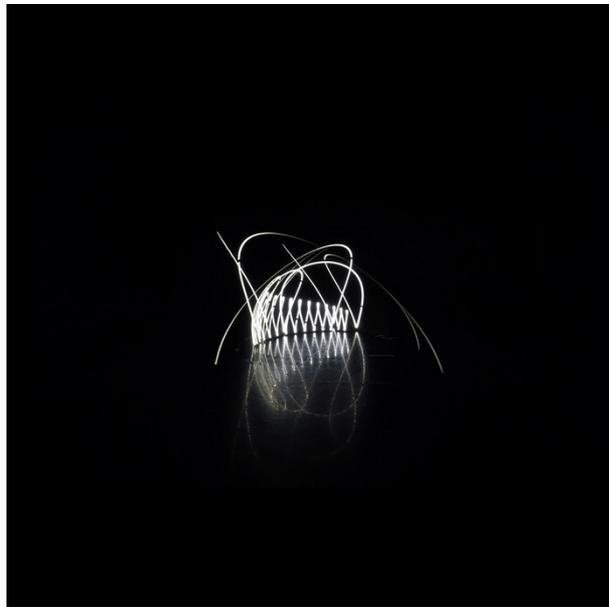


MOVEMENT AND LIGHT

WAYS OF LOOKING, FEELING, UNDERSTANDING AND REPRESENTING
MOVEMENTS IN THE WHEEL



By Robyn Haefeli

Class of 2022

Alisan Funk

DOCH, Dans Och CirkusHogskölan

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INTRODUCTION

For a short presentation, my name is Robyn Haefeli, I am a twenty-one-year-old woman from Switzerland and currently, studying circus at SKH in Sweden. My discipline is the Cyr wheel. I usually explain to people asking what I do, that I turn in a big metal ring on the ground and no, I do not run on my fingers.

Everything started from an accident, on the trampoline something went wrong, my knee did not like it at all. I had to go back to Switzerland for a surgery. This was the beginning of my research. My question at the time was:

HOW CAN I CONTINUE TO PRACTICE MY DISCIPLINE WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO MOVE MY BODY?

I started to talk and read about different techniques that help to heal an injured body. What appeared to be a path to explore was visualization, the action of imagining movements, sequences or sensations would help keeping my muscles and not losing the skills I had. I listened a lot to my internal sensations to understand movements as I could not move physically. I am now able to move again and want to see how much all my mental process helped me. Summer 2021, this is the original research question:

WHAT IS THE RELATION BETWEEN MY INTERNAL SENSATIONS (LINES DRAWING) AND THE EXTERNAL VISUAL (LIGHT DRAWING) OF THE SAME MOVEMENT?

I left the comparison part of my question on the side to focus on the present, to connect with what comes out of these lines of light. I did not find so much interest in coming back to the previous lines, it was something in itself that I felt already complete and wanted to explore something new. Winter 2021 the research question is:

HOW CAN LIGHTNING CHANGE THE PERCEPTION OF MY WHEEL PRACTICE AND HELP ME CREATE NEW VOCABULARY?

OTHER FIELDS, WHY, WHAT AND HOW

PHOTOGRAPHY

This new research question is first bringing me onto the photography field. Eric Paré (2021) is a photographer based in Montréal that has a shooting spot that has a 360° circle full of cameras around a space where he can adjust and play with lights. With this setting he is able to make a video out of a still pose. He made a series of videos and photos with circus artists and lights painting. A behind the scenes of the picture below video can be seen on YouTube (360° aerial bullet-time light-painting, 2021).

It feels important to me to see how precise pictures of light can be. For sure the technical boundaries are not the same but the idea is there, give the focus to a movement, a body or the light itself with the help of lightning.



Picture from Eric Paré, Jen Crane doing areal straps with light painting (2021).

