

# On Being Available. Conversation with Silvia Călin

## Laura Jiga Iliescu

Constantin Brăiloiu Institute of Ethnography and Folklore of the Romanian Academy, Romania  
ORCID: 0000-0001-6688-6543

Laura Jiga Iliescu is Senior Researcher at the Constantin Brăiloiu Institute of Ethnography and Folklore of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, and Associate Professor at the University of Bucharest. Her main fields of interest include the relationship between orality and literacy, folk narratives and their ritual continuity, devotional and enchanting practices, Christian religiosity in premodern and modern times, interconfessional exchanges, the ethnology of the mountain, fairytales, and video games.

Correspondence: [laura.jiga.iliescu@gmail.com](mailto:laura.jiga.iliescu@gmail.com)

## Silvia Călin

Coreographer, Bucharest, Romania

Silvia Călin is a graduate of the Floria Capsali Choreography High School and of the I. L. Caragiale University of Drama and Cinematography. As a dancer and choreographer, her chosen field of expression is contemporary dance, but she also enjoys her involvement in the theatre, where she works with a range of directors on determining how actors should move on the stage. Fascinated by language, whether it takes the form of word, gesture, or complex movement, she always devotes great attention to studying the construction of a message or a story.

Jiga Iliescu, Laura, Silvia Călin. 2025. "On Being Available. Conversations with Silvia Călin."  
*Martor* 30, 163-73. [DOI: 10.57225/Martor.2025.09]

### ABSTRACT

This interview focuses on the act of dancing as a corporeal experience that connects body and mind as part of an indestructible unit deployed in specific spatial and temporal arenas. In this respect, traditional folk dances and dancers share with modern performers and dance performances a corpus of sensorial and cognitive tools for bodily exploration. The dialogue is between Silvia Călin, a contemporary dancer and choreographer, and Laura Jiga Iliescu, an ethnologist. The issues explored during the interview are concerned with self-perception and connection with other dancers performing in the same arena; fixed structures, creativity and improvisation; movements, exertion, breathing and altered states of consciousness (with comments on ecstatic ritual dances); objectification towards one's own body; and related topics.

### KEYWORDS

Dancing experience; body and mind; tradition and the modern art of dance; supernatural encounter narratives.

My conversation with Silvia Călin, dancer and choreographer, touched on a number of subjects linked with the general theme of this issue of the *Martor* journal: the configuration of the relationships between movement, sound and space from the perspective of bodily knowledge; social communication and sacred communication actualized through dance; hypostases of the relations between tradition and individual creation in traditional dance, ballet, and contemporary dance; the construction of the individual message and of expressivity through dance; formal dance training and the place of ballet schools as institutions in different social contexts.

The aim of our discussion was to articulate two professional perspectives on the shared realities that exist around dance, each of them with its own concepts and ways of understanding and evaluating the movement involved. For the ethnologist, the perspective of Silvia Călin, an *insider* of dance, provides valuable information concerning how to understand a form (choreography) of traditional knowledge to which her access is not direct but mediated through the beliefs and narrations she studies.

**Silvia:** Why do you think people, the first people let's say, started dancing? I believe dancing appeared before spoken language did.

**Laura:** It's complicated to establish which came first. Both speaking and dancing, and indeed any kind of activity that involves a sequence of predetermined moves that are organized in the mind before being externalized through actually being performed, imply a mental capacity to articulate information. This holds true whether we're speaking about dancing, tying a knot, or processing raw materials. I believe these things go hand in hand, whether we are dealing with speaking, singing, movement and dance, or with a succession of actions that achieve the production of an implement or even of a work of art. We are talking about two kinds of thinking: retroactive, by means of which the memory is activated, and planning-focused.

**Silvia:** Yes. I am asking simplistic questions now, so that we can see where we're heading. Why did they not perform incantations and leave it at that?

**Laura:** Because everything happens via the body. And when you perform an incantation, you don't stand there like a block of stone, you move. You shake your head, you rotate...

