

Hunting, Gathering, Cultivating: Practical Scores

Defne Erdur

“Never play to the gallery. [...] Never work for other people in what you do. **Always remember that the reason you initially started working was that there was something inside yourself that you felt that if you could manifest that in some way you would understand more about yourself and how you co-exist with the rest of the society.** And I think it’s terribly dangerous for an artist to fulfil other people’s expectations. [...] If you feel safe in the area you are working in, you are not working in the right area. Always go a little further into the water then you feel you are capable of being in. Go a little bit out of your depth. And when you don’t feel that your feet are quite touching the bottom, you’re just about in the right place to do something exciting.”

— David Bowie



— *Reaching out to darkness.* Photo by Oğuz Erdur

The material shared below is the outcome of several years of experimental work using the tools and techniques of expressive art therapy for facilitating creativity. As I have argued in my essay ‘Hunting, Gathering, Cultivating: Documenting the

Self Towards the Work of Art,' a sustained effort in documenting the artistic process proves invaluable for creativity and writing. Meaningful reflections can often bring seemingly fragmented thoughts, memories, and practices together, making them foundational for artistic creation. The below tasks and scores have been developed with precisely this purpose in mind.

There is not one right way to use this material, as every artistic process is unique. That is to say, feel free to pick and choose, modify and experiment according to your own needs. Mine here is merely an invitation to traverse your path more consciously and reflexively throughout your artistic journey. Should you wish to give it a try, here are a few tools that might help empower yourself in claiming the authorship of your own story.

“Joyfully Serious, Seriously Joyful”: Tasks and Scores¹

● 1.

Self-Portrait: This is a modified version of the score used by Julia Buckroyd in a professional training workshop. The movement and embodiment exercises were added by Defne Erdur. You may do this alone or with a friend. Feel free to skip some of the questions and add your own. Supplies needed: A large piece of paper, colorful pens or crayons, and a notebook.²

1. Take a moment to reflect on what dance means to you. On your large piece of paper, using your pens or crayons, begin drawing something that represents what you get out of dance. Pleasure, excitement, release, meaning, etc. (*Before drawing your answer, you may wish to dance it first.*)

2. On your notebook, write down all the words for feelings that you can name.

3. Circle the feeling you know best. Describe that feeling in your notebook and/or to your partner. How do you know you feel that feeling? What happens in your body when you do? What kind of sensations does it cause? What kind of behaviours does it engender? *(You may want to take a moment to welcome this feeling into your body and let it become embodied. Allow it to put you in a posture or trigger a movement for you to express. Take as much time as necessary before putting your answers on paper.)*

4. Based on steps #2 and #3, make any additions to your drawing that you would like.

5. Think of your family environment and write in your notebook the three most dominant feelings you have observed.

6. Choose the strongest one of the three and write and/or tell how you know this feeling. How does it emerge? How is it expressed? What is expressed? By whom? etc.

7. Take a moment to reflect on your emotional life. Considering also your notes on embodiment (#2, #3) and the expressions in your family (#5, #6), make further additions to your drawing.

8. Think of your dance training: teachers, classes, techniques, styles, people you encountered. How would you describe this journey? What did all that bring to you, your body, your dance and your life? In light of these reflections, make further additions to your drawing. *(You may also wish to contemplate these questions while dancing.)*

9. Think of a teacher or some other person who had a significant influence on you. Someone who believed in you, supported you, and was there for you when you needed. What did they bring to you? How did they make you feel? What do they mean to you? Add more to your self-portrait to represent them. *(As you recall this*

person, you may wish to lie on the floor and feel the support of the earth underneath.)

10. Think of a moment you mastered or achieved something; when you felt successful and at your best. Reflect on how that felt. Add more to your self-portrait.

11. Think of the notions of 'commitment', 'self-discipline', 'choice', and 'responsibility'. What do they mean to you? How have they affected you and your dance career? Use your reflections to make further additions to your self-portrait.

12. Think of your inspirations, resources, and means for creativity. How do you nurture your imagination? Use your notebook to make a free-flowing list of things, people, images, sensations etc. Write down your reflections too, if you feel like it. Now add more to your self-portrait.

13. Who do you consider a part of your support system? How do they give you support? Take a moment to reflect and draw to signify them on your self-portrait.

14. Take a look at the whole picture. See the whole composition you have created. What does your self-portrait tell you about yourself, your life, and your dance? Anything else you wish to add?

● 2.

Dialogue with the Inner Child:³ Find a place where you can feel at peace with yourself and write or draw comfortably.

⊗ On a new page in your notebook, draw a portrait of yourself using the hand you do not normally use. Take as long as you wish but make sure to spend at least 7 minutes. When you finish, observe the drawing and take note of what catches your attention. Try to be descriptive, not judgemental.

● Draw a vertical line to divide a new page into two. Choose two different pens for each of your hands, which you will use in a written dialogue. The hand you usually use represents you as an adult, while the other hand represents your childhood. The conversation begins with the adult asking a question in writing, which the child answers also in writing. The adult might begin by a simple question like, "Hello, how old are you?" The conversation can then move on to what the child likes, what s/he wants to do, where s/he is etc. Anything that the adult feels like asking and curious to know is fair game. But the child must be left as free as possible in answering the questions. Equally important is to let the conversation flow in its own course. Continue as long as you would like but spend at least 7 minutes.