LABANOTATION

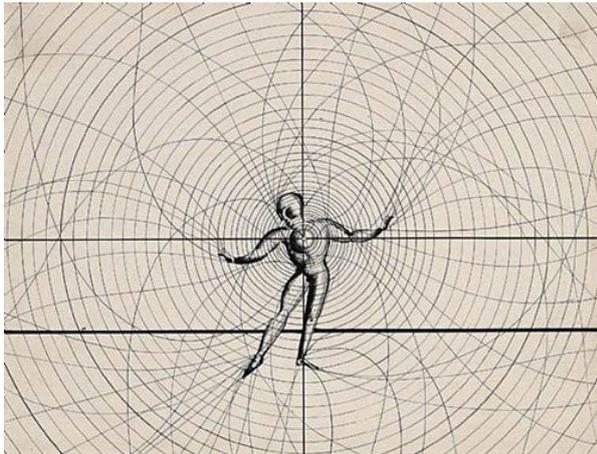
From the beginning of this research, I got interested in notation. How can I show what is going on in my mind while doing visualization? This question was the start of everything that happened during the project. Rudolph Laban (1879-1958) is a Hungarian dancer and teacher that invented the Labanotation (also called Kinetography Laban). It is a system of recording human movement, a system for analyzing and recording movement. It was created in order to help dancers get the chance to imagine, elaborate, share and extend their vocabulary. In Labanotation, the direction, the part of the body, the duration and the quality (space, weight, flow) of the movement are given (Ohio State University, 2021).

I did not go completely in that notation field but I was amazed to see how precise a movement can be written with a non-verbal language. It encouraged me in trying to develop my own vocabulary for my own language, with the risk that not everybody will understand it.

I became more interested in the feeling that the movement gives, the visual translation of the movement. I asked myself as well how different circus disciplines could be written in order to be understood by all artists but finally I prefer my version, vague and open to everyone to understand what they want.

BODY AND LINES

Oskar Schlemmer (2022) was a Bauhaus master. What I take from this movement is that it mixes fine arts, art and crafts. I like the fact that it puts together physical and non-physical art (The History of Bauhaus Art. 2022). It feels close to what I am trying to do, mix multiple forms of art and craft. Oskar Schlemmer was the head of many workshops and works that evolved around the human body and human being. I got really attracted by some of his art pieces.



This series of art works is called “slat dance” (Fabrizi. M. 2022), it is representing a body connected to the poles and the space with lines, the connections with the abstract space around it. I liked the lines connected to the body, connected in between them and floating through space. It was in a way the visual representation of me thinking about the lines I drew in my mind.

METHOD, DISCOVERIES AND RESULTS

I started to explore the physical part of the movement. I had the idea of taking long exposure pictures of a fixed lamp on the wheel to see what line it draws. To answer my questions, I tried everything I could, didn't close any doors before trying it. I went through pictures, videos and physical work, I put myself in and out of the wheel, in and out of focus to have a big range of combinations.

During this experimental phase my focus shifted a lot. It was in the beginning on me in the wheel but not physically, then on the movement of the wheel (and not on me even though I was in it) and all together, me in the wheel physically and the movement of the wheel. All these different combinations were possible thanks to the illumination, the lights gave the focus to what I wanted to show. The movement vocabulary changed with the light and the focus, if the focus is only on the wheel, the movement my body executes does not matter as much as when the focus is on me as well.

I will now separate my work into different experiments, they are different steps of my work and are all connected.

EXPERIMENT 1.1: SICK FIGURES

I drew stick figures in wheels that exaggerate what they are supposed to do to execute technical elements. The illuminated body parts are the ones that help me to perform the movements and the arrows are the mechanical action I need to do, directions, speed variations and forces, the smaller their back line is, the more they are going in or out. When a part of the body goes out of the wheel it means that I have the feeling of stretch not necessarily being straight and when it stays inside it is because it is straight. On their side I put two different texts. The one on the left is what I think about while doing this part of the movement and the right one is what I am supposed to think about or at least do (usually what my teacher tells me).

Being injured was the start of the first part of my research, a way to express my movement without having my body physically on the wheel.