**Silvia:** You see, I hold that movement is the first form of expression, but you support the claim of words [smiles]. All the same, why do we dance?

**Laura:** I can say why *I* dance. In the first place, I dance because I like doing so [we laugh]. Now more seriously: as far as I'm concerned, dancing is very connected with music. Music that I hear with my ears, not internal music. At a given moment, this can make me want to move. And rhythm. I can move on my own or with a partner or even in a group of people, but this once again depends on music, or rather on *what kind of* music can be heard.

**Silvia:** Dancing is also a form of socializing, isn't it?

**Laura:** Yes, with a partner or in a group, it is a form of human communication. I have never taken part in a ritual dance; that would mean also experiencing a communication that involved the vertical dimension. When you dance with someone, you anticipate how that other person is going to move, you don't dance just how the mood takes you, as I might move now if I were to dance to electro music when home alone. An anticipation of the other person's movements based on a preexisting structure and on memory: how I have danced in the past, how I have seen other people dancing, how I have seen the steps ... On such occasions, when you become tired or bored, you either leave the dance and it goes on without you, if it's a group one, or you keep going in order not to make it stop, you persevere to the end, you finish up exhausted and you smile. With satisfaction. Like in a team game.

**Silvia:** It was worth my asking you. Because I don't feel dancing the way you do: simply dancing for pleasure at a party. Rather, when I'm on the stage, my movements are constructed, the product of conscious thought. I create a language via my body, without words, like a Neanderthal we might say, someone who is not yet capable of speech but who is attempting to say something, to enunciate something through their body alone.

**Laura:** You are not talking about dance as a form of individual expression—*I'm dancing because I feel like it*—but to the fact that...

**Silvia:** ...that I wish to convey something. To someone. I think it is simpler when we are talking about traditions. It's like when people used to dance as part of a ritual that had a very specific purpose. To invoke rain, for example. They knew very well why they were dancing and their purpose was to transmit a primordial message which, even though it was addressed not to other people but to God, was extremely concrete. But ritual dances have disappeared; no one now spends their time stamping the ground and raising their arms to make the rain come. They are called *traditions* now, because they [the ritual dances] have disappeared. So, I would say that there are two kinds of dancing, both valid: for yourself, and for others. In

both of them the body is engaged in a way that depends on the message and the purpose of the dance.

All the same, when I reflect on contemporary dance I find something of the old functions of dancing, because contemporary dance expresses, raises, even seeks out the problems of present-day society, and for this you try to find an appropriate bodily language. Like in rituals, in a way.

But do you still take the body seriously, do you still feel it even when nothing hurts? Do you think about it?

**Laura:** In *Antropologia corpului și modernitatea* [Anthropology of the Body and Modernity] David Le Breton proposes the phrases “I am a body” and “I have a body” as a criterion for differentiating between pre-modern and modern societies. This possessive in the second phrase, he suggests, implies a detachment from your own body, which you simultaneously construct and attempt to conceal. Le Breton also notes that at the very beginning of the modern period, the aristocracy, as a sign that they belonged to that social category, used to inhibit their bodies. They didn’t laugh noisily, they behaved in a restrained manner, etc. Even Court dances are characterized by delicacy, discretion and order. Without the sweat associated with lower-class people’s dances.

**Silvia:** Right, you begin to not want your body any more, you seek to remodel it, transform it. It starts to offend you. People no longer use their bodies in the way they should and this leads to the appearance of new illnesses, not only physical but also affecting the brain. Because we were made to cultivate our vegetable gardens, to travel on foot, to exert ourselves, to produce endorphins and dopamine naturally. The body is made to give us both pain and enjoyment.



