

A DANCE STORY ...

by

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My story links the two sides of one coin; physical and psychological pain. These experiences, I would call them, are heavily interrelated when a health issue arises. Our psychological condition may change due to physical pain and psychological turbulences can affect the way our body's functions work. What is our attitude as human beings towards pain? A possible answer to this question would be that first and foremost we tend to express pain. A verbal description of the symptoms to a doctor, a scream, a sigh, a painting, a poem, all can be regarded as "expressions" of pain if their content is relevant. This reflective essay concentrates on how pain is expressed through art, as well as on how a personal experience "fuelled" my choreography, in an attempt to deal with physical and psychological pain.

There are some moments in a person's life, when language is not enough to express pain, or at least do it successfully. At such moments, other forms of expression are employed. Theorist Elaine Scarry mentions that pain "does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about [a]...reversion to a state anterior to language (4). According to her, when pain is expressed, it tells a story (3). What is more, the story can be told through different discourses, that is types of art. To me, dance—the physical movements of the body—convert physical and psychological pain into a form of expression that redeems the soul. The experience of the body "undertaking" the task of freeing your mind and heart, is a very strong and unique one.

Behind the particular choreography lies a health issue I had to face a couple of months ago. The sole symptom: numbness. First, numbness on my left thumb, then on the whole hand. The next night it continued to my left foot and sometimes the whole leg. It lasted for about fifteen to twenty days, with frequent visits to doctors, brain scans and so on. My doctor could not give a name to it nor could he detect the causes that triggered it. Rather, he gave me possible scenarios; that was something that scared me even more. In my health issue, there was not any actual physical pain, but the loss of touch, accompanied with a lot of stress and fear.

When I decided to share my experience through dance, I faced some technical difficulties. As an amateur dancer, and not a choreographer, creating a choreography from scratch is not an easy task. As a consequence, my video is not a well-made choreography where space and movements are meticulously and aesthetically "measured." I would characterize the project as an improvisation of a girl for whom dance is a significant part of her life in expressing herself. Improvisation means freedom of choice, freedom from being technically right in executing particular combination of movements and steps. It is what is inherent and comes naturally from the dancer's impulses and soul. I attempted to dance to the song a couple of times. All the attempts were recorded. After watching them, I selected several parts of the improvisations and combined them to make the final outcome. I decided to follow this procedure not only because I am not a choreographer myself, but also because I wanted to see what my body had to spontaneously "say" about the health issue, without restrictions and careful preparation beforehand.

Music is closely interwoven with dance. Thus, Sia's song "I'm Still Here" was not incidental. The lyrics of the song talk about the winning of a personal battle. It is a very dynamic piece that inspired me from the beginning, since I could easily relate it to my story. The verbal message unconsciously triggered some of my movements. Where the lyrics describe the torment, I translated this sense of suffering into my dance. Finally, the song ends with an optimistic tone, and this is how I would like to speculate on my experience.

The choreography as a whole is a representation of my emotional condition at the time. Some moves may resemble the nature of my symptoms, for instance, when I make my leg move with my hands, or the multiple fallings on the ground. The choreography works as a depiction of not only physical, but also psychological pain, though. It is a statement of my emotions at the time: fear, anxiety, stress, and a sense of frustration. All these are usually present during medical examinations and the procedure of waiting for medical results, I suppose.

All in all, one of art's main purposes is to express emotions, ideas, stories... Human beings resort to art when language proves deficient. A choreography or improvisation constitutes a story. The "dance story" represents something of the humans' psyche, in capturing and communicating a variety of emotions during its course for the dancers themselves, as well as the audience. This creative project was part of a course in the field of Health Humanities. It offered me the chance to "speak" of/through my body at a time when I fumbled for words.

Works Cited

- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford UP, 1985.
- "I'm Still Here." Sia. *YouTube*. 12 October 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jrgbjk45IFA.