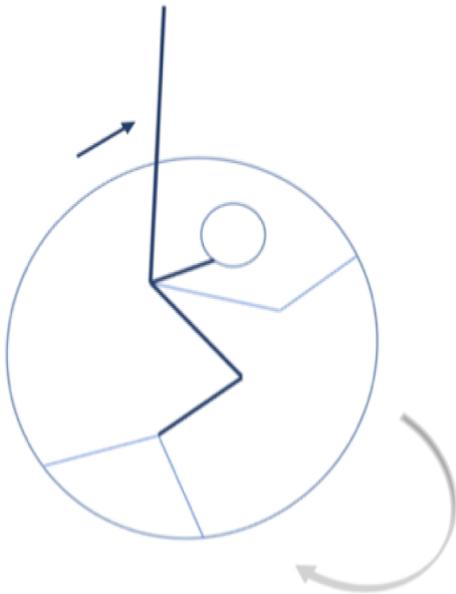


FRONT HANDSPRING

NEUTRAL POSITION



BEGINNING



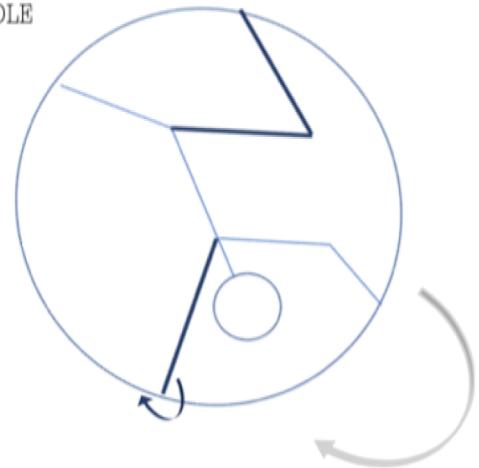
Right arm really to the back,
Belly in the front to compensate,
wait

Have a good prep without letting the belly go out,
Have the body weight in the feet,
Try not to hang

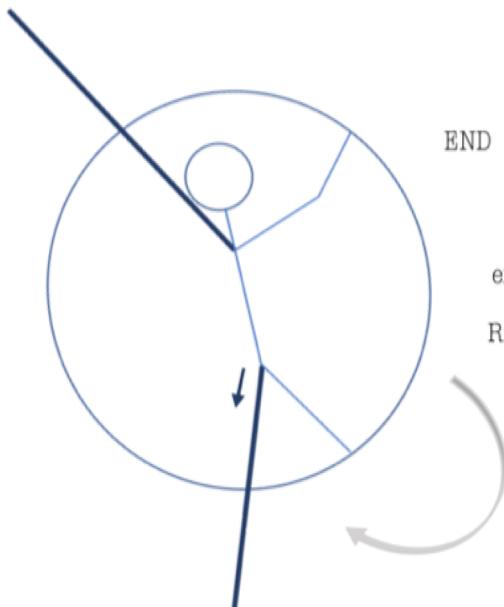
MIDDLE

Right arm straight (floor one, in support)
Left leg bended (absorbs the movement),
Right leg ready to land (as straight as possible)

Stay solid,
Not bend too much the legs like a frog,
Look at the right hand,
Stay on the toes



END

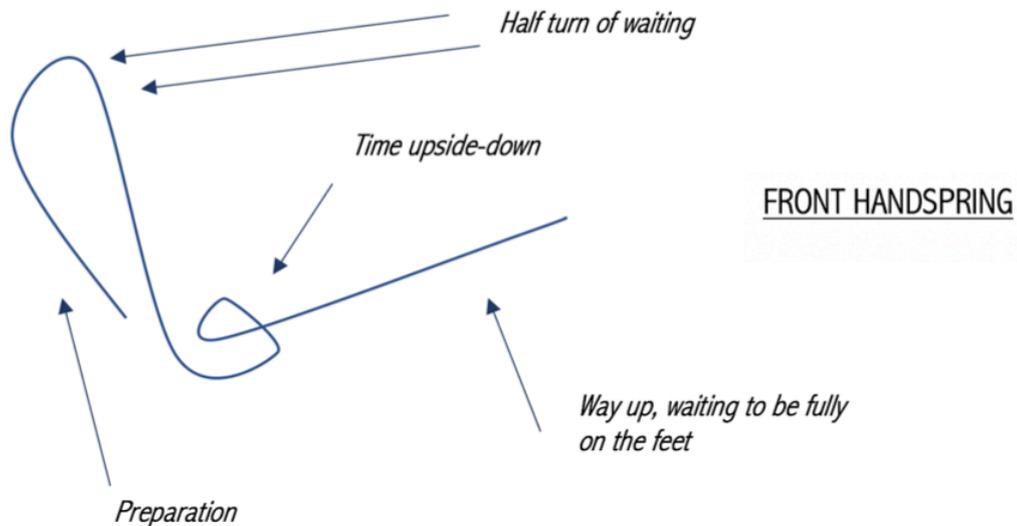


Right arm extended to slow down,
Right leg straight

Try to put the body weight on the right foot (on the toes)
Try not to bend the left arm,
Stretch out,
Let the head in the alignment of the body (not pull with it to stand up),
Keep turning,
Really look for a long moment at the left arm

