

Past, Present and Future of Russian contemporary dance through the prism of personal stories

Introduction

Natalia Kuryumova, a noticeable dance critic and lecturer from Yekaterinburg, recently wrote an article on Russian contemporary dance for the book *European Dance since 1989*.¹ She described a historical context, revealed the roots of contemporary dance forms and mentioned quite a wide range of practitioners who were central to the development of dance in Russia. Natalia made an overview for the whole country. My intention was to focus on Yekaterinburg, which is somewhat special in regard to contemporary dance, by discussing how contemporary dance emerged and developed with time and the possible future of contemporary dance through individual stories and viewpoints. In noticing that the new generation of dancers have lost the experience of the original intentions of contemporary dance, this research aims to form a bridge between the new and old by revisiting the original framework of dance. For this particular research, I conducted six one-hour long interviews with people who are the carriers of the corporeal experience, who implemented dance experiments, who were on stage in the beginning of contemporary dance in the country.

I spoke to Evgeny Martyanov, Natalia Levchenko and Alexander Petrazhitsky, who were the founding artists of one influential company, *Kipling*, that does not exist anymore. The company existed from about 1994 till about 2010 and was mainly famous for their social art performances. In the beginning of their dance theater experiments, the company “was chiefly known for its games of parody and nostalgia with the poetic of the only recently defunct Soviet way of life, Soviet collective recreation, or gardens.”² Another three of my interviewees were Maria Kozeva, Ravil Galimov and Olga Sevostianova, former dancers of *Provincial Dances Theater*. This company is famous because of “the original,

¹ Natalia Kuryumova, “Russian contemporary dance” in *European Dance since 1989: Communitas and the Other*, edited by Joanna Szymajda, (Milton Park: Routledge, 2014), <https://books.google.ru/books?id=3svpAwAAQBAJ> (accessed April 22, 2016).

² Ibid.

fantastical/grotesque style of Tatiana Baganova [choreographer and artistic director of *Provincial Dances Theater*], now widely known in Western Europe and the United States.”³ Ravil and Olga danced with the company for almost 20 years. Maria and Ravil were the first performers of the roles of the bride and groom in the *Wedding* (music - Igor Stravinsky, choreography - Tatiana Baganova), which along with *Maple Garden* (choreography - Tatiana Baganova) “are among the classics of dance theater.”⁴ Maria Kozeva is an outstanding contemporary dance teacher as well.

The paper is divided into four chapters, each chapter is devoted to one of the artists I interviewed. I chose four (among six) stories which are distinctive and bright. Evgeny Martyanov and Natalia Levchenko were the leading figures in *Kipling* dance company. Evgeny got his first serious dance influences from his childhood in a little town where he grew up. Natalia received her first dance experience in a youth street dance group. Maria Kozeva and Ravil Galimov along with being the bride and the groom in the legendary performance of *Provincial Dances, Wedding*, had had a completely contrasted experience before they came into the company. Maria graduated from the Chelyabinsk Institute of Culture and Art as a dance teacher and choreographer, and Ravil came occasionally to the company’s audition and was accepted with no prior experience in dance.

In the conclusion of the paper, I will focus on the interviewees' views of the future of contemporary dance in this city and expand this focus to reflect on contemporary dance globally. I chose these particular artists because they are great dancers and influential figures in the field of contemporary dance in my city as well as nationally and internationally. I intend to publish the interviews, and I was going to make a report about my research at dance conference organized by the Liberal Arts University to present the results of my research to the contemporary dance students. Unfortunately, I was utterly sick and could not participate in the conference; however, I have a chance to publish an article in the conference’s booklet.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Chapter I

Evgeny Martyanov has substantially contributed into the field of contemporary dance. He danced with two main local contemporary dance companies: *Provincial Dances* (around 1991-1994) and *Kipling* (around 1994-2001). Evgeny was a dance teacher at two main city contemporary dance schools: the Contemporary dance school of the Yekaterinburg contemporary art center (director - Lev Shulman) and Dance Institute (director - Oleg Petrov). I truly enjoyed being his student at the Contemporary dance school in 1997-2000 and at the Dance Institute in 2005-2006. I saw him dancing and his choreography presented on stage and I was dancing some of his choreography myself.

