

**Kai Chun Chuang**  
**Matr.Nr.: 61800019**

**“ The relevance of dancer's  
experiences in the choreographic  
process and in its documentation”**

**Master of Arts**

Zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades Master of Arts  
des Studiums Zeitgenössischer Bühnentanz

**Anton Bruckner Privatuniversität OÖ**

Betreut durch: Rose Breuss

Zweitleser/in: Jianan Qu

Linz, 22.01.20

## **Abstract**

For this day and age, what is the relationship between a choreographer and dancer? How do they influence each other? Historical records reveal many choreographers' creative ideas and dance compositions that are preserved through several forms of documentation, such as video, photos, books, interviews etc. However, besides the acclaimed contemporary dance pioneers and choreographers for example Vaslav Nijinsky (1889-1950) Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), Katherine Dunham (1909-2006), Charles Weidman (1901-1975), Erick Hawkins (1909-1994), and Martha Graham (1894-1991), there are only just a few recorded documents about dancers. Why should we record dancers? If an entire rehearsal process could be completely documented, including the elaboration of a choreographers thoughts, and a dancer defining their connection between awareness and the dancing movements, such stimulation-and-response processes between choreographers can potentially further a new understanding to the composition and movements of an entire artwork. I hope that through this research we can record the experiences of dancers and explore the creative processes from both the choreographer and dancer.

# Table of contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction   | 2  |
| 2. The motivation for the topic                                       | 4  |
| 3. Influence of dancers creativity, creative abilities?               | 4  |
| a.) Triangle Relationship   | 4  |
| b.) Is the dancer a translator?                                       | 5  |
| 4. Contribution of dancers /The flexibility of dancers                | 7  |
| 5. Experience as a dancer working for divers choreographers           | 8  |
| 6. Own experience used for interpretation                             | 12 |
| 7. Choreographers: Working with Dancers Experiences                   | 13 |
| 8. Experience Nijinsky and Jiří Kylián                                | 15 |
| 9. Historical context   | 15 |
| a.) A Short History of the Ballet Russes and their Influence to Dance | 15 |
| b.) Antiquity materials Vases   | 17 |
| 10. The Ballet: Description of faun                                   | 20 |
| a.) Rehearsal Process and Memories                                    | 21 |
| b.) Anton Bruckner Private University in Austria                      | 24 |
| c.) My experience to the ballet                                       | 26 |
| 11. Jiří Kylián   | 28 |
| 12. Jiří Kylián’s Self-interpretation for “Sleepless”                 | 31 |
| a.) Motivation  | 33 |
| b.) The vocabulary of concepts and actions                            | 35 |
| c.) The relationship between music and dance                          | 36 |
| d.) Visual arts and dance   | 37 |
| 13. Dancer Meng Ke Wu   | 38 |
| a.) Interview for Meng Ke Wu  | 42 |
| b.) Experience after the interview                                    | 51 |
| 14. Conclusion  | 53 |
| Bibliography  | 55 |
| Network information   | 55 |

# 1. Introduction

“In today's 21st century society there is a constant changing environment; people living with a fast pace of life with no time to stop and observe their surroundings, including those around them. Among these neglected measurements, a great deal of small art is concealed.

Fortunately, under the continuous advancement of science and technology, dance and various media are combined to create many diverse faces. This not only makes the audience have disparate levels of visual experience also soothe an individuals heart. Based on this notion, the progressive development action of the performing arts had many impacts and influences on society. Among all kinds of performing arts, dance has a unique status. “In addition to the display of beautiful movements, it also combines various elements such as music, props, and costumes, while other performing arts are often integrated into dance movements“

(Manli 2010, p.66)

As dancers and choreographers, we are constantly delving in creative processes, and often making this involuntarily approach a form of enjoyment for self-understanding. In the book "Feeling and Form", American modern philosopher Langer points out that when human emotions are made and revealed by the extremes of technology, art is produced. She believes that technology is the medium for creating emotional expressions (Technique is the means to the creation of expressive form); and art is the creation of human emotion symbols (Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling). As Langer said, “Art, the biggest difference is the performance of emotions. The so-called emotional expression can be divided into two levels, one is the artist's self-emotional expression, and the other is the expression or presentation of the artist's concept”.

(Boxian 2013, p.2)

Langer states that the latter is similar to the function of a sign; which is the value of art. In another book, “Problems of Art”, the author emphasizes that dance does not reveal physical flesh, but the power of the spiritual soul. Langer pointed out that the value of dance art is not to express the emotions of the dancers, but to reveal the choreographer's idea; a concept derived from personal emotions or life experiences, and to convert the symbolic image into a performance where the audience can perceive form.

In this thesis, I will explore why I think it is essential to document dancers. I will base my research from my own dance experiences as a dancer and choreographer. Focus will be significantly put on a re-staged dance piece I had the opportunity to learn from Nijinsky's work *The afternoon of Faune*. This early twentieth century choreography was lead by Claudia Jeschke in Anton Bruckner Private University IDA. Claudia guided the rehearsal with the concepts and notation from Nijinsky which she had obtained and deciphered over the years from her own research. However even though we already have so many records from Nijinsky's classic work to be able to re-stage, I would like to know what the original dancers thought, how they perceived the movement when they interpreted the work given. In the dance industry today there are a lot of details given from the choreographer during an artistic process offering the dancer options for self-transformation. If we also record the dancer's experience in the creative process, we can have more diverse pathways for up and coming dancers to refer to, therefore the dance works can be preserved entirely.

In addition to my personal dance experience, this study will explore Jiří Kylián, the choreographer Nijinsky, created a unique dance vocabulary based on ballet. I will focus on his work "Sleepless." I am going to work with Taiwanese dancer Meng Ke Wu who has been working with NDT for ten years. I will analyze the work "sleepless" from my own point of view followed by an interview with Meng Ke Wu. Questions I intend to explore will be: How did Jiří Kylián work with dancers from Meng Ke's personal experience compared with other choreographers? What are the biggest problems and challenges for a dancer who is learning a re-staged work? How can one record the importance of dancers? With her personal experience as a professional dancer, what are her thoughts towards the dance environment of today and its influence on re-staging work?

There are many similarities between Meng Ke Wu and I. We are both Taiwanese, have been trained in the Taiwanese dance education system, and we have both come to Europe seeking our dreams and expectations. It is not comfortable for a foreigner, whether it is the environment or culture. The most important thing is that people have a different language in this artistic country. We need to be brave and persistent to face every challenge as these challenges make our life experiences more fruitful and productive. Nevertheless why Europe? Why did we choose here? Meng Ke Wu has nearly ten years of work experience with NDT and has also worked with the Munich Theatre in Germany for a year. NDT being a world acclaimed dance company is very influential for our current dance environment. NDT dance company has a 60-year history.

In 1976, Jiri Kylian became Artistic Director. During his time, the company laid a critical position for NDT in the contemporary dance world. Fortunately, Meng Ke Wu gave me the opportunity to observe behind the scenes in order understand the working style of this professional dance company and from her personal experiences with NDT. However this is only her point of view and does not mean that the company is precisely like this.

## **2. The motivation for the topic:**

The motivation for my topic is to explore the reception between a dancer and choreographer. In the course of a creative process, can a dancer really appreciate the idea given by the choreographer? Or does the dancer interpret the concept in their own way after receiving, and how do they guide themselves within the artistic work?

I found that historical records of dances or books mostly talk about the motives, methods and ideas of choreographers. Only few researchers interview dancers or document their feelings and how they transfer a given concept or story during the creative process.

The dancer must believe in the choreographer and the success or vision of the dance piece. However, how do choreographers believe in the dancers? It is indeed a big challenge for the researchers themselves! As a choreographer, the first day of a rehearsal is the most intriguing part of the creative process as it combines the difficulties and excitement into one. I have a great interest in the memories and feelings of each person. As the choreographer creates and reveals his motivation, I start to understand the image of dance. However, when I enter a rehearsal space as choreographer, expectations may not be fulfilled. The following questions arise: How to start the piece? How to communicate your methodology to the dancers?

## **3. Influence of dancers creativity, creative abilities?**

### **a.) Triangle Relationship:**

In this triangle: "choreographer, dancer, spectator", it is only the dancer who is singled out from the other two components; the choreographer and the audience. He is a messenger between the two. He needs all the necessary information and confidence to be able to produce

something he can believe in; something that touches his sensitivity and consequently the sensitivity of the spectator. Perhaps it is interesting to realize that the choice to become a dancer is accompanied by contrasting forces.

” His abundance of physical energy on one side, and great uncertainty and fear of physical exposure, on the other. (The fact that his lifespan is short and intense might also add a seed of anxiety into his psyche). Dancers live and function under pressure. Their professional experience is tainted by the complicated and often difficult process of self-acceptance. They spend much time of the day trying to come to terms with their physical appearance, faults, and deficiencies. And although they might feel that they are imprisoned within their body, dance gives them the possibility to break out and communicate with their surroundings in a deeply human and sometimes unconventional way.“

(Kylián 2018)

## **b.) Is the dancer a translator?**

Through the interdependent relationship among "creator (choreographers)", "artworks (performance from dancers)" and " viewers (the audience)", the artistic creations would be fulfilled and carried out. The creators utilize their intelligence and artistry in collaboration with dancers to incarnate their inner imagery. In other words, the artwork is the imagery of the creator, and after the dancers' stage performance, it becomes a concrete work and exhibits its particular feature. Through the interpretation of the dancers, the viewers could enjoy the beauty of the artwork and prompt their own emotional perception.

Hence, artistic materials (the dancers) are a very important link in the artistic performance. Dancers are the linkage between the choreographers and viewers. In fact, many people just take the dancers effort for granted and ignore their significant roles in the performance. When two people have a different mother tongue, they do need a good translator to help them maintain correct communications. With a terrible translator, communications between these two people become worse and even cause a lot of misunderstandings.

Nevertheless, dancers are simply not the translator between the choreographer and viewer. They possess the ability to utilize their own experiences and knowledge and transfer the choreographer's conceptual intentions to the viewers through the art of dance. As an art performer, we often tell stories of others and act like others. On the stage, we are not who we

are, but we are the roles in the performance. I do think this is the most interesting and difficult challenge for art performers, because one experiences a new life story or a new concept that he/she may not encounter in their daily life. Therefore, how can a dancer fulfil a given artwork whilst dealing with such contradictory situations?

When you are not portraying one hundred percent of yourself, it is very challenging to convey your feelings and emotions in the role of others. If you fake your emotion in order to pretend to others, viewers may feel this deception. Hence, professional dancers require the ability to combine his/her experience in conjunction with the story of the given role in order to embody their true emotion. Therefore, viewers will be moved by their true emotion. The difference between self-confidence and over-pride is very great.

However, an artist must have strong self-confidence in himself/herself and such self-confidence arises from self-understanding. It is hard to express oneself and one's thought if he/she does not have enough self-understanding. Through the journey of life, we undergo many different experiences and sense growth with our heart. The dancer is the communication medium between choreographers and audiences. Dancers may not necessarily reach the same consensus as to those of the audiences, however we do expect dancers to strike a chord with the audience; hence the same unanimity a choreographer and dancer convey during a creative process; there is trust, and their minds are in sync.

In the early stages of the contemporary dance creations, choreographers usually took the dancers movement as a foundation in order to develop more movement. Sometimes, choreographers provide a concept or initial thought and ask dancers to improvise in a given range. Choreographers might tell stories along with questions as a stimulus and dancers in affect responds with their dancing movements. This kind of artwork is the collaboration between choreographers and dancers. It is *co-creation*<sup>1</sup>. As a professional dancer, I have a lot of *co-creation* experiences. However, if one wants to reproduce a classic choreography dancers who do not participate from day one of the *co-creation* might have a desperate understanding of the choreographies central ideas.

---

1. By co-creation is meant a collaborative mode of work between the two parties.

Each individual has different experiences in life from the upbringing of their environment and culture. Even in the same family, everyone has a different personality. Therefore, in reproducing a dancing artwork, the artists might have similar ideas, but it is very often that they choose a different way to express their thoughts present through their dancing composition. This is a unique and valuable element. If one is a choreographer at the time of creation, whether they are reproducing a dance composition or newly creating, his/her understanding of the dancer is essential and plays an important role to the final artwork.