EXPERIMENT 1.2: LINES

From my drawings and mind stimulations I started to feel a tempo, a rhythm in every movement that I feel or see. I drew it as a line, using a style of making lines that would never be straight lines but always curved depending on what is the next step. I had to comment these lines with some words, to specify where it starts and stops and where the acceleration is.



EXPERIMENT 1.3: EVOLUTION OF LINES

What if I could remove the comments of the lines by bringing more details onto the line of the drawing? I did it by mixing paint and pen drawing. Making the line more or less thick gives the acceleration, the weight of the movement. The thickness of the line corresponds to the acceleration, therefore to the effort required. A constant speed rotation requires no effort, I highlighted the parts where the change occurs, the change is the acceleration.

FRONT
HANDSPRING



EXPERIMENT 2.1: PICTURES

Things have now evolved, a year later, I can finally walk, run, jump and spin in my wheel again!

In the experiments 2 to 6, the research obtained a shift of focus. I am now looking at my practice and see how the work I have done last year has impacted my movement.

I want to explore now the physical part of the movement and how my practice is seen from the outside. I followed the idea of attaching a light on my wheel or on my body, and record a movement in the dark. With a long exposure mode on the camera, I can capture the movement of the light on one picture. Will it be the same as the line I drew? Different? Will there be any correspondence? This was my idea before starting the physical work (summer 2021).

This is what I did, I went in studios and played with the wheel and the lights, taking pictures from two to thirty seconds long. I enjoyed watching these different lines appearing on the camera, it was for me another way of seeing my practice. There are a lot of subtilities that we cannot see in the dark, completely different movements can have exactly the same wheel pattern.

I made a series of pictures that I called Lines of Light.

The speaker



The writing



The half ring



Three lights

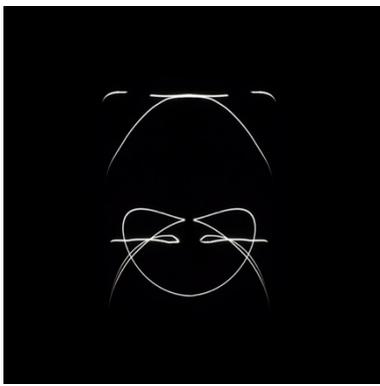


EXPERIMENT 2.2: PHOTOSHOP

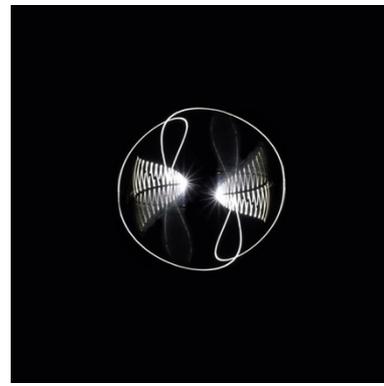
With the series of pictures Lines of Light, I wanted to play a little bit. Could they take new shapes? Could I manipulate them? Use one picture multiple times, juxtaposing them to make it look different, take another shape?

I enjoyed playing with the round shape on the pictures to get the feeling of the wheel more present, and on the opposite go even further in the new shapes the pictures created. I managed to change, play with the movements of light that were on the pictures.