I feel close to the story of Evgeny Martyanov, I also grew up in a province, and fell in love with dance through a similar situation. I took classes with one choreographer, who was in a self-deportation; he and his wife used to dance in St. Petersburg, they were injured and decided to move to a province. They organized a dance group there, and I participated in their teenager class. Sergey Pryazhenkov and his wife still work in the same house of culture, where I studied dance in my childhood.

It might be crucial to encounter with a professional dancer in the childhood. Maria Kozeva said in her interview that if a children dance group had a professional ballerina as a teacher, they felt lucky and happy. Professional attitude let children get an essential experience in the field of dance. Here is the story from Evgeny Martyanov's childhood:

“For me, my first dance classes were determinative. It happened of course in my childhood, when I was in sixth grade. Our teacher, Nina Petrovna, came and said that we as a class had to go to study dance at our local recreation center in preparation for a presentation of amateur groups. It was the Soviet period in its heyday. I then lived in a small town of Nizhniye Sergi, in the Sverdlovsk region. The city is very creative. During the construction of the local factory, there were a lot of migrant workers who had been convicted in so-called creative articles! They were writing or drawing something inappropriate in the Soviet period. There were many artists and poets, who came with their families and were forced to live in the city. We looked at them with an open mouth! There were artists who could paint very quickly and entertained the kids by drawing bunnies in three seconds. My first

dance teacher, Elena Kharina, was forced to come to our city apparently for the same reasons. She had no other choice besides working with children. On the first lesson, we came wearing valenki (felt boots). We didn't know what we were going to do. On the way, all the children ended up rolling around in the snow. I still remember, when we entered the class, the teacher was sitting at the window, she was extremely subtle, she was a real ballerina! [...] she predetermined my destiny and put some proper moments in my childish head. [...] The amazing thing was that we lived in a village, the place of timber industry. My father was a lumberjack, my mother was a cashier in the local office, but when we came to dance class, we moved to a different state. Teacher constantly told us something, showed us something, she immersed us in another world, pulled us out of the impassable state of the village.”⁵

Evgeny Martyanov and Ravil Galimov (another interviewee) told me the same thing - that they came to *Provincial Dances* because they felt it was interesting for them at that moment; however, they were young, and now they most likely would not do that again. Contrary, Olga Sevostianova (another interviewee as well) and I would repeat the same scenario.

The current situation bothers me. In the 1990s, many foreign teachers came to Yekaterinburg, and shared with us a lot of qualitative information on contemporary dance, but now, I see that we lost the information. Olga Sevostianova suggested that we were unable to convey the information to the younger generation, who does not use it, or does not know about it. They were born later, and either don't want to know or don't care. Maria Kozeva told me in the interview that the seeds fell into infertile soil in the 1990s, we did not have a base. Evgeny Martyanov has a different opinion:

“Any development occurs in waves and periods. At the time [in the 1990s], everyone expressed everything that was possible to express. Relatively speaking, in the Space there is no cluster which could be expressed through dance. Now something else is developing, and maybe something is being born in music or architecture. Maybe something will come later, but it always occurs in waves. I

⁵ Evgeny Martyanov, interviewed by Ekaterina Zharinova, *Starbucks*, March 28, 2016.

want to say something in dance, I'm accumulating. Everybody has something to say. We all have talent and it is infinite but space resource is exhausted. We said all we could say through dance, now the period of accumulation comes. You should live keeping calm, do not pursue the issue further. Take care of yourself, do what you like. If you want, do your dance project, but I don't think it will be successful now.”⁶

From the following quote, Evgeny said that if you have no resources to do a project properly, it is better to wait until you get what is necessary to realize it. He added that they could not find a sponsor during the whole time of *Kipling's* existence.