#### **4. Contribution of dancers /The flexibility of dancers**

Currently, it is quite difficult to maintain a steady and professional position as a dancer. In the annual recruiting of dancers in Europe, there are many talents unrecognized. The reason that dancers are not employed might only be due to their body features and not their skills. I often have a question in my mind about why there are so many auditions each year and whether this is due to many dancers withdrawing from dance companies or perhaps because dancers can be easily replaced. What is the prerequisite for being a dancer? What kind of dancers are contemporary dance companies looking for, nowadays? I do not have simple answers to these questions. It all comes down to the direction and style of the dance groups, company, and vision of the art directors.

To be honest in this day and age, I think that dancers are easy to be replaced. The physical attributes of the twenty-first century ballet dancer is stronger and more enduring, with the aesthetic conception to change with the time. From my own experience and also from observing my fellows, it is much harder as an Asian dancer to succeed in an audition compared to ten years ago. The situation has become much more challenging for dancers, due to the intense competition from both colleagues and junior dancers. Besides the basic skill requirement, creativity and a dancer's vision are also essential attributes to acquire for a *co-creation* process with choreographers. There should be a lot of chemistry between choreographers and dancers.

It is too superficial no matter what the point of view is in a contemporary dance or classical ballet if the quality of a dancer is only based on his/her skill. There is no discrimination between good and bad in art performance since it is a subjective judgment. The most important aspect is whether the performance touches the audiences' hearts. One artwork would be expressed differently by the interpretation from different dancers since an individual

has his/her unique perception. The same situation also occurs in the personal feeling of the audience. For example, even with the same piece of cheesecake, everyone could have many different tastes. Some people might say it is too sweet and others might feel that more sugar is needed. One might simply not like cake at all, but another might think that one piece of cake can make his/her day. Maybe, it is a bit unfair to compare with food as it is a physiological necessity, and taste is only one of our senses. Therefore, we could also take the aesthetic taste of a movie or clothes as examples. These various personal opinions result from one's own perception. As I mentioned earlier, professional dancers should have considerable self-understanding, be willing to appreciate different points of view and even learn to admire diverse opinions; that is "the flexibility of dancers"

I believe that dancers are like sponges. Although they have their own opinions, they can accept, tolerate and adopt the ideas from choreographers. This is nevertheless similar to a sponge; owning its original colours and textures but changing and modifying its colour after absorbing the given new colours. If dancers are sponges with white colour and choreographers are the providers with black colour, they would collaborate to generate different levels of a grey colour. To reproduce a classical dance, the main thought should not deviate from that expressing from the original dancers. Most importantly, I think that one of the responsibilities of choreographers is to discover the characteristics and abilities of new dancers and their new artwork would give the original dance a new life and vision. Choreographers are the magicians who modify and create new colours from their own thought in conjunction with the dancers response.

## **5. Experience as a dancer working for divers choreographers**

During my college years, I was constantly thinking about whether the relationship between dancers and choreographers is equivalent. Does such equivalent relation occur during the creation of arts and/or during the artistic performance? This question does indeed also arise when I play both roles as a choreographer and as a dancer. During the creation progression, I tried to go deep into the dancers in order to gain feedback from them. We were working together to find a comparable relation in both roles.

After graduation from the National Taiwan University of arts, in 2015, I joined the WC Dance

Company, whose artistic director is Wen-Chung Lin and I performed in one of his artworks, *Long River*. During the process of rehearsal, Mr. Lin motivated all the dancers to explore quality of the dancing movement. How to analyze the quality of dancing movement is an abstract concept and cannot be easily explain in a literal form. As an example, similar to learning a new language, one should learn the alphabet first, and then learn how to put the letters together to form a word. By combining words, one could write a full sentence and then eventually write a complete paragraph or even an article to express his/her own thoughts. During such a learning process, I figured out that for contemporary dance choreographers, it is very important to acquire dancers with consistent movement. Consistent movement does not mean that all the dancers move like robots, but move with the same level of dancing quality. One might ask why must all the dancers need to perform with the same level of dancing quality. There is however no simple answer to this question. In the dance theatre, consistent movement might not be the most important requirement. Nevertheless, in the dancing artwork of a pure body movement, it would be quite crucial for all dancers to understand each other and their thought process, resulting in a synchronized movement quality.

Take the classical ballet, *Swan Lake*, as an example, it is obvious that the dancers have been (and need to be) trained with the classical ballet ability in order to present consistent movement on the stage.

In the dance group sections of Jiří Kylián's artworks, It is easy to recognize how all dancers are well-trained in classical ballet. However besides their strong technique and movement quality, the dancers portray unique personalities and individuality. Such unique personalities allow individual dancers to display their dance movement to conduct the central thoughts of choreographers. In Vaslav Nijinsky's choreographies, he created a dance artwork based on dance notation where all the dancers were instructed to move in a precise and accurate manner. In comparison to Vaslav Nijinsky's artworks, I have discovered how Jiří Kylián's dancers obtain more chances to express their personal characteristics. Is it possible that Kylián motivates dancers to comprehend the central thoughts of his artwork with their own perception? Does Kylián encourage the dancers to display their own emotions through their dancing movements? I will elaborate in more detail in the interview with Meng-Ke Wu, who had worked with Jiří Kylián in several performances.

As mentioned earlier, in 2015, I joined WC Dance Company and worked with the artistic director is Wen-Chung Lin, who emphasizes quality within dancing movement. In one of his artworks, Long River, all motions are related to the spine kinematics. After warming up, the training of the spine movements and articulations was the main focus of our daily practice. Since I did not participate during the first co-creation of this artwork, all the dancers learned the movements from a recorded dancing video. After we got familiar with the movements, director Wen-Chung Lin elaborated on the details of each motion and the quality movement that he expected. During the rehearsal process, I remember him often saying “ the previous dancers did not move their bodies in this way, you do not dance like original dancer”. At those moments, I had a hard time to adopt those statements. I expected that he could provide more description of the details and the central idea of each dancing motion. This way I could then advance my understanding of the composition and present it in a more developed way. Since I am not the initial co-creation dancer, I would not express my emotion in the same way as the previous dancers. With more communication between the dancers and choreographer, one can learn how to explain the initial thoughts and then state the requests.

In fact, he admitted that the dancing movements from previous dancers are synced with his idea, although he might not completely know how they utilize their bodies to dance in a solo, duet or in a group. As I mentioned earlier, each individual perceives in a different way. Hence, choreographers focus more on how to express his/her idea through the dance composition rather than concentrating on how each dancer applies the use of his/her own body. From this experience, I learnt not only how to memorize the movements of the dance composition but more importantly how to comprehend the ideas of the artwork through each movement. In the end, we had reached the consensus that even with the elaboration of the choreographers’ idea and concept, we needed to consult the initial co-creation dancers about what their thoughts were and how they felt during the developmental process of those movements. With this information, we could then try to portray the given ideas through our dance.

In 2019, I had the opportunity to perform at Ohad Naharin's work "Decadance" at the Austria Festspielhaus St.Pölten. During the rehearsal process, we actually met a lot of rehearsal directors; I was strongly impressed by what Yaniv Abraham said during the rehearsal process. One sentence was particularly very profound: Try to use only 20% to move your body, the other 80% it's all about sensation. This sentence is like a stone; the impression left is very

long-term. We spend the majority of our time training our body skills and the ability to perform movements. Especially in college, most of the instructions are based on the physical action. Very few people will teach us how to open our own perceptions. Why is perception so important? That 80%'s sensation creates individual style.

“Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin uses a body language stripped of inhibitions. His dancers incarnate fear, despair, hysteria, joy and every feeling in between. He won't explain what's causing the rawness enacted before your eyes, but you'll feel the emotions, all right.“

(Bleiberg 2019)

Earlier I mentioned that there were 5 rehearsal directors guiding our work "Decadance". They were also all the original dancers and had each worked with Naharin for at least 6 years. During the process, I discovered that the rehearsal directors were using their body very much. There were signs of similarity due to the long-term training of *Gaga*<sup>2</sup>. Their bodies showed *natural*<sup>3</sup> memories, but each person was so unique from the perspective of independence. In addition to the texture of gaga, they all moved with their own body vocabulary. So there differences in the interpretation of the movements, but the results of those small differences were noticeably contrasting. For these reasons, I am more interested in this study.

I think that "fame" is not equal to "success". But in this era that belongs to us, these two elements are so inseparable. History shows how many choreographers during their time were unknown. However these artists explored their personal characteristics and the process of self-style. If there were no dancers willing to join forces with the choreographers and learn or understand their artistic intentions, then I believe there will be no such thing as Nijinsky, Jiří Kylián or Ohad Naharin today. The concept of a creator or choreographer is the shape and soul of the whole artwork. He is a very significant and important role.

---

2. Gaga is a movement language intended developed by Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin, to practitioners raise physical awareness by focusing on or listening to the rhythm of trainers' bodies, letting the body through the texts or imagination direct their movement and the pleasure that daily natural movement brings.

3. The human body has memories. For example in daily life, we do not need to deliberately think about how to walk. After different types of dance training, dancers' bodies will remember those movement styles or convert them into their own preference.

## **6. Own experience used for interpretation**

Under the educational environment of dancing in Taiwan, one has to go through the complete training process from a pre-professional school and graduate with a dancing education diploma in order to pursue a professional career. However, there is a distinct difference in dancing education between Taiwan and Europe. For European contemporary dancers, they have the opportunity to pursue a professional career from an earlier age of seventeen. For Example, the audition age in NDTII (Nederland Dans Theater 2) is from seventeen to twenty-two. However, we really cannot determine which case is best, as in the end it is on the personal career planning for the individual.

During my bachelor's degree studies at the National Taiwan University of Arts, there was an annual performance in the winter semesters open as an audition for casting students from junior to senior years. Ballet, contemporary dance and Chinese classical dance take turns to become the main focus for each year. Hence, students obtain the opportunity to interact with different choreographers in various working styles and attitudes. In addition the dancers from the undergraduate years also need to attend the student performance in summer semesters. The student performance allows those who have the passion and ambition to create an artwork the opportunity to learn how to be a choreographer. Therefore, one not only creates his/her own artwork, but also learns how to work with his/her classmates, develop better communication skills and potentially evolve becoming a mature dance artist.

## 7. Choreographers: Working with Dancers Experiences

Among all kinds of performing arts, dancing has its unique status. In addition to the display of elegant movements, dancing also combines various elements such as music, stage design, and costumes, while other performing arts are commonly integrated with dancing movements. Based on the observations from their daily life and through their keen perception, dance artists develop an emotional foundation in their artistic creation.

” Furthermore, through imagination, association, and fantasy, dance artists create a complete and meaningful image to express their own thoughts and emotions. “

(Jiaoxian 2010, p.4)

The inspiration for dance creation comes from the experience of life. Dance artists analyze, understand, and transform these accumulating life materials into dance artworks from their own experiences. Due to the ceaseless changes in our social milieu, everyone is under different external and internal pressures. These pressures influence an individual’s psychology and emotional state.

Dancing is a comprehensive art of time, space and strength. The transitory features in dancing movements are the most attractive and aesthetic characteristics. Even the dance that emphasizes rationality, is represented with the emotional display. While exhibiting only rationality, one will present suffocated feelings and ruin the charm of modern dance. The structure of the dance refers to the style, the posture, the choreography, and the motion path of the dancing movements. A successful dance artwork must have a well-organized structure that allows the audience to clearly understand the ideas that are expressed in the dance.

” The structure in the dance is like the organization in the paragraphs of the article. It is essential to focus on how it transforms from the opening of the dance to the evolution of the whole process, to the establishment of the central thought, and to the finality of the dance. During this whole process, to perform the best artwork, both the changes in space and the arrangement in time are necessary to take into consideration.”

