

# A shared relief

Forsøg by Maxime Kroot & Paulina Rewucka  
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## Introduction

The idea of this residency was based on the idea of “relief techniques”, coming from a common background in contemporary dance and a common interest in “releasing tension” as a dancer and human being in a pressed society.

Three artistic researchers, Maxime Kroot, Paulina Rewucka and Roula Samiotaki, separately have collected various ways of entering the state of release while making choreographic work. They find it important to share between each other in order to continue exploring and learning to support the main concept of “relief”. Working from a participatory perspective, they let their curiosity towards the role of the audience guide the artistic research. While each having their separate practice of “relief”, they aimed for participating in each other’s practice and focussing on the experience of performing and audiencing. The initial question to research developed:

*If we translate practices based on techniques of relief into performances, what kind of performer and audience experiences can unfold?*

However, quite soon the question ‘What is the practice of relief for us?’ arose. Thereafter, these sub questions developed :

*What does it mean to dance from a ‘relieved state’?*

*and*

*How do we witness from a ‘relieved state’?*

*and*

*Is the relief that we aim for a part of the warm-up, the performance itself, or the outcome?*

Originally there were supposed to be three dancers and choreographers included, namely: Maxime, Paulina and Roula. In January 2025 it turned out that Roula could not join the team due to lack of financial support for her travels from Greece. Nevertheless, they decided on continuing this residency as the starting point of research for Maxime and Paulina, who are both situated in Copenhagen and leaning on artistic research and participatory practices, which they encountered the past 2 years in that master of Dance and Participation from Den Danske Scenekunstskole. In the next chapters you will read about their experience of the forsøg.

## **Studio time - exchanging practices**

They have spent two weeks in the studio around the research question *“If we translate practices based on techniques of relief into performances, what kind of performer and audience experiences can unfold?”* Let’s dissect what happened in these weeks.

The first days they exchanged **techniques of relief** coming from different backgrounds. Maxime shared her practice based on Contact Improvisation (CI), elements were: laying down to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, engaging the somatic body through solo exploration, tuning into a listening touch while connecting to another body. She introduced the term ‘hands without demands’, which is being used to touch without manipulating the other. Paulina shared her practice based on Trauma Release Exercise (TRE) and from shaking practices, encouraging the tremble in the body, to find common rhythms and to release tension. She uses free dancing which takes tools from improvised and authentic movement. From there she introduced the idea of a ‘parasite body’ relating to the philosophical theory and postmodern artistic practice called ‘hauntology’ and suggested Tim Matiakis toolbox as an external filter. They invited the qualities of rocking, pulsing, sliding and rotating and added them to their practices, whilst also combining their practices. Next to these movement practices they used elements of yin and nidra yoga together with breath meditation, to bring the body into an engagement of the parasympathetic nervous system.

### **scores**

After warming up their bodies and entering into a state of release, they introduced **creative scores** into the studio. Paulina introduced ‘The twin body’ and ‘Body as host’ from Meg Stuart and “Telepathic dance” from Alice Chauchat. Next to that, they made their own scores by combining elements of their own practice, with an existing score or philosophical input. Ideas started to collide, by putting different elements in the room.

“Perform a twin body with everything that is in the room, while witnessing the other dancer”

“Do the telepathic dance with everything that is in the room”

“Perform the twin body while shaking”

“Rocking in and out of contact”

“Rotating in and out of contact”

“Pulsing and rocking while dancing”

“Sliding and rocking while dancing”

Questions came up: When would the score itself give relief? When did the score overwhelm? When was the score more an outcome of relief? Also other questions arose: When do we connect or when do we feel interrupted and what does that say about relief? In some of these scores, they refocused the question onto the experience of the dancer.

### **Practice vs performance**

Working from an idea of thinking in movement, they added a philosophical layer into the studio of questioning the division between **practice and performance**. They listened to the Self-Interview of Chrysa Parkinson, read ‘On Practice’ from Jonathan Burrows and learned about scales of participation from “Education for Socially Engaged Art” by Pablo Helguera. While moving they listened to an interview with Nita Little on representation, explaining why performance should not only be visually received. They made self-interviews about practice versus performance and combined them into their scores:

“Do a self-interview while getting massaged by a massage pistol”  
“Listen to your self-interview and dance an immediate reaction”  
“Listen to multiple self-interviews while performing the twinbody with the space”  
“Make a map of the room, with the dances you just did”

At some point there were so many scores overlapping - of movement, sound and thoughts - of witnessing and performing- that it would get too overwhelming. To document this valuable information they kept a note-book from the beginning, noting down their experiences after each session with scores. In case of being too overwhelmed, they would grab back towards the movement practice of release. Starting from the body and slowly building up layers again, trusting that the body is thinking in movement.

### ***Witnessing situations***

**Sharing** the explorations they were doing seemed to bring up a new idea of approaching the word performance. They did not feel like the word performance could cover what happened in the studio, for it was not about the visual and esthetical aspect about dance only. The term ‘witnessing situations’ came up, to let the audience look from a witnessing and supporting point of view, rather than an representational point of view. They tried out to look without grabbing, to look from an embodied view, to have ‘eyes without demands’ like the ‘hands without demands’ and to look from supporting the other. They explored the experience of an audience who witnesses, after using techniques of relief as a preparation to look at ‘witnessing situations’ but also by continuing elements of the techniques of relief in the witnessing situation itself. On the last day they invited external participants into the studio, to share their scores and have an open discussion about their experiences.

### **Realisations - AHA**

What developed out of this research is an understanding of relief as a somatic-visceral state that needs time to be found, entered and further explored. There are definitely different ways of providing time to prepare the body to work from that state where the parasympathetic nervous system is activated. However, we needed to take into account that we only had limited time and that our energy and needs could be different everyday. While spending time in the studio it is not always possible to fulfill the wish for relief, while interruptions in the dancing or in our way of working would take place. After a week we saw a pattern in our way of practicing that seemed to work and therefore repeated in the following week.