“The availability of finances expands opportunities; you have the talent and the vision of the project, but money, damn it, collapses it, brings it down to nothing. For example, I need an old oak table for my piece, I see it is what I need, and no one will give me the money for that, I want to buy this table, put it in class and say, I need those dancers and assign them a salary as much as they need, go ahead and roll on the floor. In the absence of finance, it turns into a table from Ikea, which will break. The right dancer is not available, she needs to earn money for her children, you take someone else, and as a result you are unable to implement your true intention. The table can be the only reason. Would you have the table, a real oak table, everything would be different. It can be not the only reason. However, I want to have such a resource, to be able to buy the table.”⁷

Today, I have some enthusiasm to create performances with no sufficient financial support, utilizing what is currently available to me as an artist. I work with museums and libraries mainly because theater stage is unaffordable to me. It gives some advantages and I find the projects which I do there interesting but I guess at some moment I will be tired of working with no proper conditions and prefer to accumulate and wait while I have enough resources as well.

I really enjoyed interviewing Evgeny Martyanov. It was very useful to talk to him. I had some revelations, I realized after our conversation that it is completely true, there is no

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

demand in contemporary dance currently. It is truly impossible to change it right now. But still I would not wait for a better time, this is my choice. I was glad Evgeny did not refuse a possibility to see him dancing on stage or publicly. He did not say he would never dance again, he said he is accumulating and open to later opportunities. It gives hope. For me, all my interviewees are legends of contemporary dance, I remember them dancing on stage and I still want to see them dancing. Evgeny Martyanov was one of the founders of dance team *Kipling* and the next chapter will be devoted to another founding artist of the company, Natalia Levchenko.

Chapter II

Natalia Levchenko was the leader of the contemporary dance company *Kipling*, started as a team of independent dancers, which changed in its organizational structure over the decade when it was active in Yekaterinburg. Over the last few years, Natalia has been a resident of the Ural branch of the National Center for Contemporary Arts and she creates dance performances there quite often, in the frame of the project *Actions: Art of Presentation*. Natalia Levchenko has remarkably strong charisma, which contributes to her charm as a performer; in addition she has a special sense of humour that is rare in the field of contemporary dance. She also possesses tremendous presence and lightning-fast orientation in the space of performance. Currently, it is hard to tell who would be able to stand with her as her equal 'on stage.'

In her interview, Natalia told me that they danced during fashion shows which I find to be a fascinating mix of dance and fashion, which are two different disciplines. She described her experience:

“There were two fashion designers in the city at the time: Kolya Romanov and Gleb Svetlakov. During fashion shows we did dance inserts. For example, we hosted a show with Kolya’s Indian-style clothing collection while doing an Indian-style dance to Prince’s music. We would alternate between having the models come out on stage to show off the clothing and us coming in to do dance breaks. Back then,

art disciplines were much more interconnected, whereas later, everything became more split up into different disciplines.”⁸

The *Kipling* dance company had a unique approach to creating choreography. They did not have just one choreographer, but the whole team participated in choreography creation. Evgeny Martyanov described the inconceivable coincidence of how they merged into one company:

“For me, *Kipling* was a unique combination of circumstances which only happens once in a lifetime. [...] Everyone did what they wanted, no one interfered, no one jerked others around, everyone complimented each other and everything was just fine. [...] We never had conflict with one another. We didn't understand what a conflict was. We were always laughing and in a good mood. We never did anything serious and just fiddled around. However, everybody understood that Natasha was the leader. If an issue was raised, we looked to her to make decisions, although sometimes I made decisions in her place. Everyone was incredibly loyal to those decisions -- whatever we said, they would do. This ability to unconditionally give responsibility to one person who decides which movement phrase will be included in a performance — it's precious and not everyone has it.”⁹

Regarding what Natalia does now:

“I turned to what I did in the very beginning. I'm interested to work together with people with whom I can exchange information on an equal footing and to do something in the framework of this company, in its original sense. Not a hierarchical structure, where you're the boss and you have to teach others and persuade them to do something. From what we started, when we were four dancers, we had something to share and it was very resourceful. We spoke on equal terms. It's interesting to me now. I have resisted it for a long time, tried to be an artistic director, but it's not my purpose, I'm not interested in such kind of work. When it turned into a routine, I lost interest. There were many other reasons, including my

⁸ Natalia Levchenko, interviewed by Ekaterina Zharinova, *Starbucks*, March 25, 2016.