● 3.

Letters to the Self: Write three different letters to yourself at three different stages of your life.

- In your mother's womb
- When you were 3 or 4
- At the age of 80

What would you tell them? Any news, stories, advice, confessions etc. Spend at least 10 minutes for each letter.

● 4.

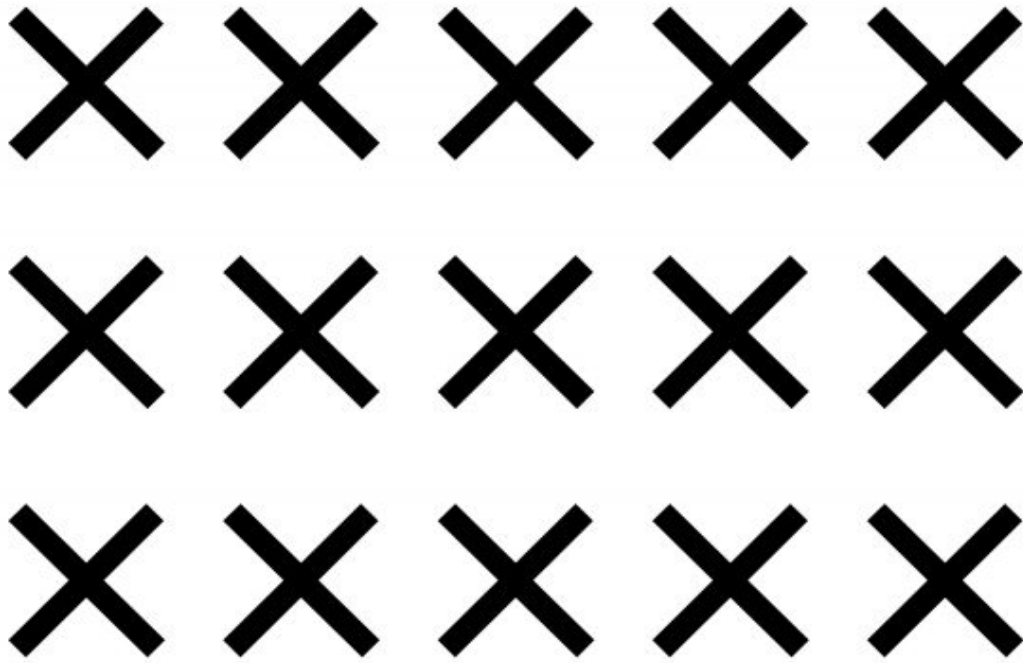
Self-Portrait in 3D: Revisit the Self-Portrait in order to use it for creating a movement based piece such as a dance phrase, an installation, a sculpture or a video. The task is to recreate the portrait in 3D, preferably by situating your own body in this work.

● Provide an overall written narration of your self-portrait that makes sense to you. Begin by looking at the whole picture you created. Write about the portrait in a descriptive manner, explaining every detail as if you were talking to someone who doesn't see it. Try to remember the process and explain what each image signifies. Give descriptions of physical details. Tell them what you thought and how you felt during the step by step process.

● Give yourself two weeks to turn this picture, your written narration, as well as your further thoughts into a piece of art. Key to remember: You are doing this for yourself; for your own pleasure and for discovering your field of play and expression!

● 5.

Giant Xs:⁴ Fill a whole page with rows of giant Xs and print it. Then take a pencil and draw around these Xs to create butterflies, smiling faces and whatever else you can imagine. Just a little exercise for your brain to go beyond your habitual thinking patterns and break the routine of your perception. Using colorful pens is recommended in order to trigger the joyful and creative child in you. Meanwhile continue your 3D production of the Self-Portrait.



— “Fill a whole page with rows of giant X’s and print it.”

● 6.

Associative Writing:⁵ Revisit your three letters to yourself and your written narration of your self-portrait. Scan through these texts and choose one word from each. Trust that a word will strike your attention and manifest itself to you. Don’t try to attribute too much meaning at the beginning. Just go with the word that catches your eye at first glance. Put each word at the beginning of a new page and spend 6 minutes writing nonstop in a free associative way. If you get stuck, write down the keyword on top of the page once again and continue from there. Feel free to use any style or form; letter, story, poem... anything that moves you. The purpose here is to freely express the conscious content as an aid for gaining access to unconscious processes and the only requirement is to not stop for 6 minutes. Also, it is important to relate to each text on a different day, rather than doing all four in one sitting. Read, chose a word, do the free writing. Sleep over it. Then visit the

other text the next day. Meanwhile, continue your 3D production of the Self-Portrait.

● 7.

Reflections on the 3D Self-Portrait: This task involves answering a set of questions about the piece you created out of your initial Self-Portrait. The below questions are for a video production. If your final product is an installation or a performance, you can try working from memory. Alternatively, you might want to make a visual documentation⁶ of your presentation and use it for analyzing your work through the questions below.