## Dancing and institutions

**Laura:** When did you start dancing?

**Silvia:** When I was three years old.

**Laura:** Children generally dance when they’re small—but how was it that you took up dancing quite that young?

**Silvia:** First my mother took me to the Children’s Palace, where dancing was taken extremely seriously, with only the very best children selected, because they were used for the performances in front of Ceaușescu. There, dancing was only a form of decor. And the children were a faultless, beautiful, living installation for the *beloved leader*. I remember being a doll on a cube in one of these shows. Later she sent me to gymnastics, because it was the Nadia Comăneci era. I did gymnastics for a long time.

In fact, I even used to do gymnastics when I was playing. I would line up all the little girls in front of the block and collect coloured milk bottle tops to make medals for them. And I would teach them such exercises. We had an entire artistic program. Clearly, working with my body was something that came to me readily and easily. Expressing myself in that way was simple. If you made me recite a poem I would mutter, go red, hide away.

Finally, when I reached the fourth grade, my mother sent me to the ballet school and... it was lucky I was a docile child. They would say to me: “Now I’m hurting you. Yes?” “Yes.” “Now you must stay on the rope for one minute and I must get on your back. Yes?” “Yes.” I had good powers of resistance. Many people say dancers have a bit of masochism in their makeup. I’m exaggerating. But there is a sense in which you can endure pain better than

others can. From an early age you are tortured and twisted, literally. And the worst of it is that the discipline you have in order to perform does not form you but rather deforms you. I don't know whether this power of endurance that can make you a dancer is a learned behaviour or something you have from birth. Clearly there also exists the perception that "these people don't have a childhood," but at the time it seemed normal to me. I didn't experience it as torture. "This is my life. That's all." When I went through adolescence it didn't cause me any problems, because all the movement I was doing kept me away from the all-adolescence crazy problems. Later, when both dance school and the Communist period were over, only then, at the age of 18, I asked myself: is it OK to learn to dance under such a harsh regime? That damaging to one's ego? That humiliating?

**Laura:** Are you talking about the ballet school and the teaching methods there?

**Silvia:** Yes. I thought it was normal for it to be like that. Being called a cow, being slapped, or... It was only after I left high school that I realized that it wasn't all right. Because there are other ways to be trained as a dancer.

**Laura:** These dance schools were on the Soviet model?

**Silvia:** Yes. I don't know what it was like in the West. But, for example, when I went to France on a school exchange, I saw that things could be done differently. There all the girls were the same: tall, superb. But they had a nutritionist, whereas in our school here they'd say to us: "You're fat. Lose three kilos in two weeks. It's not my job to tell you how," How? With vinegar; you would drink vinegar until you couldn't drink any more. Or plantain tea. Or you would eat nothing but potatoes one day, nothing but apples the next, I don't know what on the third. No one cared. It was a total aberration. And it alienated you from yourself. I'll put it in terms of a comparison for you. In Paris the girls at the ballet were flowers, they probably had their struggles, too, but they made up a garden that was beautiful, well looked after, organized. While we were weeds. A garden of weeds, I could call us. That can be beautiful too, but the weeds are still weeds. Some survive, others don't. Some are suffocated by others; some suffocate the others... That was the kind of difference. It may well have been tough in the dance schools in the West too, I don't know. Scrubbing floors is tough wherever you do it. Now methods have changed hugely here too.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

### The self and the shoal of fish

**Laura:** Let's talk a bit about solo dancing and dancing in a group, on the stage. How do you integrate and position yourself in the space, how do you relate to distances, vectors of movement, forwards and backwards, upwards and downwards etc.?

**Silvia:** When dancing as part of a collective you practice how to be aware both of the group and of the space you have at your disposal, but without changing direction in relation to the stage as a whole. Your reference points are only right and left. No more. The people beside you. You function as if you were in a shoal of fish. But what comes out of all the small units is harmony. You take part in it, but you cannot control it on your own.

And there's something else. When dancing in a group you can't afford to have your own emotions. You depend on the others and they depend on you. Because there is a single voice. Which you need to serve. It doesn't matter what ideas or emotions you have. If you start expressing your own feelings, it's no longer a collective or a group, it's a ... revolt [laughs].