⁹ Evgeny Martyanov, interviewed by Ekaterina Zharinova, *Starbucks*, March 28, 2016.

personal reasons and my personal qualities, as to why it all fell apart. But the main reason is that I am not interested in hierarchy. This is evident on stage and it is boring to watch. I can find colleagues equal to me, not many, and I do not need many and in the beginning we had just four people in the company. Another thing is that we were young and full of energy, able to devote much time to the dance. Now it is getting harder to find time and we all have families, children, husbands, etc.; and if I have the internal discipline and the desire to dig and to dedicate time regularly to dive into the process, not everyone is capable of it now. I am interested to work for pleasure, how it all began. I'm not interested in making a product every year. I'm not interested in existing for the sake of a brand or a name. I don't condemn and don't deny that it works when you use it properly. I am not interested, and it is not only my personal attitude, but it is a general trend.”¹⁰

And what she thinks about future of dance:

“I think, I need to mix the principles that we have in the domain of dance with life. Especially since I have had children, spending half a day in class and another half at home, this heaven and earth took so much time to bring this experience to reality. Not to fly in the clouds all the time, in creativity and imagination, but to understand that these principles which work in the dance studio may be applied to your life. It took a lot of effort and I am not saying that I accomplished it. I thought about how my life at the studio could be continued in everyday life smoothly. How to stay in the same thread in life. Because for some reason when you go out of the studio, the flow stops. It is weird, this separation. It is typical to make a division in the society, and it is important to return to childhood and to understand that all is one, all is one. All the principles: in nutrition, parenting, etc. are all the same.”¹¹

During the interview, Natalia stated that the field of Russian contemporary dance is still stuck in 1992 and has not moved forward in terms of development since. To me, Russian dance seems even more old-fashioned than Natalia believed it to be and I find that it is mainly still on the level of knowledge of the beginning of the previous century. It might

¹⁰ Natalia Levchenko, interviewed by Ekaterina Zharinova, *Starbucks*, March 25, 2016.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

be proved by what Natalia Kuryumova describes in her chapter on Russian contemporary dance in the book *European Dance since 1989*. In the beginning of the 20th century, there was a bunch of rhythmic/plastic movement adherents and the so called 'free movement' was quite flourishing in Russia. But later, in Soviet Union it was forbidden "when a decree from the Moscow authorities closed almost all the plastic movement private studios and schools."¹² That was due to contemporary dance's "evident dissonance with the official ideology of Soviet culture. Critical articles in the 1920s asserted that plastic movement was alien to the working class, that it devoted too much attention to irrelevant subjects (love, complex mental states), it cultivated individualism, which stood opposed to the spirit of collectivism, and it had 'demoralizing effect' on the youth."¹³ One exception was made by the Isadora Duncan studio that worked till 1949. First later experiments in modern dance appeared in the late 1980s, and they were raw and innocent, we still have not built a solid base. We skipped modern, postmodern, 'postpostmodern,' and now try to catch up with other countries. We are not able to rely on the above mentioned experience of 'free movement,' we completely lost the roots. Thus, we have to start from the very beginning. Spanish dance artist Pablo Ventura, while he was visiting Russia in 2000, said, "Begin from zero, guys, and I am sure you will invent something interesting."¹⁴

Chapter III

Ravil Galimov started literally from zero ten years earlier, in 1990, when he occasionally came to the audition of *Provincial Dances Theater* and then danced with the company till 2009 being soloist and leading dancer there. Personally, I do not know another dancer who danced professionally with one company for such a long period of time. I danced with Ravil as a partner a little and in group a lot; and took some of his classes in body conditioning and Feldenkrais. Ravil used to have a broader scope and now he focuses

¹² Natalia Kuryumova, "Russian contemporary dance" in *European Dance since 1989: Communitas and the Other*, edited by Joanna Szymajda, (Milton Park: Routledge, 2014), <https://books.google.ru/books?id=3svpAwAAQBAJ> (accessed April 22, 2016).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Olga Gerdt, "Dancing in the Dark" in *Itogi Magazine* #43 / 229 (October 24, 2000), <http://www.itogi.ru/archive/2000/43/115809> (accessed May 3, 2016).

on teaching somatics. Ravil Galimov is among remarkable Russian contemporary dancers who created memorable characters, and I vividly remember him dancing on stage.

