving them weight or instead completely bringing them into question. It is up to me to make the effort to sort through the information and to hold onto what really speaks to me.

The theoretical sessions offered the opportunity to 'break the silence' as noticed by Emilie P., a student who already had completed a BA in theatre:

I am sure that my reflection would have been totally different if dance had been the first medium I had come in contact with. It is surprising to see all the sacrifices that a dancer makes without ever complaining. The law of silence, this is what we call it in the milieu [...] I was half-surprised when I heard that some women in third year were asked to lose weight to participate in a student show. I don't know how I would have reacted if I had been asked this. I'm sure that I would have asked (the choreographer) if he thought he was God, to ask me something like that. The quest for the perfect body with dancers is so deeply anchored that it becomes almost abstract for them that a person with a non-perfect body could be proud of it or at least could be accepting of it. Here's an anecdote to illustrate what I'm saying: last year, a teacher thought that I didn't dance with my torso because I didn't accept my weight. It didn't matter how much I told her that I didn't have a complex about my weight, there was nothing to change her mind.

Before turning to the next section, it is interesting to note that many students, as Caroline D., mentioned the consistency between the theoretical sessions and the Feldenkrais lessons:

These two ways of learning come to one and the same thing: becoming aware. I really appreciated this whole philosophy (of Feldenkrais). I understood that there are many different paths to reach one goal. The choices that we make should empower us, not only physically. One should never neglect one's own power and freedom.

Students ways of negotiating different discourses

Towards the status quo

Our analysis of the data highlighted three main nonexclusive tendencies, each of equal importance. We spontaneously called them: (1) towards the status-quo, (2) between the status-quo and change, and (3) towards change.

Tracing back the process of each student, we estimated that at the beginning of the study about two thirds of the students were geared toward the first category, which is aligned with the dominant dance discourse. In their first talks and writings, we noticed that much importance was given to the teachers' and choreographers' authority and the right way to achieve an ideal body was valued without much regard for the consequences.

As mentioned before, for certain students the theory sessions presented 'no great revelation', for others, it 'spoiled their little girl's dream'. Our analysis revealed that the upheaval caused by the theoretical sessions was most frequent in this group. Here are Marie-Pièrre's words:

Sometimes I would leave the class completely depressed. I am very sensitive to those realities that I don't want to face because I'd rather continue to think that everything is going to be great for me.

The students of this first group were indeed the most disturbed by the theoretical session that consisted in presenting the results of a study addressing the relationships between passion and injury in dance students (Rip, Fortin and Vallerand 2006). They identified themselves spontaneously with the obsessive passion rather than the harmonious passion. The students mentioned the 'harshness' and the 'perfectionism' that they impose on themselves. Many underlined that the high requirements of the BA program 'forced' them towards an obsessive-type passion. Because they saw no alternative, students in this group stayed somewhat passive when facing situations that they found deplorable. This is consistent with technologies of domination that, more often than not, reproduce the status quo. At the end of this theory session, Marie-Pièrre wrote in her weekly report:

I have so little time for myself I am exhausted and depressed. I have no time to spend with my family and my boyfriend [...] But there's nothing I can do! I have to go to school and work. And later, if I work for a choreographer and I have rehearsals every day, it's going to be the same thing. I won't be asking him for fewer rehearsals unless I'm injured or really sick.

In this group, pain and fatigue were often perceived as signs of hard work and serious commitment. The students usually didn't see that these feelings may indicate overwork predisposing them to injury, although Aurée shows a transformation in her way of thinking:

I realized that my injury was there before my feeling sick on Thursday. I thought back to Friday's class in which I had noticed a pain in my left shoulder and I realize now that I should have taken more time to listen to this pain. Now, I'm on forced-leave. This injury makes me realize that I have to develop more awareness of my body to prevent this kind of injury.

Interestingly, the students in this group committed themselves fully to the Feldenkrais lessons. For the most part, they used the proprioceptive explorations from the ATM lessons to solve physical problems they had at the time of the action-research. However, they didn't use the opportunity given to them to question larger bodily issues. Patricia's words about somatic practice offer a good illustration of this tendency:

It's about living with discomfort and determining techniques that are favorable to lessening this situation [...] What's important is to find one's own solutions. You've got to understand that pain and discomfort are part of this profession. Might as well tame them!