**Laura:** Is the mood you are talking about created while you are dancing, or do you have it before the dance begins?

**Silvia:** For a professional it's healthy if they don't stake too much on the sensitive feelings they experience on the stage. Effectively, you need to practice them and filter them. You need to know all the emotions that are going to come in the course of a given dance, you need to work hard on this, so that you're well prepared. You mustn't get so *high* during a performance that you can't control yourself afterwards.

**Laura:** So you know in advance what kinds of emotions are coming during a dance. Here I am exuberant, here I am sad, etc.

**Silvia:** Yes, you know. And you don't let yourself be overcome. These feelings are linked with the language and the message that you need to convey. Which is not your personal message. Any external stimulus, be it a personal problem or a physical problem, needs to be forgotten if it doesn't form part of the character you're playing.

**Laura:** Even if the dance *carries you away*, you still have to control yourself. Because it's not yourself you are expressing.

**Silvia:** It depends what you're working on. For example, if we're not talking about a fixed, worked-out structure but about improvisation, then you have a research area in which you can go through the whole gamut of feelings, emotions, stimuli etc. It's happened to me; I experienced the emotion I knew I had to feel at a specific point in the dance, I experienced it for real. It was and it wasn't controlled, I don't know how to explain it. It was actually a gift. To play someone who's in love, and to begin to be in love. But in a classical work with a set structure, you mustn't be carried away either by the dance or by experiencing feelings, in case you get in the way of the other members of the cast.

**Laura:** Do you become objective about your own body when dancing? Do you detach yourself from it a bit? When I say body I'm also referring to the mental and emotional aspects.

**Silvia:** A fundamental quality of any dancer is availability. I was in Israel many years ago, at Baceva, and I was given some T-shirts that said *available* on them. And once again I realized how incorrectly I had understood dancing in school for all those years. If, instead of being put down by all kind of treatment and comments like "You're fat," "I'm going to throw you out," "Stand by the door" and so on and so forth, someone had told me and explained to me that a person who appears on the stage needs to be available, it would have helped me a lot. Now I know. Available means that you need to be happy with what you look like, to be at peace with your body, and to be present.

**Laura:** Are you also talking about the flexibility of communicating with others through dance?

**Silvia:** Definitely. This availability and flexibility involve a normality which we didn't have in the years when we were being trained at the ballet school. But in fact it characterizes your attitude towards yourself and towards the court of the public. As when you take an exam. You don't go there because you are scared, you don't go because you are afraid of making a mistake, you don't go because you want them to like you. You go because you are available to communicate. I'm not concerned with your past, but with the fact that you are here open towards me.

**Laura:** Where *you* refers to me, the public.

**Silvia:** Yes. You can also miss this as a result of too much pride. Flexibility. You, the dancer, are like dough. You shape yourself and allow yourself to be shaped.



• • • • •

## Sound, breathing, movement

**Laura:** It's said that both laughter and meditation have the capacity to make you not think about anything. The mind is empty. This produces a therapeutic effect, at least for stress therapy. Is it the same when you dance for a profession?

**Silvia:** It can be. The external ceases to exist for you because all your senses are occupied, nothing parasitic can stimulate you anymore. There's no room for it. In addition, the mind is fully occupied when you're dancing because it has to think both physically and in terms of feeling what your arms, legs, neck and breathing are doing.

**Laura:** How does movement help?

**Silvia:** Precisely this: sound, respiration. Look: if I make a simple movement and [draws air noisily into her chest] breathe in, the sound amplifies it. It draws the movement after it. Breathing or even the sound of breathing draws you like an arrow. I'm convinced that trampolinists, high jumpers, tennis players, people who practice martial arts, for example, are helped by the way they breathe.

**Laura:** As if you were getting off to a good start.

**Silvia:** Yes. But in dancing, breathing is calibrated by movement.

How can you not think about your breathing when you move, if stopping breathing would mean you'd stop moving [joking]?