Watch the video once a day, trying to view it as if you are seeing it for the first time. Then, spend 10-15 minutes answering the designated question for that day. Notice: Although this exercise is meant to facilitate writing and reflection on your own work, we do not want you to get tired of writing either. So limit it to a maximum 30 minutes for each question.

Day 1. What is this video is about? What are your impressions after watching it? What does it tell you? What do you feel about it?

Day 2. Focus on the visual components. Colours, order of things, shapes... Make a list of the things that work for you visually. What is in the foreground? What is in the background? What is more prominent? What draws more attention? Do these fit with your priorities in the dramaturgy?

Day 3. Check the images that are meaningful to you. There may be various connotation of each image. There may be metaphors you used. Make a list of these and construct 'mind maps' (see below) in order to chart out their field of references.

Day 4. Focus on the sounds. If there is music, observe how it is used. Pay attention to words, sounds, images and their relation in the flow of the video. What do you feel works in the relation of these elements? Make a list.

Day 5. If you were to talk about this video to someone who didn't see it, what would you tell them? You can write or use a voice/video recorder. Either way, limit your storytelling to 10 minutes.

● 8.

Constructive Feedback:⁷ Find a minimum of 3 people — preferably one from performing arts, one from visual arts, and one from a non-art discipline — and ask them the following questions on your 3D self-portrait.

⦿ Positive Reinforcements

- ☐ How does this video make you think and feel?
- ☐ What elements work for you in this video/performance?
- ☐ What are the most remarkable images you remember?
- ☐ Do you have any remarks about the sound/music?

⦿ Constructive Suggestions

- ☐ Any suggestions to help develop this work?
- ☐ Anything that does not work for you? If so, what about it do you feel doesn't work?

⦿ Artistic Response

- ☐ If you were to respond to this work with movement or sound, what would you do? (Observe their creative response and see what moves in you while you watch them).

● 9.

Inspirational Reading: Before you move on with your creative process, take a rest from “active” production. Read *The Courage to Create* by Rollo May, marking sections that particularly speak to you. Once you finished, choose 5 quotes that trigger you the most and copy them on a word document. On separate sittings for each one, spend at least 15 minutes with every quote elaborating on why you chose that section of the text, what you understand from the statements, what they trigger in you mentally and/or emotionally, and how you think they are relevant for your process.

● 10.

Self-Assessment: Go back and revisit all your documents. Make notes on what worked and did not work for you; what you think needs to be developed further; and what kind of strategies you might want to pursue going forward. Reflect on all the steps of your process until now:

- ⊗ What did you learn by documenting your creative process step-by-step?
- ⊗ If you worked with others during production, how did that collaboration work out?
 - How was the briefing to the video artist?
 - How was the shooting phase?
 - How was the editing phase?

In all these phases, do you think you were clear in your expectations and assertive in your demands? How much space did you provide for the creative interpretation of the other artists involved?

⊗ How was the outcome received by the audience? The feedback and constructive criticism you received? Your own personal reflections? Knowing the steps you took towards this outcome, do you feel the process was reflected in the end product? If so, in what ways?

● 11.

Mind Map:⁸ This one is for you to restructure your focus and redirect your attention. Go over all the images, texts and documents you have created until now. It is useful to have an interested colleague who could be your soundboard as you do this. Have the conscious intention to figure out key words and concepts describing your interests along the creative process. Anything about the content or the form is valuable. Choose 3 to 4 main topics and start creating a mind map around them. This may help you restructure your thoughts and get on a new path towards a new creation.

● 12.

Inspiration: Watch at least 5 performances that inspire you. Take notes on what makes you appreciate these works of art, what works for you in these pieces, and what needs to be developed. Ask yourself; if you were to develop those pieces yourself, how would you do that? If you do not have the chance to view an actual performance, you can always watch videos online and analyze these works towards clarifying your own aesthetics.

1. The order of these practices is identical with the flow of the graduate course on “Creative Process and Documentation Methodology” that I taught at MSGSU Istanbul State Conservatory, Performing Arts Department. For an example outcome, see the video dances and the final report of Harika Onur at this link: www.idocde.net/ideos/1717. The attitude of being “joyfully serious and seriously joyful” in learning was introduced to me by my physical theater master John Britton.
2. The Emotional Welfare of Student Dancer and Their Teachers’ at the Professional Development Week in Balettakademien Stockholm, December 2008.
3. This and the following task were adapted from the exercises shared by Nazlı Azazi in her Story Telling Training.
4. This little game was introduced to me by Fahri Akdemir, who is a PM Soft Skills Trainer.
5. For more information on “Associative Writing,” see Sabina Holzer’s contribution Tracing the Invisible: Writing as a Trace.
6. For tips and guidelines towards video documentation see Manual for Video Documentation of a Dance Class by Andrea Keiz and Video Tech by Martin Streit.
7. More ideas on feedback from me can be reached from the link: www.idocde.net/ideos/1709.
8. For more information on “Mind Maps,” see Sabina Holzer’s contribution Tracing the Invisible: Writing as a Trace.