I find the way Ravil started his dance career unusual but perhaps typical for some other dancers at that point of time:

“Yes, I brought my cousin [to the *Provincial Dances* audition]. She lived in the center of the city and was not familiar with Uralmash district, she asked me to guide her. I came and saw that people were doing something strange and everything felt as if ‘under veil.’ I attended a circus studio at the same house of culture and by chance saw rehearsals of theater *Provincial Dances* before the audition, everything seemed so far away from me, so weird. When I came to the audition, I realized that it was the same company I had seen rehearsing on stage earlier. I decided to try. Moreover, I saw that a boy came, very awkward, and he was accepted into the company, I could do it too. They accepted all the men without any previous experience.”¹⁵

In 1992, two couples from the company *Provincial Dances*, Ravil Galimov and Tatiana Baganova, and Renat Khasbatov and Tatiana Mashianova, participated in one prestigious dance competition in Paris. I asked about the experience, because I heard of their utterly elaborated work in preparation to the competition, his response:

“We were good there, but not because of it. Lev Shulman [founder and first director of the company *Provincial Dances*] wanted us to be prepared at an extremely high level. We perceived our participation in this competition as a breakthrough. And in fact, it was a routine, you come, you pay money for participation and show your dance pieces. There was an obligatory program that was quite a generic piece of dance, but it was good in the sense that some contemporary dance technique could be showed in the piece. We prepared it very very very well; eventually we were the best there. The dancers who came from other countries were good dancers, but they did not treat the obligatory program seriously. Because, probably, they devoted half of the day to it. I had always failed to do a double pirouette, and I did not make it in the obligatory program. Our two pieces were very original and distinctive, besides we were from Russia, which was a closed country back then, perhaps some political

¹⁵ Ravil Galimov, interviewed by Ekaterina Zharinova, Restaurant *Ivan Chay*, March 26, 2016.

considerations also affected the choice of the jury. As a result, our two duets were neck and neck, both pieces were different, and both were beaten out from the general dance canvas. Plus, we worked well in the obligatory program, resulting in the grand prix of the competition for Renat Khasbatov and Tatiana Mashianova. They danced the piece *My love wears black boots* choreographed by Natalia Shirokova. And we did not even know how many points we earned; perhaps, they did not want to give all the prizes to one company.”¹⁶

All the dancers in the company tried the role of choreographer. Ravil did it as well but decided the role of choreographer did not suit him. At some point in time, Tatiana Baganova became a leader and the theater turned to be a theater of one choreographer. Then some international choreographers worked with the company, and Ravil especially stresses the importance of working with the Dutch choreographer Anouk van Dijk. He thinks about Anouk as his main teacher who changed his way of dancing. Ravil even taught her technique (countertechnique) with Anouk’s permission. He stopped dancing with the company because of knees and lower back pains. I asked him about his future in dance, whether he wants to dance more?

“While I have not recovered, certainly I am not going to dance. For me, I am not interested in performing on stage. So dance which should be presented to the public is not interesting to me. What I would like to do is looking more into improvisation. I do some workshops with Natalia Levchenko, and I am looking to what other people are doing in the field of improvisation. It is interesting and important to me, but not for the sake of performing for the audience. I need like-minded fellows and I would like to realize my personal potential in the domain of dance. I have a keen interest in the movement, and I have no interest in the theatrical implementation.”¹⁷

There is another approach to dancing with no audience, which states that dance doesn’t exist while it is not presented to an audience. Dance has to be presented publicly to reveal itself in the reality. Having these two approaches gives a wider perspective, and allows more choices, where every person may decide for himself what approach to choose and utilize in

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

the dance field. Perhaps, it depends on the person's nature. Ravil admitted that it is in his nature to have an inclination to dig, to have a deeper understanding of what he is doing, and that is why he does somatic practices, in particular Feldenkrais. He recently became interested in biodynamics and integral psychology. He has been reading a lot on the integral psychology lately and it allows him to come back to dance. Although, he resisted that for a long time, it seems he wished to forget about dance. So, he is back to the dance world. For instance, Ravil attended a round table devoted to contemporary dance which was recently held in the city.