**Laura:** Respiration itself being a movement.

**Silvia:** Precisely.

• • • • •

## The controlled body

**Laura:** There are dances that bring about powerful emotional and cognitive states that are externalized in a bodily way. In this context I would be interested to know your point of view, as a professional dancer, regarding the controlled body and also its kinetic hypostases that are not under conscious control. Because here too, we may be dealing with a form of communication that draws upon the numinous register of reality. A form of communication which, in the last analysis, becomes an ecstatic dance. Or a mystical one. For example flying dervishes who, through a dance that involves a twofold rotation, in a circle and around their own axis, control their bodies and bring them into a state of ecstasy. An ecstasy in which the movements are not chaotic. The opposite example would be that of the possessed, stimulated body, whose movements are spasmodic; in this case the body is merely a vehicle and not an active participant in the sacred communication.

I saw an anthropology film where there was a female dervish who started revolving with her arms beside her body. Gradually, her arms seemed to lift themselves on their own, impelled from within, not that she was raising them in a conscious manner. Then her arms went down and she lifted just one arm and held it slightly inclined. Everything was coherent, orderly, harmonious. Circle.

**Silvia:** It's interesting what you say about the arms. Effectively, when you raise your arms and revolve, you increase the number of revolutions, you become a propeller. Probably they know this; raising their right arm, left arm, both, they control the revolution. They can even control how dizzy they become. I don't even believe they get dizzy. It's possible that the training they undergo causes the dizziness center in their brains to atrophy [laughs slightly].

In classical dancing, when you do 32 or however many *fouettés*, the rule is: the head starts last and returns first. That is, you have to have a fixed point all the time. A single point, so you don't get dizzy. You can rotate for a long time if you do this. Whereas it seems that dervishes rotate their heads as well, but they keep their eyes fixed on their palm when rotating, so they hold on to the idea of a fixed point.

I believe that whenever dancing is being done professionally, whether we're talking about a dervish or about a ballet dancer or ballerina, there is a technique and a mechanism behind it. And as long as you have a technique and a mechanism it's harder to lose your mind. Or for your emotions to carry you away. And I also believe there are professional dancers who even know how to lose their minds.

**Laura:** I am also thinking of the dancing of *călușari*,<sup>1</sup> who also rotate, rotate, leap in the air, until it appears that they are no longer in control of their bodies, but this loss of control is again part of their ritual behaviour. They roll their eyes, their bodies are convulsed and possessed. But the *călușar* dancer, who is a professional and ritually initiated in his turn, comes back every time from the state in which he rolls his eyes and moves spasmodically—a condition that corresponds, according with local beliefs, to his choreographic confrontation with the fairies. But if an ordinary person, not a professional, were to meet these same fairies and were *carried away*, let's say, in their dance, they would develop gout as a consequence. In fact, the *călușari* confrontation with the fairies takes place in a context that is a ritual one, in other words a controlled context.

It may be that this ability is linked to the professional's constant self-monitoring during the dance. You don't come out of yourself, you don't distance yourself from yourself, you don't detach yourself but rather you know all the time what's happening.



## Spirits, dancing beings and rotatory movement

**Silvia:** Let me ask you something: how is it that different cultures share stories about people who dance with fairies or who come under the influence of fairies or spirits from different worlds? I was thinking of *Giselle*<sup>2</sup> with those dead girls who've come from somewhere else. There are spirits of this kind in our Romanian beliefs, the English have them too, they're everywhere. Did spirits of this kind actually use to appear? I wonder.

**Laura:** Are you talking about dancing spirits?

**Silvia:** Yes. Who would drive you mad and make you dance until they gave you seizures or left you dead. What's the explanation for this theme? Why do people make up stories of this kind?

**Laura:** These are tough questions for an ethnologist. Because such stories can generally be linked with an attitude towards beliefs and with a manner of viewing the world.