Between status-quo and change

A second group emerged from the analysis of the data. Unlike the students in the first group, they benefited more from the theory sessions than from the practical Feldenkrais classes. Their writings contained many indications of a sustained interest in the theoretical sessions as opportunities to

formulate opinions. Pascal's comments during a group discussion offer an excellent example:

I am surprised that some still view the body of a contemporary dancer in the same way as that of a ballet dancer. They've got to injure themselves, they've got to be skinny, they've got to be perfect, with no tattoos. I went into contemporary dance because I thought this mentality was over. When I found it's still here, I just about climbed the walls. Does this mean that people like me and Emilie have no place here (because we don't have the stereotypical body)?

Many students grumbled about the ideal body in the dance world. They believed that it was possible to change the way one constructs an ideal body, whereas in the first group students held the opinion that it was unfeasible. For many dancers in this second group, the 'ideal body myth' is unattainable and the way dance is taught has to be questioned as well. As the weeks went by, students in this group enlarged their criticism of the dominant discourse. The writings of Emilie P. demonstrate this dimension:

The choreographers will try to impose their ideal body type on all the dancers [...] who try and risk everything for the creative process and the choreographer. It becomes a vicious circle. The dancers want to live their passion, so they push their bodies until it's perfect enough to be hired in the professional milieu. Often, during the creative process, it's not enough; so the dancers will go even further. They won't complain out of fear that the choreographer might dislike them and then not rehire them. The choreographers therefore feel fine in asking for more because they don't meet any resistance from the dancers. The dancers end up not listening to their own sensations anymore.

While this group was called 'between status-quo and change', the desire for change was traceable more on a theoretical level than on a practical one. The students did not act in a concrete way when facing situations they deemed problematic. We noticed many 'I must' statements compared to 'I do' statements. In the next quote, Luc questions the external criteria of the ideal dancing body. He revealed a desire to invest himself in proprioceptive explorations, which would guide him towards what we could qualify as a 'better feeling' rather than a 'better looking'. However, his desire remained at an intentional level.

I must change my behaviour. I want to change my habit of doing things right, just for the form (the shape). I am enormously influenced by our society that values performance. I see my obsession of wanting to be perfect as an obstacle since I'm criticizing the movement instead of feeling it.

Eveline's comments, about the appearance of the ideal dancer's body, also help us understand this idea:

In Feldenkrais' book, *Awareness through movement*, there are certain exercises that work with an arching of the lower back and a release of the abdominal

muscles [...] This intention goes so completely against what we learn that I would find it difficult to do it in front of my peers. To give myself the right to have a soft and round belly would change my perception of myself and even change the perception that others have of me. We are so conditioned to pull in one's stomach that we notice big bellies right away. As a dance student, I'm so used to being surrounded by pretty straight and thin bodies, my vision becomes skewed when I get into the metro at night and face the reality.

We can see in Eveline's comment a capacity to think critically about body image even though she feels uncomfortable about changing her behaviour. If she would give herself the right to do otherwise, she would experience the discourse of somatic education. By seeing the 'games of truth' at play in the dance studio but not opposing them, the students in this group are positioning themselves in an in-between space with regard to Foucault's technologies of domination and technologies of the self.

Towards change

A last group brings together students whose comments express a certain resistance to the dominant dance discourse. These students manifested a facility in making links between their bodily experiences and their understanding of the dance milieu. As expressed by Emilie S.:

I became aware that my past training did not really take into account the internal sensations of the body. I really appreciate the fact that I have become more critical in the face of pain. I realize that I have to change those pre-conceptions that I have about the dancer's body. I believe that many dancers themselves still have preconceptions about their own bodies. This is why I am so grateful for the conversations that allow me to put things into question and become more critical. Of course, dance is steeped in a world of sacrifices but I think that changes begin inside our own internal worlds. I love the idea of developing an 'internal authority' that dictates the path to follow.