Chapter IV

Maria Kozeva performed the role of the bride of Ravil's character, she danced with *Provincial Dances Theater* from 1994 till 2002, then danced with a company which has existed under different names but always been under direction of Oleg Petrov who made a lot of connections with European, mainly French, choreographers. Maria is a teacher of contemporary dance at the specialised gymnasium for performing arts which is named after Dyagilev; now she manages the choreography department there. Maria also teaches contemporary dance and dance composition at the Liberal Arts University Department of Contemporary Dance. Currently, Maria is the strongest and most experienced contemporary dance teacher in our region. I studied contemporary dance with her when I was a student at the Contemporary Dance School of the Yekaterinburg Contemporary Art Center. When I came to the *Provincial Dances Theater*, she was a dancer there and we danced together for some time. What is noticeable is that Maria was the first performer in the role of the bride in the legendary performance *Wedding* choreographed by Tatiana Baganova in 1999, which "created a furor. Critics have called it the first iconic performance in the new Russian dance, where minimalism of Stravinsky and lessons of Vaslav and Bronislava Nijinsky were newly reconsidered."¹⁸

¹⁸ Ludcia Khabibulina, "It is necessary to experience every second" in *Peterburg Theatre Journal* #2[32] 2003, <http://ptj.spb.ru/archive/32/music-theatre-32/nado-prozhivat-kazhduyu-sekundu/> (accessed May 6, 2016).

I have known Maria Kozeva for almost 20 years and during the interview, as always, I got the feeling of her as a very elevated person. It simultaneously captivates and pushes me away. Contemporary dance in Russia is about 20 years old, so Maria was at the beginning of this era in the country. When she studied dance at the Culture Institute, she did not know that she would teach contemporary dance later. The Culture Institute prepared teachers for amateur dance groups. They studied ballet and folk dance. So, we talked a bit about the beginning of the era of contemporary dance in Russia, and how the educational system worked at that time and about the changes that happened in the 1990s.

I will quote Maria's description of two major dance groups in Chelyabinsk, a city nearby, who did first experiments in terms of contemporary dance there:

“Back then this group [choreographer - Vladimir Pona] existed as an amateur, as a lot of others, and was called *Movement*. In parallel, there was a plastic theater *Rakurs* at the Medicine Institute. Rudolf Markov, professor of the Department of Histology at the Medicine Institute, was an ideological inspirer for experiments with movement, costumes and form of performance, and Lyuba Ivleva, professor of the Culture Institute, was in charge of the choreography. I was a member of this group. Remarkable and unusual, as I now understand it, was that, coming in the *Rakurs*, people first talked, discussed ideas, listened to music and it was a major impulse to begin to move, to dance. This was experienced by me, a student at the choreography department of the Culture Institute, where we danced and were completely silent. That was a very important experience — when you are not only a tool of dance but you can have an opinion, express it and become a co-author. This right is intended for each participant. I understand that it substantially influenced my teaching and the relationship with the students in the learning process. *Movement* and *Rakurs* existed in the space of a single city, but presented their understanding of dance differently, at that moment it was not even called ‘contemporary dance.’ *Movement* worked in the genre of miniatures and experimented on the side of ballet movements, although it was impossible to go too far in that direction. Dance consciousness entirely consisted of stereotypes at that time. And interest of *Rakurs* was free plastic and serious music (Brahms, Dvorak, Poulenc, Kobekin). ‘Plastic’

appeared out of the body, dressed in tights; Markov called on a Party meeting about the appearance of the dancers, it was as if they come out to dance with no clothes at all. It was the 1986-87 year. *Rakurs* thought in large forms and it is interesting that a performance could take place at the level of a discussion, as a project. We could just dream about it, listen to music, assign roles, and experience it in some sense. And that was part of the process. Some ideas which attracted more attention were implemented in dance. Lyuba Ivleva invented choreography, but the author of the movement could be anyone."¹⁹

I would like to mention what Maria said about sustainability, "I think that the profession of a dance teacher keeps from a professional burnout. This makes the profession lucky and happy because you can adjust your path depending on your condition at this moment."²⁰ She meant you can teach a rigorous dance technique while you are young and active, and then you can open your horizon and there is no limitation in fact. For instance, she recently opened for herself *Axis Syllabus*, a system devoted to efficient movement based on a better knowledge of how skeleton works, that introduced her to plenty of unknown. "If you understand that there is a way to go in depth and don't lose an interest then you can learn constantly. It is not a secret. That's why it happens with me, I just change focus," she said.²¹