We may be dealing here with an archetype that asserts the existence in the world of the dimension of the sacred. In all the ways in which it manifests, not only the institutionalized ones. Because the Fairies, too, the dancing fairies, embody an expression of the sacred.

**Silvia:** Yes, and they *dance you* by making you rotate. Perhaps it has to be a perfect form, a closed one, not a line?

**Laura:** I do not know. Rotation is perceived as the movement that mediates in a bodily way the passing-over to other states of being of the person who rotates, or even their journeying to different places, different areas or different lands. This pattern too is widespread in and beyond Europe. Mirjam Mencej has written very finely about this.<sup>3</sup> So it is not only a

belief in fairies that is common property but also the theme of rotation as the vehicle of transformation. Whether you revolve around your own vertical axis, or roll over and over, or dance in a circle, you become different. You have the same thing when a character nods three times and changes into something else, you have it when it's a matter of people who *are carried away*—both physically and mentally—while dancing with a rotatory movement and wake up *somewhere else*. In this rapid motion, they undergo something. Turning round and round, rotation, is a kind of journey. Have you ever had this kind of role in a dance with predetermined moves?

**Silvia:** No, but there's something we can connect with this. One, all dancers have experienced that moment when you can't go on. When you feel you're going to die. You are going to faint. Your body can't keep going. And then you kind of go into a loop, after which you recover miraculously. Two, I'm thinking of *Giselle*, which is an old ballet, a classical ballet, a white ballet. Yet there you have Giselle's madness. She lets her hair down, she runs wild on the stage, she hurls herself on the ground—these things mark a complete break with classical convention. In fact, this is a first intertextual irruption of contemporary dance into a classical dance.

But still, what is going on in all these stories?

**Laura:** These are expressions of knowledge. I believe that stories explain physical, emotional, psychological, and mental states, but they explain them figuratively, not literally, potentially even anthropomorphizing these states so that they assume the form of fairies and spirits. Story explains reality by interpreting and transfiguring it on a number of levels, including symbolically.



### Traditional innovation, artistic innovation, contemporary dance

**Laura:** Within the ethnological field there is much nuanced discussion of the dynamics of the almost dialectical relationship between tradition and innovation, which manifests during performances in such a way that, at a given moment, a *new* sequence, created more or perhaps less spontaneously in the course of a dance, because this is what we're talking about, a leap, a limping movement or even a small sequence of movements, if it is not felt as so innovative that it is rejected, can from then on become a standard feature of the dance concerned, possibly bearing the name of the person who created it. For us the innovator remains anonymous, but for their community the new element becomes so-and-so's leap, as it were. But the dance stays largely the same: a Serbian dance, for example. Things change when traditional dances leave their original context and appear on stage. They become a spectacle/performance that expresses the vision of a choreographer, director, scenographer, etc. How does innovation manifest itself in the context of classical dance? I am thinking of the fact that here there is a choreographer, a known person, who creates the entire structure. Do innovations of this kind occur?

**Silvia:** Yes. As a dancer, you contribute your interpretation and virtuosity. In your own words, you leap a little higher, or whatever. As a choreographer, you may be looking at an original that's as much as a hundred years old, created by a predecessor. In relation to this model, you can innovate, change things here and there, the costumes for instance, but you cannot take out a whole section and thus destroy the libretto. Here things are clear: this is the libretto, this is the music, and these are, by and large, the moves. In neoclassical dance, you can have ideas, you can make changes to the libretto and even the music, but you can

never change the character and configuration of the movement, which continues to resemble that of the classical dance. So you can play with the surroundings, the stage setting, the costumes, but the main line of the dance stays the same. In contemporary dance you can change everything. For example, you can follow the libretto but all the swans can be men. All the elements can be mixed around and changed, reinvented.

**Laura:** What is the difference between classical dance and contemporary dance?

**Silvia:** In the first place, in classical dance you have a standard set of moves and repeat them *ad infinitum*. There is an alphabet.