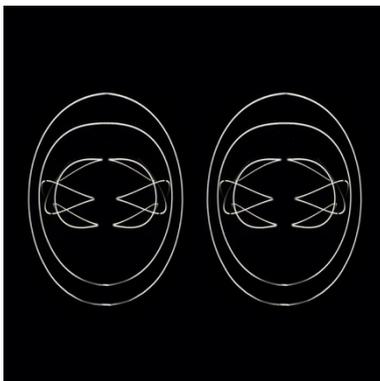
The cat



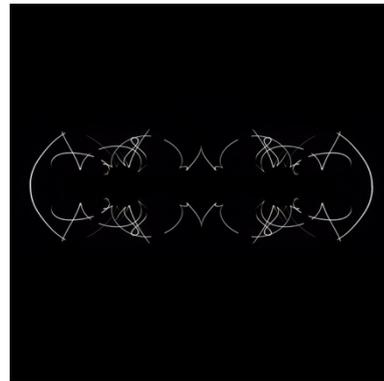
Full ring



The alien eyes



ZORO



EXPERIMENT 3: WORMS VIDEO

I realized that it might be difficult to understand how the pictures were made. I started to film it, which gave me another perspective, another eye on my movement. Playing with camera settings, shutter speed, aperture and ISO, I landed at one place where the light was actually small lines moving on the camera. I called them the worms, small entities moving slowly in the frame. With the editing I modified the speed, made up new rhythms to give a little different energy to these lines. I used music to help me get rhythm impulses and made a video called Worms of Light (Haefeli, 2021)

EXPERIMENT 4: SCULPTURES

The sculptures are the 3D representation of the lines that the light and my wheel drew. They are the materialization of the movement. There is an interpretation part that is coming from my sensations and the feeling of space while looking at the pictures and trying to recreate them. It is another layer of the research, a way to understand movement differently, another way of seeing these lines of light.

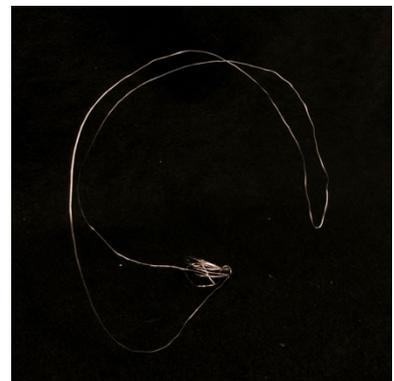
The bridge



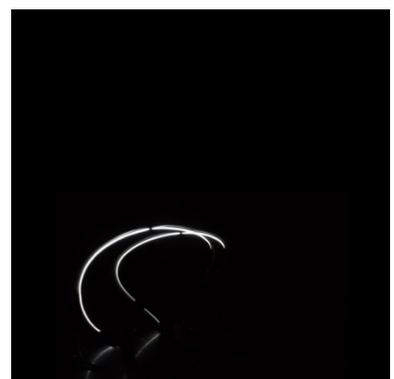
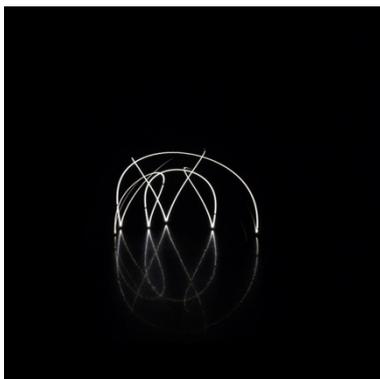
The man



The wave



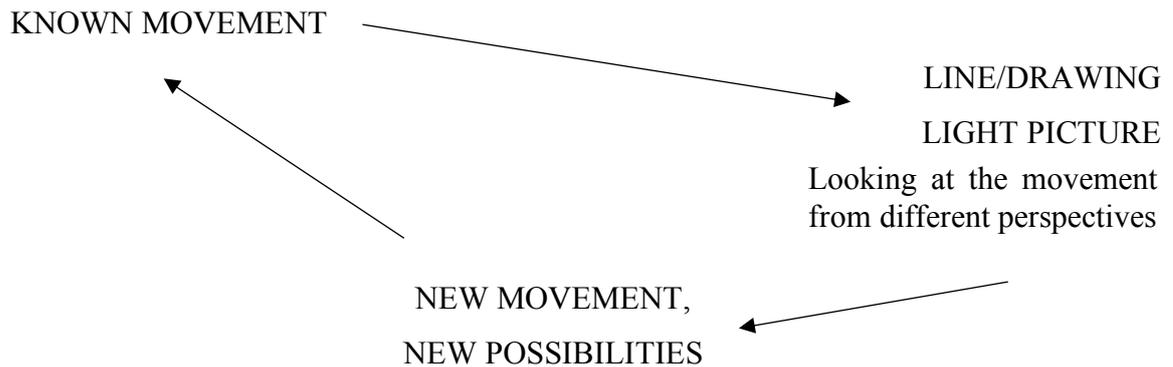
And the related pictures



EXPERIMENT 5: MOVEMENTS

How did all these experiments impact my movement in the wheel?