It made me think about my way of going further with time. I am gradually using up the resources I have. I expended my physical resources while I was dancing with the dance company, *Provincial Dances*. Then I was looking for what I can use more -- my intellect, for instance, and included mathematics in my research on dance. I have some of the organisational skills as well, and I do some projects as an art manager, for example, run the *Small-format* dance festival in the city. I have a family and two children, and that is also a use of my resources. I was thinking what I can do more. As an expert in the field of contemporary dance I might write about dance. After this conversation with Maria Kozeva, I realized I may dance further; perhaps, I need to find a different approach to working with

¹⁹ Maria Kozeva, interviewed by Ekaterina Zharinova, Liberal Arts University, February 10, 2016.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

the body, moving to a deeper level. So, it is possible to stay in the same activity but change internal directions, intentions, focuses as Maria said.

Conclusion

Working on the paper, in addition to the interviews I held, I intentionally focused on texts in Russian and written primarily by Russians because I was curious what has been written in the field of contemporary dance in Russian. I finally figured out, at least in bare outlines, the history of contemporary dance in my country. I used to glare at what happens outside the country, it seemed inessential what was going on here. I decided to interview local artists to give them more attention, fix their experience in text, and take the chance to learn the wisdom which exists so close to me. Through the stories of Yekaterinburg dancers- and perhaps the wildest experiments were done here in the city - I became more acquainted with the situation in the city. That is important for placing my work in the context of the city. I have always focused on what's happening globally in contemporary dance, I wanted my work to be inscribed into the global context, but the knowledge of the local landscape is also significant.

“Contemporary dance is a deeply personal art form, it derives from a subjective experience of a choreographer, from his/her personal feelings — the number of variations is the same as the number of choreographers.”²² There is a diversity of ways to become a contemporary dancer and to go through the development of the dance form on the life way, there are also diverse options for the future depending on an artist’s experience and personal inclinations. Every path is unique which adds to the variety of the ways of work in the field of contemporary dance. The most intriguing is what is next, we have reached a certain point and the question is what direction we will go further. There are a number of options as well.

According to Christine Meldal, a choreographer and teacher who lives and works in Denmark, “... dance is a synthetic art discipline uniting elements of music, theater and

²² Anna Antipova, “Specifics of a choreographer’s work in a contemporary dance group ” in *Choreography in the mirror of published production*, Chelyabinsk: Chelyabinsk State Academy of Culture and Art, 2007, p. 81.

visual arts, along with architecture...”²³ Perhaps, that is why it is quite organic to mix dance with other disciplines that leads to nowadays multidisciplinary practices eventually. Most probably I will continue my multidisciplinary experiments in the future. I am impressed by the opportunity to utilize principles which we apply in dance studio in everyday life that Natalia Levchenko described in her interview. It is hard to implement but at least to be aware of the option is worthwhile. This semester I attended workshops with Tatiana Gordeeva as a guest teacher at the Liberal Arts University, and she expressed the idea that we need to form a Russian discourse on contemporary dance because it is almost absent in the country and we need to build it to create a basement in order to enable the development of contemporary dance.²⁴ For that we need to write and read a lot on the topic in Russian. Since I am going to publish (in Russian) the interviews I made for this paper and I will write an article for the Liberal Arts University conference’s booklet, I hope to contribute a little bit into the field. Alexander Petrazhitsky, one of my interviewees, who is a prominent yoga teacher now, stated that mix of dance and psychology might be in demand in the future. His latest performance, called *I, not I*, is about the fact that we all are unique and we all do everything possible to become identical. Changing focuses stated by Maria Kozeva as a way of development made me restless. Combining with a notice from Maida Withers that I have to dance as long as possible, I see that I need to continue dancing focusing on a wise approaching to the body. Among practices which might be helpful in being in a better condition are somatic disciplines, for example those applied by Ravil Galimov. Development of kinesthetic awareness is important as stated in an article by Tatiana Gordeeva.