Students of this group talked about changes they made when facing situations they identified as problematic. Virginie, for example, talked of her decision to consult an osteopath:

I realize to what extent I neglect myself. Throughout the class, I couldn't stop telling myself that I should pay more attention to my repetitive injuries. The procrastination of my visits to the osteopath is often due to my financial situation. But immediately after this class, I jumped on the phone to make an appointment without delay. Better late than never [...] The Feldenkrais class develops my thinking and brings me closer to a mentality that resembles me.

It is important to underline that it was with these students that we noticed the weakest affiliations to the dominant dance discourse at the beginning of the action-research. Some were already engaged in a critical thinking

and have had experiences in somatic education. This was the case for Marie-Josée who wrote:

I feel divided. I can understand and accept the choreographer's authority but the way in which he directs me is very important; I am not an object. I love to participate in the creative process but I find it interesting to learn someone else's movement. I feel that the choreographer is neither above nor below the dancer. For example, there is a choreographer who asks us for a lot of time outside of class, but I accept because I find the time for it and I love his material and I see it as part of my personal evolution.

Marie-Josée is referring to a guest-choreographer invited to give a fifteen-week class culminating in the performance of an original piece. An anecdote recounted by Marie-Josée deserves to be mentioned because it illustrates the negotiation at work between marginal and dominant discourses. A third of the way through the action-research, the choreographer asked the female students to lose weight, something which Marie-Josée found inappropriate (even though later the choreographer explained that what he was really after was more commitment from the students and not weight loss). This same choreographer asked the students to rehearse during periods that are usually free such as lunch hours and weekends. Seeing this request as excessive, the students presented a united front by drawing-up a schedule together of extra rehearsal time that they could all manage. To do so, they took into account their different family situations and the loss of income they would suffer from being less available for their weekend jobs. Marie-Josée said that she felt divided between a reaction of resistance to his demands and one of acceptance because 'this choreographic project also allows me to access something unique in my interpretation'. This anecdote illustrates that students may cooperate, at least in part, with situations of domination, because the advantages are greater than the sacrifices they would experience. Engaged in a reflective thinking process, Marie-Josée contextualizes the choreographer's demands:

He's afraid that the piece won't be any good. He's scared that we don't have enough time. His reputation in Montreal is not my problem. But we're working together on this and I will do what I can to make the piece good [...] This has clarified what I want to do in life. I want to dance but that's not all I want. I don't think I have the strength. I would like to do some projects with young choreographers, do some dance-theatre, have kids, do massage therapy, travel.

In her two-sided position in the face of the choreographer's excessive demands, Marie-Josée shows clear-sightedness with regard to the 'games of truth' of the dominant discourse. Despite institutional constraints, she was able to make choices inspired by an ethic of care for herself and the other dancers. During our discussions, some students, like Marie-Josée, mentioned that body and health management is a creative challenge. If health is defined in relation to what a group accepts as normal, it can just as easily be redefined. Dancers can envisage the possibility of instituting new norms rather than perpetuating those already in existence.

Discussion and conclusion

The three emerging categories – towards the status quo, between the status quo and change, and toward change – echo Foucault's positions relative to the dominant discourse – appropriation, accommodation and resistance – in an astonishing manner that we had not anticipated. According to Foucault, power can only be wielded on free subjects and insofar as they are free, they may:

- identify with the dominant discourse and internalise it
- adapt to it without accepting it
- thwart it

The students that make up the first group had appropriated the dominant discourse in dance, which they considered inescapable and even essential in building a dance career. Therefore, these students believed they had to know how to play by the rules of the game. As such, their bodily experiences in the somatic classes did not serve the purpose of improving well-being but were subverted and used to work towards what was important to them: pushing the limits of their performance. While this approach can bring great fulfillment, it can also bring pain and injury since, for the majority of the students, the ideal dancing body is next to impossible to attain. What they learned from the marginal discourse of somatic education was used to lessen the negative health impacts of the dominant dance discourse. In other words, somatic education was used to recuperate or repair one's tired or damaged body in pursuing the quest for perfection. In summing up, the participants in the 'towards the status quo' group did not show a subjectification process, since what was learned from the somatic education classes served the dominant discourse.