(Manli 2010, p.73)

There is an interdependent relationship between choreographers and dancers. Dr. Chung-Shuan Chang, who is a professional dance pedagogue in aesthetic education at TNUA (Taipei National University Of Art), believes that dancing is an excellent way to develop professional individuals, such as professional dancers and choreographers.

First, to become an excellent dancer, one has to spend a lot of time and effort in practice. Dancers usually begin their training at an early age, and after many years of practicing and improving, they are able to perform in public performances. Generally, we can see two types of dancers, one who is concentrating on the physical aspect of the skill for the performance, and the other is focusing on the inner aspect of the emotional expression. Although both types of dancers show their own abilities to be able to carry both characterizations would be the ideal case. Second, choreographers are the magicians of dancing creations. A choreographer has to consider many aspects, such as, how many dancers on stage, what kind of movements they will present with corresponding music, costume, stage props and their positions on the stage. Therefore, a choreographer not only instructs dancers to perform and carry the main ideas of the dance artwork but also needs to collaborate with fashion designers, composers, stage props and lighting designers in order to give the best performance to the audience. An excellent choreographer is usually a great dancer and possesses knowledge in various fields. The German choreographer for example, Pina Bausch (1940-2009), believes that the relationship between choreographers and dancers is quite close. Dancers use their own experience to evolve all possible motion features and maintain good communication and cooperation with choreographers. The personality, ability, and characteristic of the individual dancer would affect the dancing artwork.

Hence, choreographers have to communicate with dancers with care due to their distinct features and maintain best interaction in various ways. Usually, choreographers first ask questions to the dancers and collect the action or verbal response from them. Then, choreographers create improvisational movements from the unique body language of the individual dancer. Through the stimulus and response between choreographers and dancers, all pieces concepts and movements evolve and gradually become the central ideas, which choreographers want to deliver to the audiences.

## 8. Experience Nijinsky and Jiří Kylián :

Nijinsky choreography work and Greek vases:

In twentieth-century ballet, no company had so much profound and far-reaching influence as the Ballet Russes. I will use Nijinsky's and Ballet Russes as my research basis for this chapter and research Nijinsky's working process of the *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*.

As a male choreographer and dancer, in order to explore my choreography, I need to know how to find the material? Most choreographers of the 21st century have the concept or the entire dance story of the intended choreography already planned and then relies on the input from the dancer to develop the movements further. The working process during Nijinsky's time was much different to our current generation. All his creative ideas were triggered by his own research. I can imagine that he may have encountered similar problems along the process like choreographers of today, however in this chapter I intend to explore how Nijinsky worked with his own experiences in order to create.

## 9. Historical context

### a.) A Short History of the Ballet Russes and their Influence to Dance:

The Ballet Russes created the first of this century's classics: *Les Sylphides*, *Firebird*, *Petrouchka*, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Parade*, *Les Noces*, *Les Biches*, *Apollo*, and *Prodigal Son*, all of which continue to be performed today.

Choreographers-Michel Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, Léonide Massine, Bronislava Nijinska and George Balanchine- strongly influenced the direction of choreography until 1970s.

The 20th centuries history of dance exhibits how the the Ballet Russes displayed an exceptional emergence between diverse arts. Lynn Garafola explains in *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* how the company was immersed in an on going exploration extending the prospects and potentiality of ballet. She explains how "Nothing was left untouched: subject matter, movement idiom, choreographic style, stage space, music, scene design, costuming, even the dancer's physical appearance. All felt the imprint if the quest for new forms." ( 1989, p.v111)

Dance as we know it today would be very different if the Ballet Russes had never occurred.

Historical records show how Ballet Russes has had a huge impact on the twenty-first century dance industry. It is not merely an indicator, but it also enables us to continually explore the classic works or characters recorded from past history. We are able to see how they laid the standard for those of us in the 21st century due to the thanks of dance researchers. However, I believe we should also hold some doubts about the past history and try to understand the elements we seek from the past works with the present thinking.

I'm also questioning myself; if ballet didn't exist until today, what could the ballet world look like? How will it evolve? How many breakthroughs can we have? If this were to be the case, there would not be an indicator or rules to be guided by; every choreographer or dancer would be able to create his or her own unique ballet style. The Ballet Russes explored innovative movement vocabulary however the dancers still practiced in their daily class (despite the subversive choreography) classical ballet as their common idiom.

It was not only the choreography of the Ballets Russes that influenced the dance world, the 1920s 1930s and 1940s witnessed the birth of many new ballet companies, most of which owned their inspiration and at least part of their identity to the Ballet Russes. This also shows that the era was accepting to free thought and creation. Contrary to Taiwan, the 1930s saw "Taiwan in the Japanese rule". The road for learning how to dance in the 1930s was with the upswing of Japan Militarism. Taiwan's political movements have been disaffected in all aspects. Following the cultural and anti-colonial movement with absence of freedom of speech, this hindered the course of artistic development in comparison to the advancement of European dance of the same time.

We can use creative arts to make historical records for this era. We can even express the social movements at that time. It is even more possible for creators to express their ideas through art. However, on the realistic level, each choreographer must go through a process of self-lost; they are worried if the audience cannot accept their new concept or idea. Throughout the Ballet Russes' existence, the company was the meeting ground for the glamorous, talented, and celebrated.

Sergei Diaghilev, was born in Russia in 1897. He was a passionately curious man with ferocious will, infinitely astute taste, and encyclopaedic knowledge; a very influential of the arts and Renaissance man in one. The impresario extraordinaire, who presided the Ballet Russes from its inception until his death in 1929 that also, ended the company.

He has often been called a dilettante, and gave many different trades a go in his youth. Yet his early ventures prompted nothing less than a rejuvenation of Russian art, while serving as a superb apprenticeship for the future. Similar to an art director of current dance troupes, Sergei Diaghilev was a patron of the ballet world in that century. His position in the Ballet Russes was among the reasons for his stringent art requirements.

A show's box office depends on if the next theatre invites the choreographer and performers or not. Artists must find ways to publish their work, and yet I find it a very contradictory situation how the success or failure of a show is judged significantly by an audiences' response.

## **b.) Antiquity materials Vases**

About 2800 years ago, Greece entered the antiquity era. From the ancient Greek classical times some of the more artistic and cultural relics unearthed unfounded cultural relics; the Greeks at during this time uncovered the wonderful expression of art and sex. What were the effects on future generations from the Greek myths (after the Renaissance)?

In the history of mankind, every scientific and technological leap has been carried out under the influence of liberated ideas. Every emancipations of mind have transpired from the premise of artistic prosperity. The revival of Renaissance, which was hoped for at the end of the thirteenth century, it has opened up a prosperous period of culture and art from the end of the middle Ages.

Renaissance poems, sculptures, paintings involving the glorification of numerous ancient Greek myths became the face of the dark Middle Ages. Many artists have to get artistic image from the mythological system's creative vision. The ideological theme of the emerging bourgeoisie against the church during this period was humanism. It objected to the authority of God and opposed the religious imprisonment, which is full of joy and struggle with the

earth's infinite spirit, it is also from ancient Greek mythology.

The spirit of heroism, adventure and exploration was embodied in the ancient Greek mythology. They are the ideological weapons for the Renaissance literature and art; to be released from the shackles of medieval religious thought. That is why I say that the Renaissance is the end of the great medieval voyage era. Ancient Greek mythology greatly enriched the Renaissance literature and art and great literature and art in turn to the ancient myth of a new life. It can be said that Western culture was developed in the context of the promotion of myth and literature and art.

"Nijinsky has never been so remarkable as in his latest role. No more jumps - nothing but half-conscious animal gestures and poses. He lies down, leans on his elbow, walks with bent knees, draws himself up, advancing and retreating, some-times slowly, sometimes with jerky angular movements. His eyes flicker, he stretches his arms, he opens his hands out flat, the fingers together, and as he turns away his head he continues to express his desire with a deliberate awkwardness that seems natural. Form and meaning are indissolubly wedded in his body, which is totally expressive of the mind within... His beauty is that of antique frescoes and sculptures: he is the ideal model, whom one longs to draw and sculpt."

(Lowen 2018)

1."Cartoon of Vaslav Nijinsky dancing the Faun in ballet L'après-midi d'un faune which he choreographed, staged by the Ballet Russes in Paris 1912. Published in Le Figaro, 30 May 1912, which carried an editorial attacking the ballet as obscene."

(Losques1912.img.1)



2."Menelaus intends to strike Helen; struck by her beauty, he drops his swords. A flying Eros and Aphrodite (on the left) watch the scene. Detail of an Attic red-figure crater, ca. 450–440 BC, found in Gnathia (now Egnazia, Italy). Her beauty strikes Menelaus intending to strike Helen instead. Louvre museum, Campana collection acquired 1861"

(Nguyen 2006.img 2)



## 10. The Ballet: Description of faun

*The Afternoon of a Faun* was first performed by Ballets Russes in Paris during May 1912. The ballet was choreographed and performed by Nijinsky, the music score was composed by Claude Debussy and the stage design and costumes was created by artist Léon Bakst. The inspiration behind both musical score and story was from the poem *L'Après-midi d'un faune* written by French poet and critic Stéphane Mallarmé.

During Nijinsky's creative process of *The Afternoon of a Faun* in 1911, Fokine was still head choreographer of Ballets Russes. In order to avoid upsetting Fokine, Diaghilev had kept its creative progress confidential.

Tension and jealousy however eventually erupted within the Ballets Russes. With Nijinsky as Diaghilev's lover and new given opportunities to choreograph, Fokine felt denounced from his position as head choreographer and conclusively resigned from his job.

“Igor Stravinsky, whatever he thought of Nijinsky's ability, regretted that Fokine would be choreographing music he had just completed for *Le Sacre du Printemps* because he thought Fokine had run out of ideas.”

(Garafola 2010, p.119-121)

The 12 minutes ballet required 90 rehearsals, in one respect justifying Fokine's complaints. However, all the dancers suffered the same difficulties; Bronislava had reported in trying to adapt to the strange new movements, which felt completely unnatural, working against their training. By this time Nijinsky had fully devised exactly what he wanted each dancer to do, so it was at least only necessary to train them, without having to work on developing the ballet at the same time. The general view amongst the dancers was that he was mad, and the ballet was doomed to failure. Even Diaghilev started to have doubts and asked Nijinsky whether there might be changes. From this, Nijinsky then threatened to resign.

“Overnight European ideas about ballet were overturned and ballet became an important art form. The success of Vaslav Nijinsky and Adolph Bolm restored the male dancer to popularity. The dancers became household names, and the designers were the rage of Paris.

Michel Fokine was a famous dancer and teacher with the Maryinsky ballet in St Petersburg from 1898; his real vocation was for choreography. He rejected formal classical ballets like *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*. He felt that dancing should be a truly expressive medium and not mere gymnastics, and that the type of movement, music and design should reflect the time and place of the subject.”

(“The 20th-Century Ballet Revolution by Museum” 2014)

Fokine was a man of many artistic talents. He was born into a wealthy family in Saint Petersburg and had a love not only for dance and choreography but also for painting and music. He performed his first ballet *Paquita* with the Imperial Russian Ballet and then in 1902 moved into the direction of teaching at The Imperial Ballet School where Bronislava Nijinska was one of his students. During his teaching employment, he delved into choreography and explored more of his own artistic capabilities. Fokine’s first full length ballet was called *Acis et Galalée* and his choreography in this piece had already displayed progressive and subversive ideas for the Russian audiences of that time. In 1909, Diaghilev had organised Fokine’s ballets to be performed in Paris and from one day to the next, ballet in Europe was permanently transformed.

## **a.) Rehearsal Process and Memories :**

### Rehearsals of L'Après-midi d'un faune in Monte Carlo

During the rehearsal period of Faune, Nijinsky’s sister Bratislava once said, “ I am like a piece of clay that he is moulding, shaping into each pose and change of movement.

“ (Nijinska, 1981, p.316) The inspiration for the movements came from images on Greek Vases. The drawings placed against toned panels enhanced their beauty while celebrating the profound portrayal of Faune’s characteristic movements.