”Development of new bodily qualities such as kinesthetic awareness changes the audience’s modus of perception, creating the feeling of physical presence of a

²³ Christine Meldal, *Poetics and Practice of Choreography*, Ekaterinburg-Moscow: Armchair Scientist, 2015, p. 71.

²⁴ Tatiana Gordeeva is the leading Russian contemporary dance teacher, researcher, dancer, and choreographer. Tatiana manages an innovative master program called “the artistic practices in contemporary dance” (former name — “the scientific-artistic laboratory of contemporary dance forms’ composition”) at Vaganova Ballet Academy in Saint Petersburg. From 2001 till recently, she was the person responsible for the educational program at TsEKh dance organization in Moscow. Tatiana writes on contemporary dance studies topics in the Russian field, which is less developed compared to European and American ones. Her accomplishments are impossible to overestimate, and they are crucial for contemporary dance development in the country.

dancing body which authors concentrate on, shifting the focus from emotional affection to the situation of empathy that is impossible to implement in a verbal discourse.”²⁵

Now I see that it is possible to go further into physical development, I used to think that my body resources were over. Currently, my inner desire is to do dance productions which involve more physicality and it coincides with the trend according to what Olga Dukhovnaya, who works with Boris Charmatz, said in her recent interview.

“But it seems to me that dance returns to its physicality. It happened when everybody stopped dancing, dancing was a shame, and dance left its physicality so much that it became simply weird. Since dance is our material, it is still about body. And the refusal from the very base, very origin is somewhat threatening. In this sense, dance, when we move, sweat and kill ourselves, not speak and read philosophical texts, has returned.”^{26,27}

In his interview, Ravil Galimov briefly described what is an integral psychology: it is about efficient co-existence of different disciplines when they support each other. It is close to what Natalia Levchenko said on integrating dance into a bigger system, not isolating the dance experience but utilizing it beyond the dance field and it also correlates to incorporating dance into multidisciplinary practices. Dancing in alternative spaces is aimed at attracting new audiences to those spaces, and it reveals the synthetic nature of dance which embraces a range of disciplines and not only pure movement. In addition, working with museums and libraries might be perceived as stepping outside the theater and rethinking of what a dance performance is. Here, dance acquires a different context and

²⁵ Tatiana Gordeeva, “Kinesthesia in practice of performing contemporary dance” in *Reporter of Vaganova Ballet Academy* №36 (1.2015), <https://ekazha.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/gordeeva-36.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2016), p. 95.

²⁶ Olga Dukhovnaya, “To eat or not to eat” in *ROOM FOR* (April 6, 2016), interviewed by Katya Ganyushina, <http://roomfor.ru/to-eat-or-not-to-eat/> (accessed April 23, 2016).

²⁷ Olga Dukhovnaya, dancer, choreographer, teacher. Graduated from P.A.R.T.S. In 2009 received DanceWeb Scholarship (ImpulsTanz Festival). Since 2010 works with Boris Charmatz «Levée des conflits» (2010), «Enfant» (2011), «Flipbook» (2013), «Manger» (2015), «Aatt enen tionon» (2016), «danse de nuit» (premiere in the Fall 2016). Participated in «20 choreographers of XX century» project by Boris Charmatz. Since 2012 also works with French choreographer Maud Le Pladec («Democracy» (2012), «Concrete» (2015)). In 2014 obtained a master degree in dance at CNDC Angers / University Paris 8.

serves different purposes in comparison to how it works in the theater. It serves for an exhibition or accomplishes some of library needs or aims.

Reflecting on the personal stories of my interviewees and readings I made this semester, the view of my future perspectives outstretched substantially. It feels as if my eyes have opened wider and I feel myself more rooted into Russian, and Yekaterinburg in particular, contemporary dance soil. I moved to the city in 1995 and missed the originating of contemporary dance, it was quite new but already somehow established. Now I have filled the vacuum, and thanks to Maria Kozeva for the first time heard of the serious beginning of contemporary dance the century before which was uprooted back then. Thus, the picture of Past, Present and Future of the Russian contemporary dance has been delineated through the prism of personal stories of Yekaterinburg pioneers of contemporary dance and some books and articles on contemporary dance.

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