**Laura:** But *Swan Lake* with men as swans? Do they perform the same moves as in the classical dance?

**Silvia:** Largely, yes, but not necessarily. But they all have tutus. Even if the moves are changed, because we're talking about contemporary dance, an identifying feature is preserved that reminds you of the classical story.

**Laura:** So, one category of contemporary dance reinterprets the convention of classical dance. But you also have contemporary dances that come from *nothing*, in the sense that they don't derive from a classical libretto.

**Silvia:** In this case we are talking about a concept that sets out from zero. Constructing language, constructing a new story, if you can—because it's hard to dramatize movements—constructing images, constructing a world. In which ideally you should have something you want to say.

**Laura:** To return to the code of communication, innovation and creation, possibly the reason why contemporary dance sometimes horrifies people is that it is so different from classical expectations, if we can so describe them.

**Silvia:** Exactly. And there are some people—I am referring to choreographers and | dancers, not to the public—who like this much tougher area of investigation in which you don't have a recipe to follow.

The dance doesn't necessarily need to be first-rate, but you need to be powerful as an artist. As a personality.

**Laura:** Does this strike me as a bit more individualistic? Compared with the shoal of fish you were talking about.

**Silvia:** Why not? You are expressing yourself.

**Laura:** How much dance is there in a contemporary *performance*?

**Silvia:** Performance can touch a more realistic area. I saw the first shocking human installation at Mumok, in Austria, where one of the works exhibited was composed of crucifixions. Real ones. And funeral corteges. The whole being a *performance* that imitated reality extremely well. There was an explanation there of how after the Second World War the Austrians were extremely angry; they were neither horse nor donkey, neither with the Germans nor without the Germans. Frustration and violence gathered force. The artists I'm talking about felt their need to show a different side of life. We are not prettifying anything anymore. Life is blood. Not good fairies.

**Laura:** So *performance* isn't necessarily tied to dance or to a choreography but only to the body.

**Silvia:** That's right. For example, Alexandra Pirici,<sup>4</sup> who creates installations that are highly valued—pictures that are slightly in motion. Or Marina Abramović,<sup>5</sup> who makes use of her own body, though she is not a dancer.

**Laura:** What is improvisational dance?

**Silvia:** Harmony between soul, mind, body and what comes from outside: music, smells, lights or temperature. There is also energy transfer. And an aid: when you are afraid to say



something in words and look elsewhere. Here, yes, you can seek and have emotions. That is, at the point at which you are no longer just a mechanism, as in classical, organized dance, when you're no longer constructing phrases but seeking emotions and being available for them. The most interesting thing is when an improvisation happens without music. You look for different sounds. Breathing, panting on the floor... It's also very important that you don't have mirrors—while in classical dance you have to see yourself, check yourself, in contemporary improvisational dance it doesn't matter what the moves look like.

**Laura:** But what are you looking for?

**Silvia:** Your own emotional state; you are looking for yourself. For this an experiment of this kind needs to last at least an hour. You get tired. But even improvisation requires practice. To liberate your mind, to empty it. Improvisation doesn't necessarily mean someone dancing on their own, as the mood takes them. You can also have a partner with whom you improvise. You have to get used to them so that you're not hampered by the presence of a foreign body etc. This can go a bit in the direction of therapy.

Or there can also be improvisations on given themes. As when our teacher came in and said "Dance the Little Match Girl," It was very hard. Adina Cezar,<sup>6</sup> who was an impressive character, in the 6th grade, when contemporary dance was introduced—from that moment I knew that this was what I wanted to do—said to us "Come on! You're leaves," Then she would construct something with us, but depending on each person's availability. Some people may regard this as stupid. But from the moment when you stop thinking it's stupid, you're *available*. You're a sponge. This is a failing of schools, in general: teachers don't build with their pupils. And the children curl up like hedgehogs, they're not *available* any longer, and the story's over.