Nijinsky created only four works for the Ballet Russes: *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune* (1912), *Jeux* (1913), *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913), and *Till Eulenspiegel* (1916). Faune, known for its movement design; Jeux, for the intimation of neoclassicism, and *Le Sacre du Printemps* for the score and its creation of primitive movement and style.

“ The score was almost immediately lost. Recreated in more than sixty versions, the ballet has become synonymous with the very idea of modernity.”

(Garafola 2010, p.51)

In the process of Nijinsky's creation, his sister, Bratislava, was one of the earliest recorders, and at the same time gave him a direct idea and opinion, and in my thoughts, his sister was his best comrade. When a choreographer is creating work, they may want to express their own voice through unique new concepts of innovation, and sometimes because of dissatisfaction with the world, it can also present a story, an encounter, and their past or memories. I believe art is very valuable; it can record what happened in each generation. As large as the world is choreographers cannot only find inspiration in real life, but also in the virtual. Through imagination, they find elements of creative ideas (like a dream) and transform it into reality.

“Nijinsky was the first to demand that his whole choreographic material should be executed not only exactly as he saw it but also according to his artistic interpretation. Never was a ballet performed with such musical and choreographic exactness as *L'Après-midi d'un faune*. Each position of the dance, each position of the body down to the gesture of each finger, was mounted according to a strict choreographic plan. One must remember that the majority of dancers in this ballet could not understand Vaslav's composition. The dancers did not like the choreography at all. They felt they were restricted and would often complain, saying such things like “What kind of ballet is this? ... There is not a single dancing position, no single free movement- not a single dance at all.... We felt as though we are carved out of stone.”

(Nijinska 1981, p.427)

“The ardent supporters of Fokine in the company saw this new ballet as a provocation, a challenge to their “master.” They would say, Nijinsky is a wonderful artist and dancer ... but why is he trying to steal the laurels from our genius of a choreographer? Let Nijinsky dance and let Fokine Choreograph.”

(Nijinska 1981, p.428)

In the book Bronislava Nijinska(1981) Early Memoirs P. 428~429 had this conversation Nijinsky was insecure about the new creation. One day when Vatsa stopped by the hotel where Bronia staying, as he often did, he looked very upset and tired.

“Bronia, I can trust you. Please tell me frankly, what do you think of my ballet?”

”Vatas, if you have any doubts about Faune it is because you cannot see the quality of your own work. Don’t listen to the others, and don’t give up what you have created.”

“Don’t worry, Bronia. I have no doubts of the merits of my ballet. I know that I have created L'Après-midi d'un faune exactly as I see it ...so correct in all its details that I cannot add or cut a thing.”

“Vaslav was very agitated as he was speaking, and I had the feeling that he was not telling Bronia all. After a moment of silence, he asked “Do you think public will understand Faune?”

“Paris will understand, Vatas, of that you can be sure. But as for our dancers, naturally it is difficult for them to grasp it... they have seen so little as yet, they have so much more to learn about Art. Your work is too new for them, they still have to let go of the old school, part of their life in the ballet, and reject their traditional ballet in order to understand your work.”

We can document conversations or interviews during the rehearsal process, which is a great help for choreographers and the rehearsal process. The choreographer continuously digs himself during the choreography process. If the trust or understanding each other reaches a certain level between choreographers and dancers, then from both sides will feel mutually support in the creative process or when they perform.



“Vaslav Nijinsky (far right) performing as the Faun in the premiere of the Ballets Russes's production of *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (The Afternoon of the Faun) at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, 1912. Léon Bakst designed the scenery and costumes.”

(Edward 1912.img.3)

## **b.) Anton Bruckner Private University in Austria**

In the summer semester of 2017 we had the opportunity to learn Laban notation by Professor Breuss Rose, which opened up our curiosity and interest for notation. We understand that notation is used to record the details you have programmed; it is a tool that can be more than a teaching material. At the end of the Laban notation course, we furthered our research with the opportunity to learn about the notation from Nijinsky with dance historian Professor Jeschke Claudia.

### **Contemporary Stage Dance**

“The curriculum for the Master Programs Movement Research – Stage Dance/Dance Pedagogy offers in-depth study of the practice and theory of dance. The focus is on the methodology of artistic (performance) research and practice-led research. The Masters students worked through a variety of individual problems and themes within the productive transfers and contradictions of theory and practice, past and present, artistic practices and materiality as well as intercultural and transcultural distinctions. The teachings of the Master Programs is carried out in a variety of formats – lectures, normal classes, study weeks, shared practice - as well as artistic and pedagogical projects. The IDA Dance LAB offers a platform

for the work of Masters students. Available to them are dance and media studios, and studios for artistic residencies and teaching practice. Links to future professional fields are incorporated in the form of external projects.”

(Breuss 2019)

In the course of the study of learning about Nijinsky's *Afternoon of Faun*, I realized difference in space, as well as the action of design. I tried to think like Nijinsky in the process of arranging, how and dancers communicate and work. It is only natural that this was not exact to that of Nijinsky's work, but through Claudia's research of from the notation of Nijinsky, we were able to analyse each exact movement. From this exploration, we were able to notice how Nijinsky brought a completely different language to classical ballet. Nevertheless, I still felt from the movement I learnt that he still kept the same accuracy as ballet dance has.

Reminiscent of the works a choreographer will always start before the dancers work and they imagine how the dance could be like with the texture of action. The dancers also imagine their own story to the choreography by dismantling, deconstructing the structure; a constant repetitive cycle. This is the most general way of working for contemporary dancers and choreographers who have created classic dances in the past. They try their best to record their ideas, dance, scores, notes, paintings, and music. The music is marked, and in the course of today's developed technology, we video, record, and take photos in order to record our life and/or the rehearsing process. I think it would be very sad if the contemporary artist lost the most basic perception of their artwork.

Nijinsky's notation can be used as a reference for contemporary dance. I think for every artist, being able to express their ideas or concepts accurately, or bring new ideas to the present is the biggest test of today. Contemporary multimedia records bring convenience for people, it has become another platform for creation.

### **c.) My experience to the ballet**

When you dance *Afternoon of Faun* do you have a different feeling?

On the first day of rehearsing this dance piece, I found it difficult to adapt to because all the actions must twist your waist. I started to imagine myself between two very narrow walls that became a very helpful metaphor for me. In the rehearsal two days after, my body felt uncomfortable because we did not undergo a complete physical practice before the rehearsal. The dance requires very strong muscle control, and balance. The rules from ballet need to be applied to the upper body, and I found the footwork somewhat similar to the Chinese classical dance. There are several moments of squatting in deep positions and then alternating between high and low positions from standing up to squatting down again; thus demonstrating a new dance vocabulary created by Nijinsky of his era.

Over a short time, my body gradually adapted to the new movement. When I come into contact with different dances, I like to imagine a way to help myself, whether it is during the process of learning the movements, or during the final presentation, the so-called imagination is not imagined. However, by imagining the texture of the action, rather than only staying ignorant to do the action, can help the dancer really perceive an object understand the meaning of an action faster. In *L'Après-midi d'un faune* reflects a real object, but in terms of action I imagined all the positions to be their own bones placed, rather than only with the muscles control. One can achieve the action in a relaxed sensation, but this can also achieve accurate results.

In the process of compiling, every artist must concentrate on his own works, whether they are painters, composers, musicians or sculpture'. We are not only exploring ourselves, but we are also exploring the world, and sometimes too much within the concept. One can see this like reading a book or watching a movie; it may take some time to pull away from ones relationship with the ideas or concept, but we always keep reflecting asking ourselves questions.

On these photos students of Master Program at IDA are captured while learning Nijinsky's work *The Afternoon of the Faun* in 2017



Video link of Nijinsky *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* new version by Kai Chun Chuang:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7fWCzvUOks>

## 11. Jiří Kylián

Born in Prague in 1947, Jiri Kylián began pre-professional ballet training at the School of the National Ballet Prague where he also learnt folk dance and Martha Graham technique. One of Kylián's biggest influences and an important contribution to his artistic growth was his mentor Zora Šemberová who was known as one of the most prominent artists in the Czech dance industry. Kylián's first choreographies were *Nine Eighth's* and *Quartet* and were performed at the Conservatorium where he studied. At the age of 20, he traveled abroad to London where he won a scholarship to study at the Royal Ballet School. Kylián was invited by John Cranko to be the main dancer of the Stuttgart Ballet in Stuttgart, Germany. He created several dances and received critical acclaim. The outstanding choreographer made Jiří Kylián become a new generation of superstars.

During the Kylián youth, the Czech Republic was a landlocked country in Central Europe. The ancient Bohemian country, formerly known as Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the Prague Spring that required democratic reforms, but failed in the Soviet military repression. Until November 1989, Czechoslovakia finally realized democratic reforms and through the velvet revolution it began to implement a multi-party democratic parliamentary system, and separated peacefully from Slovakia in 1993.

Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic is located in the Central Bohemia and Vltava rivers of the country and is a famous European city. Because Czechoslovakia was a vassal state of the Soviet Union, the heavy industry assigned as a polluted city with the Vltava River, making Prague a research centre for toxicology. Jiří Kylián grew up in a colonial city full of history, culture and art.

Coming back to the topic of Jiří Kylián, in 1975, the 28-year-old was hired as the artistic director by the Dutch Dance Theatre. After more than 20 years since he took office, Jiří Kylián had created approximately sixty dances for the dance company and his works have been further used as part of the repertoire other dance groups.

In 1976, Jiří Kylián became the Artistic Director of the Nederlands Dans Theater and not long after expanded the company for younger dancers with Nederlands Dans Theatre 2 in 1978. In 1991 he then established Nederlands Dans Theater 3 which was significantly set up for older

dancers. In the article *Jiří Kylián and the Naked Art of Dance*, dance critic Valleda C Ceccoli PhD described Kylián's early choreographies to be works that:

“(…) brought us non-narrative, dramatic dances, which featured a balletic style pushed to extreme limits with subtle references to folk. But this was only the beginning, since then, Jiří Kylián has advanced dance to its most communicative possibilities. His work addresses the body's ability to speak without betraying itself, where words can be manipulated and distorted, in dance distortion remains an honest communication that says what it means to say. As perhaps the oldest art form, dance expresses emotion and feeling in a language that does not require words. The movement is the words. The body its naked interpreter. Kylián's work is very sensual because his choreography is about the inside, and about the body as an instrument of inner movement, naked in its ability to perform it.”

(Siegel 2014, para.2)

One of his most well acclaimed works are *Stomping Ground* and *Dream Time* (1983) which were inspired by his travels to Australia and his fascination with the Australian Aboriginal culture and rituals. Other popular works include *Symphony Psalms* (1978) and *Silent Cries* (1986).

How do I know Jiří Kylián?

In 2014, Kylián's work came to Taiwan for the third time at the National Theater Concert Hall Taipei. The Taiwan International Festival of Arts (TIFA) had a project called “The Jiří Kylián Project”. The four works that came to Taiwan were *Anonymous*, *Birth -Day*, *14 minutes and 20 seconds* and *Fortune Cookies*; a creative dimension span of twelve years. I remember 19 years old when I heard about the choreographer Jiří Kylián. At that time the internet was not so convenient like it is today. The dancer Meng Ke Wu, is the first Taiwanese dancer to have joined the Netherlands Dance Theater NDT1 with a life contract. The NDT channel on YouTube in the current internet generation has created considerable clickthrough rates.

“ It's all a variation of "time." Kylián said when he wrote about the work *No Name* I share my doubts, questions, insecurities, and beauty with me every day. To understand the values that make our lives more worth living, but who can understand what I said? Sometimes I don't

understand myself, as if there is another person hidden in my body. This is called "unnamed" The work is also "unknown" to the viewer, but its honesty and humanity may have a weak possibility to enable people who have never met each other to understand each other and lead us to an unyielding basis. And has not been regulated by the daily routine.”