The students in the second group adopted a position of accommodation towards the dominant discourse. On the one hand, they manifested critical thinking in how they verbalized their reticence about certain aspects of the dominant discourse; on the other hand, they did not seem to physically experience the changes that they professed verbally. One must develop critical thinking in the face of the dominant discourse but, as Markula (2004) suggests, in order to develop a practice of the self which constitutes a technology of the self and a practice of freedom, one must also consciously build the alternative discourse by making concrete changes to the way one uses oneself physically. This was a step that had not been taken by the students of this group by the time we ended our action-research. In this group, the process of subjectification appeared as a 'bricolage' borrowing from both the dominant and marginal discourses. Sensations, ways of being and doing, were integrated into their daily activities, insofar as they were compatible with elements of the different discourses to which these individuals adhered to.

It is therefore with the students who manifested both critical thinking in the face of the dominant discourse and a capacity to make connections with their bodily experiences that we observed the fullest subjectification processes. The experience of the Feldenkrais Method of somatic education allowed these students to develop an internal authority which made them less vulnerable to the health impacts of the dominant dance discourse.

They made choices based on their intimate experiences, respecting the limits of their own bodies. For the students in this group, the normality of pain or certain pedagogical practices was no longer so blindly tolerated or, if so, it was only under certain conditions and for a limited period of time. When a proprioceptive awareness is coupled with reflective thought, the threats to the body that were once deemed acceptable in the life of a dancer now become unacceptable.

For all the students, this action-research provided an opportunity to cast doubt on the 'games of truth' of the technologies of domination. The students of the first group were, for the most part, less inclined to question the dominant dance discourse but when given the opportunity to discuss its various issues, they found it to be a viable exercise. In the dance training milieu, there is a certain amount of consenting to training or choreographic demands that are sometimes violent, and physically or psychologically abusive. Power, as explains Foucault, is not the result of the imposition of external constraints on the person but is rather an internalization of norms and productive goals by the person. Of course, dancers cannot abandon all disciplinary practices throughout their training and career, but they can critically think about the benefit or cost of participating in different body practices that inevitably have consequences on their health.

On the whole, this action-research offered the possibility of investigating how the dominant dance discourse, and the marginal one of somatic education, participate in students' reappraisal of the body, art and health. In the course of their previous training, some students had registered certain 'truths' from which they did not stray if they were to succeed in attaining the physical perfection that they so desired. The action-research questioned the rules of the game by presenting the dancers with a pedagogical approach compatible with health concerns.

Somatic approaches represent a definitive development for contemporary dance but they should also be contextualized and looked at critically, since we cannot look at somatic approaches outside the historical and artistic discourses from which they are practiced. Dancers construct themselves and are constructed in many ways by various, and sometimes competing, discourses, which operate at any given time, each of them with different games of truth. While recognizing the possibility for satisfaction resulting from the different ways of practicing dance, our focus throughout this action-research was on a broad notion of health, one that connects with Foucault's concept of technologies of the self. In a short period of time, the Feldenkrais Method of somatic education, tied to a reflective thinking process about health issues in dance, has confirmed its potential as a technology of the self. What will be the long term effects of the action-research on the students' negotiations of dominant and marginal discourses in dance is unknown.

Through this action-research we invited the students to engage themselves in different ways of knowing. While we do not support a position that theoretical and practical knowledge necessarily leads to changes, we would argue that knowledge is a prerequisite. For change, dancers need to raise their consciousness about the dominant discourse and how it constructs dancing bodies. Unless the dominant discourse in dance changes, or marginal discourses are given a more prominent place, changes in

dancers' health and well-being will remain limited. While this action-research was realized in a contemporary dance training institution using the Feldenkrais Method of somatic education, we believe that other somatic approaches, particularly those that support a pedagogy valuing sensorial experience and a critical approach, could also be successfully applied to other dance forms for the benefit of students who consciously learn to negotiate between different discourses.

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