**Laura:** I'm remembering the difference between games and playing. When you dance *Giselle*, it's a game, with rules. When you improvise, you're playing *being leaves*. Playing is a bit free, it doesn't have a clearly defined immediate purpose. But it helps you escape from the (definitely socially rooted) conventions you impose on yourself.

Do you ever also play while you're dancing?

**Silvia:** Yes. Because I'm extremely ludic and empathetic.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

### Limit situations

**Laura:** Body. It also presupposes its own dynamics, including ageing. Or accidents, illnesses, etc.

**Silvia:** Then you need to make peace with your body. And, once again, to remain *available*. You can no longer do what you used to be able to do, but, using small actions, you can still construct. Things can be done well at any age. All the same, when you are young and strong you don't yet know your body. And when you reach a deeper understanding of it, it starts creaking. And you're left with nostalgia and a kind of frustration.

In old age you have something you don't have when you're young, and it's settledness. Contemplation.

**Laura:** All through our discussion I have been conscious of an aspect we haven't yet mentioned, namely limit situations. Which can result from effort, fear, accidents, etc.

**Silvia:** Well, the performing arts are like that. No one is interested in banality. And I'm not referring to themes but to how one approaches any theme.



## I am a body

**Laura:** To return to Le Breton’s theory, I think that you, when you’re dancing, fall into the category of *I am a body*, not that of *I have a body*.

**Silvia:** Yes. Probably anyone *is* a body. And I have something else to add: movement doesn’t lie.

**Laura:** It’s not only movement that doesn’t lie; the body doesn’t lie either. But it can still deceive you.

## NOTES

1. The *Căluș* is a complex esoteric ritual, predominantly choreographic, that is performed in Pentecost week by a group of mature men and virtuoso dancers—*călușari*—whose functions include a therapeutic one. According to a set of beliefs, people’s summer meetings with *lelele*—supernatural female entities thought of as singing and dancing in a circle above the earth—give them physical and psychological illnesses. Sometimes, these fairies *snatch* people up into the air and revolve them with them in the dance until they are exhausted. The diseases caused by *lele* can be cured by the *călușari*’s dances. During the choreographic ritual performed for the benefit of a patient, one of the *călușari* begins to move chaotically, rolls his eyes and falls to the ground in an ecstasy. These are the physical and visible external manifestations of his dance conflict with the fairies, whom he faces up to without being harmed, and this produces the therapeutic effect. At the end the *călușar* gets up, restored and in his right mind.

2. *Giselle* is a ballet composed by Adolphe Adam, following

a libretto based on the texts *L’Allemagne* by Heinrich Heine and *Fantômes* by Victor Hugo. The original choreography is by Jules Perrot and Jean Coralli. The ballet had its premiere at the Paris Opera in 1841.

3. The reference is to Mirjam Mencej (2019).

4. Alexandra Pirici is a Romanian artist and choreographer who is well known for staging installations, public actions, gestures and sculptures that challenge the viewer to re-evaluate the public space.

5. “Marina Abramovici is a conceptual artist of Serbian origin whose works explore body art, the limits of the mind, the art of endurance, and the relationship between the interpreter and the public” (Pistrui, February 2023).

6. Adina Cezar (1941-2024) is one of the pioneers of Romanian contemporary dance. She taught at the Bucharest Dance High School and in 1973 founded the contemporary dance group Contemp.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Le Breton, David. 2005. *Anthropology of the Body and Modernity*. Paris: PUF.

Mencej, Mirjam. 2019. “Circular Movement in ASC. Legends and Magical Practices.” In *Body, Soul, Spirits and Supernatural Communication*, ed. Éva Pócs, 310-40. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Pistrui, Maxim. February 2023. “Marina Abramović—artista care și-a expus corpul publicului timp de șase ore” [Marina Abramović—the artist who exposed her body to the public for six hours]. *diez* (online publication), available on <https://diez.md/2023/02/20/>; last accessed 15.01.2024.