(Dance reminder 2014)

The dance work "Birthday", which was created by Jiří Kylián as the director of the Dutch dance theatre, has the Chaplin-style humour and irony, and also conveys Kylián's discussion and reflection on life. "Birthday Banquet" (2011) attempts to combine stage images with dance moves. When the image was recorded, the Mozart music was played at twice the speed, the dancer danced at normal speed, and when the game was officially played, the music speed returned to normal and the dancer's movement became twice as fast. The speed of this fast action echoes the cinematic or cinematographic style of Chaplin, but the connection of the two different interfaces really interweaves the multiple images of the image/body/space.

"The Jiří Kylián Project in Taiwan"

“Ten years ago, the National Theater and Concert Hall (NTCH) had its inaugural launch of the Taiwan International Festival of Arts (TIFA) An effort was made to introduce Taiwanese audience global trends through performing arts as well as to showcase the local creative energy on an international stage. It is not only the direction toward which the NTCH is marching but also the goal it continues striving for. Inheriting such a strong driving force, we hope to take it up a notch! With leading tastes and artistic foresights, we aim to build TIFA as one of the most important and the brightest annual arts festivals, and making it the most anticipated arts event in early spring!”

(Yi-ru, TIFA – AN ART CARNIVAL FOR EVERYBODY!.n.d)

The year of 2019 marks the 11th year of TIFA. In celebration of such a new starting point, they re-define “TIFA” as an art festival full of “Talent” and “Inspiration” to be shared by all. By showcasing rich and exquisite art creations, it leads the audiences to see the global arts with “Foresight” and brings “Amazing” experiences to each of the participants! Eventually, TIFA, as an art festival, will successfully transform itself from a window of displaying art visions to a platform for the exchanges between artists and audience.

“ It’s a new concept, showing my different works in recent years in a performance in the evening. This time, I specially selected the dance works that I am more intimate and relatively close to the time for the Taiwan International Art Festival: *No Name, 14 minutes and 20 seconds*, *Birthday Banquet* and a new work *Fortune Cookies* co-produced with the National Chung Cheng Cultural Center. This work consists of five former Dutch dance theatre dancers who have worked with me many times in different career stages, as well as dancer/choreographer Michael Schumacher. I am very honored to be invited by the Taiwan International Arts Festival to bring the *Kylián Project* to Taiwan to continue to share my latest concerns and development with the Taiwanese audience. The *Kylián Project* strongly expresses my belief: "No matter how old or young can dance!"

(“The Jiří Kylián Project” 2014, p.1)

## **12. Jiří Kylián’s Self-interpretation for “Sleepless”**

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, referring to a product of collective history and forming an objective structure that is enduring and can be reinstated individually or in a society. Ballet like any dance always undergoes repeated repetitions to develop its own aesthetic system. In addition to the penetration of communication and cultural influence, habit/behaviour is such a thing, a product that needs to be adapted and repeated. However, it has no negative meanings and is neutral. It is a regulation that can be produced and restricted from the implementer, and it is the control of the group-shared code. Ballet, saying that it is a traditional or Western tradition, is too superficial, because any dance has a code, whether it is foreign or native, or a product of language or grammar. It is however a language of discipline that is supplemented for people to utilize.

Jiří Kylián has created more than one hundred works so far, and he has been discussing life in his works. Birth, death, love and desire, poverty or wealth, despite the era one was born in, these problems have always been around our lives. No matter how unfair our lives are, when we face these problems, we finally return to the "human" itself. On these topics, we all return to equality, but because everyone has different feelings and personality, or experiences of life, we have to look back at these "questions" or “problems”.

Trouble, Problem, Issue, question: If we can switch to another perspective, it may not be a problem to look at certain situations. It is a type of self-awareness and growth. Nevertheless,

it is not very simple to mentally transform such a process. Individuals have their own way of facing issues. If these "problems" are replaced by "problems", is it no longer so repulsive. Thus, these are the accumulations and growths that expand life experience.

“You can learn many things but you cannot learn experience. You have to live it. You have to live through it. And you should live as intensely as possible in order to have something to remember when you grow old. “

(Kylián 2014, p.14)

The below-quoted text is retrieved from Jiri Kylian's (2010) official website and presents the author's interpretation of his work. At the same time, one might notice that the text lacks representation of a dancer's point of view.

“Sleepless” is a tense, enigmatic work, but it is softened by the physical beauty of the dancers themselves, and by the perfection of Kylián's compositions and with music by Dirk Haubrich. *Sleepless* is a work for the young dancers of NDTII, and creating this work was equally challenging and rewarding (for them as well as for myself) Basically it comes down to the simple fact that teaching and learning are just the two sides of the same coin. The dialog between generations is always fascinating ..... It’s brings a certain feeling of “Maturity” to the young ones, and a feeling of “ Rejuvenation “ to the older ones...

It can be an interesting exercise, to trace and to document all the sleepless nights and hours, which we creators, interpreters, assistants and all involved have to endure in the course of making a new product, or also called “Work of Art” these hours and nights will probably accompany us at any time. While we are creating, someone will precisely measure the time in which we are awake or asleep. This exercise would probably not be very difficult to determine, to which degree a human being is conscious or subconscious, awake or asleep, or to which degree they are aware of their activities, or how accountable they are for their cautions.

The work of Lucio Fontana, the Argentinean artist, had an indirect influence on my creation of “Sleepless”-His “Incisions” which he inflicted on his paintings have created a “New Dimension” in the “Two Dimensional” world painting: His action of cutting through the canvas, thus declaring that the canvas is not necessarily the only thing to behold but that there

might be something more important lying behind or beyond it, was a revelation and an achievement which left a deep scar in my mind. Dance is an art form, which totally relies on our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual awareness. It is totally dependent of the three dimensions which are available to us (until now), and which determine the entire space in which we move, live and exist. Lucio Fontana took a knife, with which he destroyed the monochrome surface of his paintings. But his “Kill” gave his paintings a new life.... He gave the two dimensionality of painting a third dimension. He opened the secret door to the “Unknown”.... But this was just the beginning... We will look for other “Dimensions”, physical, emotional, philosophical or spiritual, as long as we possess the energy to do so ...

(Kylián 2010)

I will divide the study of Kylian’s work into four parts and will analyze “sleepless”

- a.) Motivation
- b.) The vocabulary of movements
- c.) The relationship between music and dance
- d.) Visual arts and dance

### **a.) Motivation**

“In the course of our life we realize that much of the movement we produce is not necessarily rational. And simultaneously we start understanding that our physical behaviour can be cultivated and organized as a procession of moving body shapes - the dance. The value of this activity is not determined by its lasting value, but much more by its ephemeral and fleeting appearance. Its moving shapes die at every moment they are created, they vanish like a poem written in ink which disappears as we write, and they live on only in the memory of the dancer’s body. It is always unique, and it can never be copied or repeated. Song and dance are two siblings, of which dance is perhaps the more personal one.”

(Kylián 2018)

“Artist is a descriptive term applied to a person who engages in an activity deemed to be an art. An artist also may be defined unofficially as "a person who expresses him- or herself through a medium". The word is also used in a qualitative sense of, a person creative in,

innovative in, or adept at, an artistic practice. Most often, the term describes those who create within a context of the fine arts or 'high culture', activities such as drawing, painting, sculpture, acting, dancing, writing, filmmaking, new media, photography, and music—people who use imagination, talent, or skill to create works that may be judged to have an aesthetic value.”

(Gelonch-Viladegut 2014)

If you want to be an "artist", I think that understanding of ones self is very important. All creators or performers must feel from the heart or feel from inside. The dance is refined and organized after a long time. When speech and music are insufficient, they are replaced by physical expressions, and choreographers use dance to beautify the human body. There are many types of dance such as: traditional dance, classical dance, and contemporary dance.... I personally feel that pure physical dance is more than just Tanz Theater. It is to provide each other with creative elements, mutual respect, and teamwork in order for completion. To be within the thinking mode for choreography, one needs to develop new ways of approaching various fields, to constantly absorb new knowledge, and to also incorporate logical thinking through various aspects of the creative process. Expand your sensation to other areas of your life. To consolidate the above-mentioned, researchers' believe in the development of neoclassical ballet. Dancers must first have a deep foundation of ballet technique and then combine the ideas of modern dance and creating a harmonious beauty under the constraints of the specifications.

In the works of Jiří Kylián, the dancers have been trained in classical ballet dance. In terms of emotions, they need to have some experience in life, which is why researchers have been quite interested. In the Asian culture, most people may think of “dancers” like an athlete, or that it is a job that doesn't require too much brainpower. But a professional dancer is a full-time dance performer who expresses ideas and beauty with body movements. Such professionals can also be called an “ Artist”. Dancers are required to receive different training according to different dance genres. With age and injury, many dancers have a shorter career compared to the average industry worker. They not only have a understanding of their own bodies, but they also require day-to-day training for any action. Professional dancers not only have their own opinions but also are very open-minded in accepting the opinions of others. It is a rather difficult job.

## **b.) The vocabulary of concepts and actions**

When we sleep the lengths of our dreams may make us believe that they last for hours, however they differ in length ranging from just a few seconds to up to 30 minutes. Dreams are regarded to be the passage way and connection to our inner thoughts and most often result in being surreal, vivid and sometimes incomprehensible. Dreams come in all shapes and forms depicting various topics where the dreamer has no control over the content. Every dream is individual leaving an abstract and sometimes emotional afterthought for the dreamer. However what triggers dreams? Why do we dream? Questions that leave us curious and have caught peoples interest for thousands of years. Despite the fact that a dream is beyond reason, it can nevertheless trigger ones imagination and become a source of inspiration for creative development.

Sleep is a very important thing for the human body, but sleep and sleep quality is another issue. Researchers think that dreams seem to enter another world, and deep sleep and shallow sleep are different. People in the period of high pressure, anxiety, nervousness, depression or creation will have such a difficult state of sleep. Everyone has different pressures in life, but human emotions are roughly divided into joy, anger, sadness and joy. If you want to subdivide emotions, I think it is very difficult to analyze what is related to the background of growth, family education and social environment.

“In the process of creation, through the action, ideas, thinking, skills, characteristics, emotions, stories, colours and simple and complex words, the curriculum that is integrated into reality and illusion, and the source of dance training is even broader. Regular constraints become classified courses with logical and repeated thinking, and layered dialectics try to move learners towards the direction of having free-moving bodies; thus a complex body vocabulary can produce a framework that covers self-anesthesia”

(Shujing 2008, p.1)

I believe that the relationship between dancers and choreographers is indispensable. If a "dancer" and "dance piece" is like a form, the choreographer is like the soul of the form. In the process of creation, in order to achieve mutual consensus and mutual trust, the choreographer needs to give the dancers their own ideas and restrictions, and the dancers use

their own understanding to express the choreographer's ideas. Unless choreographers have to continually raise questions, I believe that communicating with each other increases their trust and understanding of the dance. What I find extraordinary is the development and choice of Jiří Kylián and dancers in the action vocabulary. There is also a picture that he constructed on the stage. It is abstract, but it can give the audience space to put their own experience into the dance.

### **c.) The relationship between music and dance**

“There’s no sound without movement and no movement without sound. We're constantly involved in some kind of movement and music all our lives. Even if we are not consciously active, the Earth is dashing through the universe at incredible speed, so there's always movement and there's always sound.”

(Kylián 2014, p.97)

“Music broadly refers to any art composed of sound. The word "Music" in English is derived from the ancient Greek word μουσική (mousike), which means the art of the goddess muse. The Chinese word for music, Xu Shen's "Said Wen Jie Zi "is interpreted as "sound, sound also. Born in the heart, there are knots outside, that is the sound.” The difference between music and sound is that music needs to be imagined through the human heart. And creation. Music can be divided into three processes: creation, performance, and listening. In different cultures and societies, there are different understandings of the process and importance of music. People do not distinguish between the composer, the performer, and the listener.”

(Music 2019)

In the perception of the human body, the auditory has the ability to recognize, for example, measuring the distance and hearing the emotions when you talk with someone. One can feel various emotions when listening to different music such as joy, sadness, generosity, excitement, etc. For me as a dancer, when hearing, I receive a different message; it will directly affect a person's emotions and feelings. Even if the same genre and instrument are not the same speed or melody, it creates a different atmosphere. Music can also create a sense of space and researchers think that music is like a storyteller of dance performance, even though the two are separated. When music and dance are carried out at the same time, there is no such thing as a high or low score, however this can also be used as a tool for choreographers

during their creation.