- warm up to get into a released state
- guided movement/dancing from that state
- translation into creative scores
- note taking and exchange

Coming back to the wish for dancing from a relief, it seems to be impossible to find solutions, to think about answers, to dive into research, while you actually have to take time to release

first. You might need to be very good at splitting your research needs, your artistic needs and your personal needs. And as we are only human, that's a lot to balance.

While exchanging we found a moment to clarify what we are busy with. That became a starting point to pose a question: *what is our practice together?* The repeated aspects that we both mentioned were the ability to take time, to spend time, to let the dance be found from inside of the body (experiencing weight, touch, shake, idea-making etc.). What appeared as not necessary is the urge to mix or blend our practices - allowing them to witness and inform each other.

What also developed out of this research is the experience of connectedness, a we, or an 'extended me' (as Nita Little calls it) that comes out of the state of relief. By starting with dancing from techniques of relief and going into creative scores, we noticed that there was a strong feeling of being connected towards the other. While most scores were solo or duo work, it was hard to separate the witness or dancer role all the time.

Nevertheless we found clear moments where witnessing each other would feel as a support in the 'telepathic score' or where it would feel as non support in a trial, where one dances from 'the telepathic score' but the other witnesses from another score. That made us curious about which possible different scores we could give the dancer and the witness, while still feeling this sense of 'extended me'.

Last but not least we found a repetitive theme of interconnectedness according to J. Burrows, D. Hay and M. Ingvarsten writings. The ongoing wonders circulated around the 'natural body'. A body affected by pollution (food, thoughts, screens), capital exploitation (commercial dance/yoga/health methods, hypes, trends), climate change (slow influences, like anxiety, or stress) is no longer natural, and to add - in need of relief. Thinking about the future, learning what our dances will become without knowing what they are yet, brought us closer to common agreement on unknown places to dance from. This space can be understood as Burrows describes as a "daily return to a place of potential".

### **Realisations after the Open Studio**

On the last day of the research we invited other artists to come and experience our research. Four artists joined us for a 2 hour session. We took them through a warm-up of release exercises and went into creative scores. With the creative scores we explored with witnessing. They were allowed to propose ideas and ask questions. A few of the questions that followed were:

Why do we want to educate the audience? Our talks evolved around; the wish for an audience to be embodied, not necessarily to feel exactly the same as the performers. Witnessing is not watching, witnessing is an active verb. Does this have the potential of a ritual? A communal witnessing.

What is the importance of the roles? Our talks evolved around; We are experimenting with relating. We are practicing dancing with questions. Why do we need scores and roles?

Do you do this in daily life? Our talks evolved around: In a club in Berlin? On the streets? Clowning. Dancers are far away from the normal in everyday life. To free up the range of movement. Performance as a situation.

### **Alternative choices**

While reflecting on what we could have done otherwise, it is worth mentioning that the process originally would include three instead of two researchers. If we would postpone the residence in order to meet with Roula, we would have definitely spent our time differently; with additional insides, with different day rhythms and activities throughout our days.

Further on we discussed the matter of inviting more people from the beginning of our process. However, we agreed that it seems hard for the relief to happen whenever as artists we feel responsible to take care of other participants. Moreover, preparing such meetings could appear stressful to both of us. Nevertheless the need of the audience came together through witnessing the practice of the other, in the format of being a duo: one performing, other witnessing. However, to use contact improvisation as a duo practice in witnessing and performing, appeared to be always a blend of both. The open day presentation was very much needed to open up our experiment towards people, with no experience of spending all the previous time with us. With them we could experiment even further on the performing and witnessing roles out of a duo setting.

Looking back, we could have continued with one material that became an outcome of our work, for example: researching the relief as the warm up only. Instead, we have decided to use rhizomatic thinking, trusting what is already there, recycling, trying and doing without linearity, finding various insights that could possibly inform the research from broad angles. Working in this way, made us collect materials that created potential for ongoing practice, on a day-to-day principle, that followed our wishes rather than prepared ideas or schemas.

Finally we could have decided on making a performance out of experimentation in these 2 weeks. We were finding possibilities to follow that pathway like: staying with a practice including the qualities from Tim Matiakis' toolbox. We noticed that they did definitely influence the aesthetics of our dancing but at that moment we agreed on the fact that our common interest was not rooted in aesthetics anyways. We were considering changing the work-frame to aim for the dance performance, after experiencing connectedness while dancing, but we ended up quitting this idea. Listening to the interview with Nita Little about representation affirmed that decision, as dance as a solely visual experience seemed not so interesting to both of us.

### **Future perspective**

Some of the notions we had to skip due to lack of time but seemed to both of us relevant were: pleasure and fun, resistance, ecology, ethics. Instead we focused on relief. We could possibly open broader discussions upon etymology of 'relief' words, or concepts of an artistic practice or socially engaged arts. We could insist on longer durations to spend time on tuning in, finding a state we want to include in our work.

What appeared interesting was the sharing moment with the other artists. We have found it very helpful to have outside eyes and thoughts on the research. In a future research these moments of sharing should come earlier in the process, to radically change the idea of what a sharing should be. A sharing can bring us even closer to the idea of a witnessing that is not the same as watching. A witnessing that does not change the 'state' of the performer by getting nervous. And so a sharing can be true to its content, in our case the content of release.

After these two weeks we have expanded on the topic of release, introducing ourselves to each other's practices, and started to ponder on the witnessing role of the audience. There lingers an urge to go more in depth in the topic of interconnectedness - on the relation between dancing and witnessing.