“ I like to call dance and voice the ‘naked’ arts because we don’t need any extensions to our body to perform (unlike musicians who need instruments or painters brushes). I think they complement each other greatly because they are the most personal art forms. We thought it would be a good idea to put them together and create awareness and sensitivity between them.“

(Kylián 2014, p.60)

In Kylián's work, we can find his music as the atmosphere of the work, but also because he has a fairly strong understanding of the music as well as its foundation. In the process of creation, most of the dances began with music as the starting point. I’m interested in how everyone has a different understanding of everything or objects. The details of each person heard in the same song are different, or because of the imagination, picture, and emotion that are brought to us. How did he guide the dancers? Is it to first retain the dancer's personal freedom and then explore the dancer's feelings? Or did he give his dancers his ideas and concepts first? I will study and discuss those questions in the interview with the dancer Meng Ke Wu.

“What’s funny is that dancers are always aware of music but musicians aren’t always aware of dance. Why is that? Well, if you want to see something you need to turn your head, but if you want to hear something you don’t need to turn anywhere. The sound it’s always around you. “

(Jiří Kylián 2014, p.98)

#### **d.) Visual arts and dance**

“New technology and multidisciplinary collaborations seem to give rise to debates about where we stand as animators and where we stand as dancers.”

(Marlyn Spaaij<sup>4</sup> in Kylián 2014, p.155)

Visual Art refers to works that are essentially focused on visual purposes, such as drawing,

---

4. Marlyn Spaaij was the animation film student in 2014 she was participate Kylián’s reseach project in Rotterdam

painting, photography, printmaking, lighting, film or animation. Dance is also considered in visual art. In this chapter, the discussion is mainly based on the visuals on the stage. On the stage in Jiří Kylián's works, he has his own style for the selection of pictures and colours. In the sleepless stage, the main focus is grey, and the choice of the light is mainly white and yellow. Grey the middle colour, so there will be no conflict with the warm and cool colours. When the additional colour is the same as the central colour theme it appears clean, bright and precise. Black however looks solemn but dull; the choice of clothing is matched with warm colours: green, orange, red, etc. Grey is to reduce the brightness of those colours and not to appear too eye-catching.

Most choreographers must have imaginations and pictures of the dance in the brain before the creation. It is like a blurred map; it is vague and yet so clear and the description may be contradictory. But like a jigsaw puzzle, you must have patience to try. Most choreographers are not 100% satisfied with their own dance pieces when finally showing their picture and vision on the stage. That sense of accomplishment needs to be experienced for each person to understand.

A choreographers final work will not be complete if it wasn't for the, group of creative teams who understand the ideas, such as the stage design, fashion design, lighting design and art consultants. I think these artists and choreographers have created the vision of the whole dance. The concepts come from choreographers, and work a creative team is there to appreciate and understand your personal taste, while giving inspiration along the course of the process. It is not easy for you to understand the possibilities in different fields. The above mentioned belong to my personal analysis of the work by Jiří Kylián.

### **13. Dancer Meng Ke Wu**

The current NDT 1 member Meng Ke Wu, joined NDT 2 at the age of 22 (more than the maximum age of 1 year) in 2010, and in 2013 was accepted as a member of NDT 1.

Meng Ke Wu did not graduate from the dance department of the Taipei University of the Arts, instead she bravely packed her bags to travel to Europe to participate in auditions. Meng Ke Wu, first joined the Munich Theater Dance Company in Germany and then joined NDT where she has now danced for seven years. As a youthful dancer she has she has gone all the

way and has made many young dancers admire her achievements. However for her, what is youth? What kind of person does she want to be?

Youth is a curious thing. Meng Ke Wu says for example, how the choreographer and artistic director of the current Israeli Batsheva Dance Company, Ohad Naharin is 60 years old, but he seems 40 years old. The Swedish choreographer Mats Ek is also 70 years old and still shining on the stage. "See them, I think, wow, this is what I want!" Meng Ke Wu was excited. "I hope that this kind of youth is always there, not an appearance, but an attitude."

In her own case, the name "Meng Ke Wu" is often associated with the term "Nederland Dans Theater (NDT) "Lifetime Contract". However, she specifically stated that this is only the protection given to the workers in the Netherlands. After the employer and the employee have signed a short-term contract for three years, if they want to continue to employ, they must provide a lifelong contract and must not arbitrarily dismiss. As a profession, the dancers also enjoy similar treatment. After four years of work, the fifth year can get an indefinite contract. "This mechanism is a good guarantee for dancers, but I don't think it means being comfortable."

Meng Ke Wu said, "I continue to stay at NDT because there is still a lot of things to absorb to experience. This is why I want to stay." She does not let herself feel comfortable with the status, but is still hungry for all kinds of learning.

From the heart, I like what you want to do. "I wanted to dance from when I was in kindergarten." The little Meng Ke Wu started to dance because of the kindergarten, but her parents initially opposed it. When recalling how the national primary and the middle schools did not teach dance, Meng Ke Wu said with a smile: "I almost found trouble every day!" Until the second day, Dad said: "If you really want to dance then you have to find yourself."

Meng Ke Wu was released from the ban to dance and was excited to enter the dance society to learn. Since then, her dance career developed from her own planning. She explained "I applied for the Wen Hua High School Dance Class, and then found that the Taipei University of the Arts had a dance department with professional training for seven years, so I took a taxi from Taichung to take the exam and enrol." However, she did not finish her studies with the dance department of the Taipei National Art University and instead applied for the school

exchange program scholarship to travel to Europe for dance auditions. As a result, she joined the Munich Theater Dance Company in Germany and then officially joined NDT after a lapse of one year.

Meng Ke Wu revealed that she knew that her father had quietly done his homework and tried to understand what modern dance is, and the background and content of the Nederland Dance Theater. Along the way, she was very grateful to her parents for their trust in her, and her father's words, to develop her later active, independent attitude and personality.

Grasping the dream step by step the reason why she wanted to enter NDT is that Meng Ke Wu said that it was unbelievable to see the film in the history class of the university's western dance history. "There was such a dance company!" Later, she found that NDT 2 was 17 to 21 years old, and she was 21 years old. She felt anxious and must leave immediately.

How to do it? Where is the money? How come? When a bunch of problems popped up in her heart, Meng Ke Wu looked for scholarships, researched opportunities, and tried to find out more about the way of the country. Step by step, she began her career as a professional dancer in Europe.

From her own experience, Meng Ke Wu believes that "I want to do what you want to do from the heart." There are many Taiwanese dancers in Europe, but everyone is very different, and they have their own unique features.

They all really like dance, "because I like it, I am hungry for it." Meng Ke Wu said that the dancers are very tough. They have to face each other's body and mind every morning to get up. Every day, the body is different and they have to adjust every day. Only when I really like it, I will go deeper into what I want and always think: "I want more." Meng Ke Wu mentioned that NDT holds a two-week Summer Intensive to open the door for dancers from all over the world to apply. The young dancer applied, she served as the impromptu teacher. Meng Ke Wu said: "The dancers made me feel amazing. They are desiring to gain fresh knowledge. When I give them some text, the dancers in the studio can make a big ripple from the direction. They are always asking questions to understand more details and physically they are very good dancers". This experience in turn makes her want to continue, you must be well prepared to meet the challenges. It is also because this training camp has prompted her to have the idea of

holding a "physical micro-travel" project in Taiwan. I hope that Taiwanese dancers will have more exciting exchanges learning and appreciating.

Back to the discussion about Meng Ke Wu's experience in NDT, she describes herself as working in NDT with an attitude of observation and appreciation. Meng Ke Wu said that every dancer in NDT is very unique and has different strengths. "By enjoying and chatting, it is very useful for me to understand how they understand their limbs" Meng Ke Wu said.

Each dancer is unique and is one of the reasons why Meng Ke Wu believes that NDT can continue to attract many guest choreographers. Meng Ke Wu explained that in addition to the long history and solid foundation of NDT, is very international, maintaining an open attitude and working style, including the mode of interaction between people, and also understanding and inclusive of different cultural backgrounds. Since the strengths of each dancer in NDT are different, there are a lot of possibilities for choreographers to work with. Meng Ke Wu said: "NDT has never interfered with the way the guest choreographers work. They have a lot of creative space." Special dancers and freelance choreographers form this international dance group that continues to be a virtuous circle. Meng Ke Wu specifically mentioned that the artistic director of the Peeping Tom dance company, Gabriela Carrizo, had a great influence on her as a guest choreographer at NDT.

Meng Ke Wu said: "When Carrizo opened the other side of me and made me feel like a performer." Carrizo told the dancers: "Never say no to yourself." Carrizo gave the dancers the degree of freedom it's almost to the limit. "When freedom is too big, it is easy to get lost." Meng Ke Wu said that she always kept asking and talking to herself, and often had a wall-breaking period, fearing that she had nothing to try. The mood has always risen and fallen, and she walked away before she lost. However, the experience of the cooperation with Carrizo allowed Meng Ke Wu to establish herself and could be a performer with self-confidence. She found that "beauty is not a disguise, but a self." In addition, NDT is not afraid to train dancers, for example, discovering that Meng Ke Wu has education. And sharing personality traits, recently gave her more opportunities in this regard. Meng Ke Wu also believes that by sharing, she knows herself better. She does not reject the future path of education and sharing.

## a.) Interview for Meng Ke Wu

On 4th September 2019, I got a chance to conduct this interview with Meng Ke. This was the second time I met Meng Ke as the first time was in Europe in 2015. I believe she is one of the dance stars of our generation in the Asian dance industry.

At first I thought her personality would be very distant to the strangers, but when we first met, she gave a sense of intimacy. After several discussions, I found that Meng Ke had skipped this multi-classic work, and has worked with so many well-known choreographers, and yet she still has a curious heart, which is very precious for me.

This is Meng Ke's 10th year in NDT. This interview is mainly about: Her experiences in NDT as a professional dancer, as well as the process of interpreting and rehearsing with Jiří Kylián's work and her view on the importance and significance of recording dancers.

At the beginning of the interview I explained to Meng Ke the motivation and purpose of my research. I also knew that Jiří Kylián and NDT had reached an agreement not to perform any of his works in the past five years. In 2010, Meng Ke performed with NDTII. *Dog and God*, and in 2012 she performed *Sleepless* from Jiří Kylián. 2020 will be the 60th anniversary of NDT. She will participate in Jiří Kylián's other three works and is very excited to be able to dance his work again.

The following is the content of the interview:

**Q:** In a choreographer's creative process, the dancers influence is no less than the choreographer. However most dance books record the choreographer's knowledge and concept. I think the dancer needs to be recorded as well.

**Meng Ke Wu:** This is certain. I think dancers are also the creators. It is impossible for each creation to have only creators and interpreters, especially when co-creating. Now in modern times, there are many different choreographers, each working distinctively from each other. For example, if we talk about history, Western history goes from classical ballet to post-modern dance in the United States and then to contemporary dance. If ballet has a structure in which the choreographer is slowly breaking, then how can the choreographer also break the

ballet frame from the dancer's body? The dancers nevertheless reply on a choreographer's leadership with the aid of a concept, music or storyline. If we go back to postmodern dance for example Martha Graham Technique etc, the modern dance pioneers of this time created a method to express the body's style, which is also now interpreted by the dancers. However in our generation, especially the many choreographers who I work with now basically give you a concept or theme that is consequently used for the dancers to experiment with. Therefore creative elements are developed by the dancers; thus becoming the expressive interpreters of the whole story.

**Q:** So do you think recording a dancers creative process and experiences an important theme?

**Meng Ke Wu:** Very important what do you think?

**Q:** No one is currently recording the feelings of the original dancers. If we take Nijinsky or Laban Dance notations, or the contemporary choreographer Ohad Naharin from his movie "Mr.gaga", it's obvious that the choreographer is the soul and mind of the whole dance piece. However I still think there is limited record about the dancers.

**Meng Ke Wu:** He gave the concept and he also made a choice. The choreographer is the one who can have the right to choose. He can decide whether this movement or concept should be presented on the stage.

**Q:** Yes, but from the history of dance to the present era, we don't actually have any documented record from the original dancers.

**Meng Ke Wu:** There are still some recordings, but basically these recordings are from the so-called ballet stars where all attention is focused on them. The dancers in NDT may not be in this so-called class of stardom, however we are important for the company since the company has a brand in the market.

**Q:** In the dancer's position, do you think the contemporary dancer needs to be recorded?

**Meng Ke Wu:** I think it may depend on the motivation of why people would like to record a dancers perception of a creative process. In this whole industry, if you are a star it is likely to

be recorded. For those particular dance stars they become an image to their fans, so people will focus on them as a body. Using NDT Dance Company as a metaphor; why is the NDT famous because of its company's brand? The company has a lot of good dancers who add, different colours to the company, however the audience's focus is still on the whole big picture - "the brand".

**Q:** So if you use your NDT experience, do you think dancers are not being used for recording? Since the public just follow dance stars of classical ballet like Sylvie Guillem or other famous ballet stars, they are recorded because they represent the classical ballet dancer of today, even when the production they are performing in is already over 50 or 100 years old. However if we take a brand new dance style today, it will be a very different case.

**Meng Ke Wu:** Yes, there are several famous dance stars in Europe and due to their stardom; they will be recorded with any of the choreographers they work with. They can therefore do what they like and be recorded during the process, however unfortunately this is rarely happening in contemporary dance.

**Q:** In my reading of Jiří Kylián's website, as long as his work is created with the dancers, he will write about co-creation. How many dance pieces have you worked on with him? Was he in the studio with dancers?

**Meng Ke Wu:** I was in the performance of *Sleepless* and *God and Dog*. We are not the original dancers, so we only rehearsed with him to re-stage the two works rather than developing a new dance piece with him.

**Q:** How did you learn the piece at that time?

**Meng Ke Wu:** We first learned from the film and then rehearsed the work, until the first week before the performance. He went to the rehearsal and worked with us to give us the texture of the action. Basically a few traditional choreographers of NDT gave elements or movements during the rehearsal process and the dancers continued to create in the given style. The choreographers who really gave the dancers space while additionally creating, directing and giving a whole script was in *Peeping Tom* and *Alan Lucien*.

**Q:** So you didn't develop any new creations with Jiří Kylián?

**Meng Ke Wu:** At that time, when I first entered the company, he was no longer in NDT, but we will perform his three pieces on the 20th anniversary during next year.

**Q:** I think that William Forsythe's work also presents similar attributes, and yet their works are very different.

**Meng Ke Wu:** There is a big gap between the both; Jiří Kylián's work is based on the aesthetics even though there are a lot of twists, and William Forsythe's work basically is improvised.

**Q:** William Forsythe's work is all about improvisation?

**Meng Ke Wu:** Of course not all of it, but the dancers who want to work with William Forsythe must improvise in addition to having strong classical ballet ability, but this is built in his own Forsythe Company. With his choreographies for other companies like the Paris Opera, he still changes and creates based on the movements of classical ballet dance.

**Q:** Can you describe the whole process of working with Jiří Kylián in the last week? Did he go directly to the rehearsal on the first day?

**Meng Ke Wu:** I remember that he didn't say anything. We started to present his work. After our presentation, he would slowly analyze every texture with how the feeling should be.

**Q:** How much percent you can be yourself in Kylián's work? Does he want you to be like the original dancer?

**Meng Ke Wu:** No, in his work you can be 100% yourself, but you need to know the style. He will still adjust the texture such as how he thinks a certain section should be interpreted.

**Q:** Then he will develop your personal characteristics during the adjustment process?

**Meng Ke Wu:** There is not much time to develop, and there is no need for that because his work is already a mature work, then he only needs to make some minor adjustments to the

feeling he wants.

**Q:** As a dancer of a re-staged piece, do you think it would be helpful to have the opportunity to learn and know the working process of the rehearsal from the original dancer?

**Meng Ke Wu:** We rarely have the original dancers to teach us the dance, but in the rehearsal process of Kylián's work, there are indeed the original dancers to teach us, but he does not necessarily dance your position.

**Q:** Suppose you can ask how the original dancer interpreted a certain dance piece, would you ask for it?

**Meng Ke Wu:** I wouldn't ask for this now. I don't need the original dancer to teach me the movement. Maybe when I was young, I would have found this helpful. However, I know my body now and I have a good understanding of the style with this company. Therefore I don't want people tell me all the details, which style is needed or how I should interpret the movement. It's not going to be as interesting as it was for the original dancer. I am now teaching the second cast as an original dancer. This time I usually say, you can do this idea and quality but just be yourself. If you want a little change, Do it!

**Q:** I shared my own process in WC Dance Company and the choreographer said that I am not like the original dancer.

**Meng Ke Wu:** This is a very common occurrence in NDT, although they have already done casting. People who are taller or shorter will be casted and they will learn the same character, but in the end everyone is different. For example, the quality of a dancer is different; one person's movement may be more fluid in comparison to another person's sharp quality, however the choreographer is accepting to both styles and interpretations. However, he still will find a balance between the two dancers and their execution of the action. This task can add a lot of substance to a dancers work offering their body more possibilities for developing a character. I think this is a very challenging to learn another person's role. One can loose their personal characteristics when learning the essence and quality of another dancer. This is the most interesting and important place for me. Even if you teach another dancer, you don't want them dance like you because it will be like creating a robot and the performance will be

very boring.

**Q:** If we take the NDTIII as an example, would it be helpful if young dancers are in the process of exploring their own movement quality?

**Meng Ke Wu:** Correct. During the process of exploring oneself, it is really necessary if there is someone who can guide you with how to do it. The body is very easy to shape but it is difficult to learn the details that lie beneath the appearance of the movement, especially if one is learning the choreography from a film. Even if there is another person to teach you, there is no way to really learn all the details. Why should people work in this way? "Why" Why is it the dancers choice in that moment to execute the movement fluid or sustained? The young dancer lacks the experience compared to a matured dancer, therefore it would be very beneficial if the original dancer can share and help find the "Why" for the young dancers. He lets young dancers have many different tools to let them understand why the original dancers will make such decisions. When you become a mature dancer, you are able to become the one who makes the choice. With these tools and textures and methods, you can slowly shape yourself like clay.

**Q:** Earlier we said that young dancers are going to try more and more until they find their own personal characteristics.

**Meng Ke Wu:** I think it's very tricky to constantly try. It's very bad to try without any goal. You don't know who you are if you try too much, so you need to know your own style before you can open your mind towards a specific direction. It certainly doesn't hurt to try.

**Q:** Just like eating, you can't eat everything you must choose something is good for your health.

**Meng Ke Wu:** You can try it first, but you have to talk to yourself during the process of trying. You will discover that some styles are not good and difficult to progress with. For example, the shape of my body is relatively slender, so my centre of gravity is rather high. Therefore the weight of my movements is lighter. In the past few years I have been observing other very talented dancers, and I will always ask myself; how do they execute this certain movement? However when it comes to this person, their body shape is not the same as mine,

their weight is inherently low so I will observe how they use their muscles. Another example regarding my personal movement quality is when my hand can be reached very casually. Due to my slight frame, it is easy to reach a high position therefore I forget the process. If I slow down the process during the execution of the movement and after several years of accumulation and practice of slowing down, I have found that I must use more muscles. I will reinforce the original speed and I will deliberately use my muscles. If I take *batterie* from a ballet class, I know my own weakness for this step therefore in the past few years; I have learnt to make the movements very sticky and analysis the details. This approach helps create tension while doing the exercises, but each person's body is not the same, you have to find your own way. Exploration is a process that you must experience as a young dancer in order to develop into a mature dancer; otherwise you will become a dancing robot. This is a very important process for dancers to work on, because a young dancer has the ability to absorb new information. Dancers not only need to be versatile but they also need to have their own unique quality. There are so many highly skilled dancers out there in the current dance industry therefore one needs to stand out from the other.

**Q:** When you are dancing, how do you guide your own state?

**Meng Ke Wu:** It depends on the kind of work. NDT is not a one-person's dance company. Batsheva Dance Company for example portrays the style of the choreographer Ohad Naharin. In NDT we have to dance a lot of different styles where some are relaxed and easy on the body, but some works require your body to reach a state of emotion or the character's needs. In this case, I will make myself very focused before the performance. I try to settle myself down, however this temperament is also related to my culture. Not everyone is like this and all my colleagues will approach the same situation differently. Some people may take it easy with singing and laughing until they are on the stage. I think there is no such thing as good or bad with the mentality of this because even if they are prepared to enter the stage with a pleasant attitude, they can still complete a high-quality performance.

**Q:** In my experience, I also choose to let myself calm down first, but I have also encountered a few Spanish dancers who during their preparation are in a pleasant mood, and may not even understand why I am so quiet. I feel that any particular way is a good way, as long as you don't interfere with the other performer's preparations.

**Meng Ke Wu:** I also have a pleasant mood during preparing for my stage entrance, however if there is a work that doesn't need to be so exact, I will allow myself to adjust to a more relaxed state, but most of the time I choose to stay calm and focused.

**Q:** We just mentioned why we want to record the dancer's feelings, not just the execution of the action, since each emotion conveys different levels of expression. If we use the emotion of "crying" as an example, he has to be very multi-faceted. The way to express may be for us to focus on family, love, friendship and oneself, but these can have many different levels of feeling. If a choreographer chooses for the dancer to express love, what happens if the person has never been in love? However, if I have the record of the original dancer, I can try and reach their point of view or use the similar experience in my life to express it. We just mentioned before how in our generation, the choreographers and dancers co-create. In fact, the dancers give quite a lot of elements; therefore if we can additionally record the whole process of the creation the work can be relatively complete.

**Meng Ke Wu:** The dancer's contribution and giving are sometimes more than the choreographer. Choreographers must first have their own unique taste. The so-called unique taste is in-fact their artistic taste; how they perceive the music, stage, lighting and the entire visual effect and the dancer is also included as one of his elements. You have to imagine that you want to put these components on the stage, and it is all decided by the choreographer's artistic choice. Nevertheless not all aspects of the creation belong to the choreographer especially during the middle of the working process. Some choreographers organize the elements belonging to this work and present them on the stage. This work can also become a unique work.

**Q:** Just like a fashion designer, after he draws a design, he must personally choose the material and colour of the fabric before he can present his work. This is somewhat similar to the process of choreography. But we the public are able to know about the origin of the fabric and the factory came from, so this can be used as a reference for young fashion designers and academics. The purpose of recording the dancers is to document the dances of our time. For many years later the document can help for re-staging or the people who read this work will be more complete.

**Meng Ke Wu:** Actually, a dancer is like an artist. I think to document the dancer is very

important. I think that in addition to helping young dancers, they can record the whole process of the artist's subtle growth. I think that a few people have to keep a questioning attitude about everything, and he can look back at the record process to make himself grow faster or find the direction he needs to develop.

**Q:** On Kylián's website, he has a detailed document of his work, whether it is the location, the time of the premiere, the name of the original dancer and his creative philosophy.

Unfortunately there is no information about the dancers. Recording with him during the rehearsal period would make his dance pieces a more thorough and complete work.

**Meng Ke Wu:** But there is another problem. Not all the dancers in this work have enough ability to be documented, but this can be a good exercise. I think it is very important that the so-called "document" will help the performers. Because this will force the performer to think, you are not just a tool to pass, you will shift into a position to understand the importance of the dancer. Dancers are used to working in an environment that is lead by instructions. The teacher or choreographer tells them what to do, and they perform. When I was teaching dance lessons for body travel experience, this workshop comprised of half dancers and the other half actors. There were many times when we wanted to share each other's ideas and when I asked questions, the actors answered most of the answers. This has a lot to do with the education of our dance system. The education of the whole dance system comes from the teacher's instruction or concept, and the students in result will perform it or do it. Therefore, it is not easy for the current dancer to start thinking for themselves whether it's during a rehearsal process or regarding their professional career. Not all of the dancers are like this as there are still some who have the ability to think for themselves. However I think your idea to record dancers is very positive and a good direction to follow. If someone has access to the record, it may help the group of dancers to realize the importance of thinking and feeling. This process may even help the choreographer achieve his vision for the work.

**Q:** I feel that sometimes when I read the program, it is a little unfair when only the choreographer's name is written down. There are some choreographers who still write co-creation. The concepts are after all starting from the choreographer, but if it is a co-creation in the creative part, then it should be written on the program list.

**Meng Ke Wu:** There are quite a few artists who write this way, but this situation depends on

the type of company. There are still many small independent contemporary dance groups who have their own style, so there is no need to write co-creation. .

**Q:** What is the biggest challenge for you in Kylián's work?

**Meng Ke Wu:** The time I worked with him was too short. It may not be so accurate. You may have to interview me again in March. For me, the biggest challenge in his work is that he can't lose humanity in beauty. The so-called beauty is very important because his works are more of a physical dance, but the special aspect of his works additional to the beauty is that you can also see the personality of each dancer, not just a set of combinations to show skills, but also to retain the original humanity. It is difficult to find a balance. His work is now sold to ballet companies all over the world, but we will find that most of the classical ballet dancers are performing his movements and when they are presenting his work I find the original humanity of his work gone. The dancers are still very beautiful, so the hardest part for me is to find the balance between these elements. Kylián's is also very sensitive and passionate with music, therefore a lot of his work is based around this art.

Meng Ke thinks about how a performer attracts her personally. It is actually the "imperfection" of the performer themselves. It is because of those "imperfections" that can attract the audience. The more perfect the person, the less attractive they become. It is the skills and physical vocabulary that seems to be taken for granted.

## **b.) Experience after the interview**

Before interviewing Meng Ke, I was actually thinking about my questions. After the interview, I discovered how our thoughts were not much different. Meng Ke gave more direct opinions. Documenting dancers can be divided into two different ways. The purpose of recording is not only filming and taking photos, but also writing down the process in words or through interviews.

1. Recording the process of a rehearsal shifts the focus on how the dancer develops their movements under the instructions from the choreographer, hence allowing the scholar to read and contribute to the subsequent dance. It can be more thorough and complete and additionally becomes a saved work.

2. The documents become a tool for young dancers searching for their own personal characteristics. Recording a dancers "choice" and "feeling" as a reference may be of benefit to the dancer who needs to learn a finished dance piece.

For mature dancers, the second way may not be as beneficial since they are experienced enough to understand how to use their own body and how a certain kind of style or quality can be further developed or worked on.

“It’s an interesting way of looking at how the human body can be abstracted, or how your feelings can be enhanced through technological means. It isn’t just about the obvious visual dimension; the point of view of the camera can have a decisive influence on the aesthetic and psychological resolution of the artistic product. “

(Kylián 2014, p.165)

The relationship between dancers and choreographers are mutual. We often say that if you want to be a choreographer, you must have talent. But I think that dancers can also be called artists and must be talented in many different facets since they need to be perceptive, have a certain style and understanding of what is expected from the choreographer. The contribution of art to this society is not simply to document the aesthetic perceptions belonging to this generation, but more importantly, to enable future generations to understand the changes whether it is aesthetics, life, politics, etc... Therefore I believe that having a complete record of a dance artwork is not only a current reflection on us during a specific creative process, but it also offers a potential reference for future dancers to understand the evolution of art.

## 14. Conclusion

“You can learn many things but you cannot learn experience. You have to live it. You have to live through it. And you should live as intensely as possible in order to have something to remember when you grow old. “

(Kylián 2014, p.14)

There is a dimension in human activities which you cannot describe you have to experience it. As a conclusion there are some features/properties/central points, which so far I found out characterize the experiences of dancers and why we should document a dancers activities and role in the creation of choreographies. In the process of creating, the dancer is not only a translator between creator (choreographers) and viewers (the audience), they also have the ability to self-examine and challenge. Based on my experience as a professional dancer and during the interview of Meng Ke wu, we can find that in most of the works of our time, in the process of creating dancers and choreographers affect each other very significantly. Dancers do not only need to understand the concepts or elements that the choreographer wants to express but also must have a certain level of understanding of their own body before they can collaborate with the choreographer.

For example, Nijinsky's dancers were more in the role of performing a choreographer's ideas. Whether, his dance or score books tell us about Nijinsky's concept and design becoming a source of understanding and deciphering his dances. We can only try to figure out the dancer's experience through images. Generally speaking, if dancers learn the choreographers knowledge from a film on their own, their interpretations will still not be accurate enough. There may be a lot of ambiguity.

Following my research chapter number 13 interview for Meng Ke Wu p.49

“This task can add a lot of substance to a dancers work offering their body more possibilities for developing a character. I think this is a very challenging to learn another persons role. One dancers can loose their personal characteristics when learning the essence and quality of another dancer. This is the most interesting and important place for me. Even if you teach another dancer, you don't want them to dance like you because it will be like creating a robot and the performance will be very boring.”

The document is essential for any artwork. Dancers can keep the work intact through the record of others. It can also bring full reference and in-depth understanding to dancers who will re-stage in the future. In interview of Meng Ke Wu p.50 and p.53 she said: “Exploration is a process that you must experience as a young dancer in order to develop into a mature dancer, otherwise you will become a dancing robot. This is a very important process for dancers to work on, because a young dancer has the ability to absorb new information. Dancers not only need to be versatile but they also need to have their own unique quality. There are so many highly skilled dancers out there in the current dance industry therefore one needs to stand out from the other. Therefore, it is not easy for the current dancer to start thinking for themselves, whether it's during a rehearsal process or regarding their professional career. However not all dancers are like this, as there are still some who have the ability to think for themselves. Nevertheless, I think your idea to record dancers is very positive and a good direction to follow. If someone has access to the record, it may help the group of dancers to realize the importance of thinking and feeling. This process may even help the choreographer achieve his vision for the work.”

I think that the dancers of our time must be capable of self-control, self-discipline, self-examination, and self-exploration, and maintain a certain degree of openness in their own thought. Recording does not necessarily rely on the others. Self-recording also a method can bring great benefits to a dancer in the process of personal art development or self-research. The dancer can speak about the different layers of experiences, how she or he relates to the content of the tasks, be it motoric (movement vocabulary/steps), its emotional/affective/perceptual relations and intellectual inputs. By that dancers experience the piece through an active participation in the creative process. Having these dancers activities documented could possibly bring a shift to what so far is defined as ‘the work’ and ‘the choreography’ which is so far – how this work tries to point out – connected unilaterally to the choreographers.

## Bibliography:

Chinese books:

Lin Boxian (2013) *An Exploration of Dance Aesthetics*. National Taiwan University of the Arts, Department of Process Design

Wu, Manli. (2010, April.). *Dance appreciation*. Taipei City: Wunan.

Yang Shujing(2008).*Dance creation and physical use Art Journal,Department of Dance*. Tainan University of Science and Technology

Zhou Jiaoxian (2010). *Talking about dance creation comes from life Silk Road*. Art No. 16th. Taiwan Construction Committee.

English books:

Garafola, L. (2010). *Diaghilevs Ballets russes*. New York, NY: Da Capo Press.

Kylián Jiří, & Lampert, F. (2014). One of a kind. The Kylián research project. Rotterdam: Codarts Rotterdam.

Kylián,J.(2014) *The Jiří Kylián Project* .Taiwan: Taiwan National Performing Arts Center.

Nijinska, B., Nijinska, I., Rawlinson, J., & Kisselgoff, A. (1992). *Bronislava Nijinska--early memoirs*. Durham: Duke University Press.

## Network information

Bleiberg, L. (2019, March 17.) Los Angeles Times Retrieved from

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-batsheva-venezuela-review-20190317-story.html>

Breuss, R. (2019, December 5). Bruckneruni:Master Programme Contemporary Stage Dance.

Retrieved from [https://www.bruckneruni.at/en/study-programmes/bachelor-and-master-](https://www.bruckneruni.at/en/study-programmes/bachelor-and-master-programmes/dance/master-programme-contemporary-stage)

[programmes/dance/master-programme-contemporary-stage](https://www.bruckneruni.at/en/study-programmes/bachelor-and-master-programmes/dance/master-programme-contemporary-stage)

[dance/?fbclid=IwAR0icfEFSII6Qw4hkm7fnhCTxvsplovRpLxocIKPQ7VCFD0cD3xhau0tCmA](https://www.bruckneruni.at/en/study-programmes/bachelor-and-master-programmes/dance/master-programme-contemporary-stage)

Kylián, J.(2010, April).Sleepless. Retrieved from

<http://www.jirikylian.com/creations/theatre/sleepless/info/>

Kylián, J. (2018, March). About dance, choreography and performance. Retrieved from

[http://www.jirikylian.com/visuals/text/about\\_dance\\_choreography\\_and\\_performance/](http://www.jirikylian.com/visuals/text/about_dance_choreography_and_performance/).

Lowen, S. (2018, April 16). A breathtaking reconstruction of The Afternoon of a Faun. Retrieved from <https://www.asianage.com/life/art/170418/a-breathtaking-reconstruction-of-the-afternoon-of-a-faun.html>.

Museum, A., & Digital Media. (2014, December 2). The 20th-Century Ballet Revolution. Retrieved from <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/0-9/20th-century-ballet-revolution/>.

Music. (2019, October 23). Retrieved from <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music>.

Performing art review Nr. 254. (2014, February) *Dance reminder*. Retrieved from <http://par.npac-ntch.org/tw/article/doc-舞的提醒-dp9wfrm33v>.

Siegel, A., & Warren, J. (2014, May 31). Jiří Kylián and the Naked Art of Dance. Retrieved from <https://psychologytomorrowmagazine.com/jiri-kylian-choreography-life-death/>.

Viladegut, A. (2017, January 16.). "What is an artist?" - Gelonch-Viladegut Collection. Retrieved from <http://www.gelonchviladegut.com/en/english-gelonch-viladegut-a-what-is-an-artist/>.

Yi-ru,L. TIFA – AN ART CARNIVAL FOR EVERYBODY! (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://tifa.npac-ntch.org/2019/en/about/#vision>.

#### Image sources:

1. Losques , D. de. (1912,May.). *Losques Nijinsky as faun* [Image] Retrieved from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Losques\\_Nijinsky\\_as\\_faun\\_1912.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Losques_Nijinsky_as_faun_1912.jpg)
2. Nguyen, M.-L. (2006). *Helen Menelaus Louvre*. [photograph.] Retrieved from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Helen\\_Menelaus\\_Louvre\\_G424\\_full.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Helen_Menelaus_Louvre_G424_full.jpg)
- 3..Gooch,E.—Hulton Archive(1912) *L'Après-midi d'un faune* [Image] Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Afternoon-of-a-Faun-ballet-by-Nijinsky#/media/1/8584/59398>

## Declaration of originality

“I hereby declare that this thesis represents my original work and that I have used no other sources except as noted by citations. The thesis has not been used for examination purposes elsewhere. Individual points (wording and spirit) borrowed from works included in the literature and source list are acknowledged as such. The declaration of originality also covers all the sketches, sketch maps and illustrations that appear in this thesis. I am aware that noncompliance leads to exclusion from, or invalidates, the examination.”

Place/Date

Signature

“Hiermit erkläre ich eidesstattlich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbstständig und ohne fremde Hilfe verfasst habe. Alle Stellen oder Passagen der vorliegenden Arbeit, die anderen Quellen im Wortlaut oder dem Sinn nach entnommen wurden, sind durch Angaben der Herkunft kenntlich gemacht. Dies gilt auch für die Reproduktion von Noten, grafische Darstellungen und andere analoge oder digitale Materialien.

Ich räume der Anton Bruckner Privatuniversität das Recht ein, ein von mir verfasstes Abstract meiner Arbeit auf der Homepage der ABPU zur Einsichtnahme zur Verfügung zu stellen.”

Place/Date

Signature