At the beginning, the work was lines, based on a movement. This time I did the opposite, I have a lot of new lines, which opens up the possibility of related movements. The movement is the translation of the line, in my body. The process can be summed up in this little drawing:



In a way these lines are starting points for creation, they can help me create new vocabulary or just put together movements to have new sequences. Here, the focus is given to the movement of the wheel but also on me in the wheel. Below are images from the video, which can be found on YouTube (Haefeli, 2022).

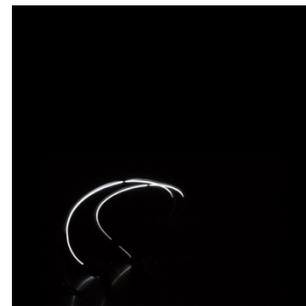
Movement A



Movement B



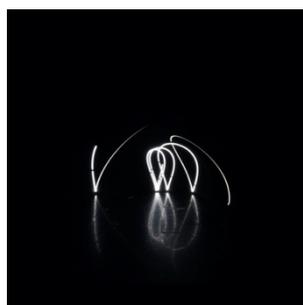
Movement C



Movement D



Movement E



DOCUMENTATION

Throughout my research journey, I wrote little sentences when I found it important. These memos are my thoughts, questions and victories of last year. By keeping a daily journal, even if it's not every day, it gave me the opportunity to back-step on my work and record my current thoughts.

During the presentation, I chose some of them and put them together to create a soundscape. They are not in the right order but like my work, I went back and forth in between my experimentations and the timeline is not so important in the end.

The evolution of the pictures and the videos is also a part of the documentation. The changes of settings, studios and light can be seen following the timeline. It started in the sauna in the changing room as this was the only dark place available. On the first pictures I could see myself, without the wheel and it ended with the pictures showed in the presentation.

RISK ASSESSMENT

In addition to the risk during normal training sessions, the dark was added. I made sure I got my body used to spinning with no visual references and to the darkness before trying movements. In order to avoid any unexpected falls, I did only easy and known movements when the light was off. Everything went well during the whole research process. The risks for the presentation just appeared in the really end of the project as it was getting clearer.

These are the other points I made sure to be safe during the presentation:

- Multiple checks to be sure that the drapes will not fall
- Clear the space from cables or end of drapes to make sure the audience cannot trip over
- Define a clear stage space to avoid the wheel rolling away with not enough space to catch it before its collision with the audience
- Safety lights around in case of need

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

I've done my whole research with almost only things I already had. The lights were old bike lamps that I should have been more careful of, not to let them fall and roll on them. I found some old Velcro to attach them on the wheel. The camera and the tripod were borrowed from friends and family. The only new things were the pictures that got printed out. With all these elements into account, I can say that my work did not have a big environmental impact.

Other than that, I feel like my work has been mainly neutral, I was not a lot on the pictures and when so, with plain and simple clothing. I did not assert a political or social opinion. I like it like that, I feel that it makes it easier for everybody to feel involved in the work.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD

It was only in the end of the project that I realized that I was not only in the circus field but really in a lot of other forms of art. I mixed live performance with still pieces of art such as pictures and sculptures but also moving ones like videos. I realized I could try to show the presentation not in theaters but more in museums or exhibitions places. I like the fact that it brings together multiple forms of art even though I do not know exactly if and what it brings separately to each of them. I do not feel like an expert in any of these art forms but I feel like having constructed something by making them become a piece all together.

However, I hope that the circus field will benefit with a part of my work. One of the goals I had in the beginning was to go through the injury and the huge amount of time that I was feeling wasted. I hope that I managed to show that I could still do things, use my time and experience to benefit my own and other people's work. A second goal was to find a way of writing my movements, which I partially achieved. It became during the work progress less important. I found a way of writing down my sensations, that other people manage to read and this is a success. It means that it could be used to lay down on paper movements and sensations that words could maybe not totally explain. Another goal was to get inspiration from movements I already know. This also worked, I managed to create new content by just watching what old content made, that simple. I feel that this could help many artists, there is no need to look far away, a creation tool is just there, at the artist's feet.

CONCLUSION

An injury is a hard moment to go through. It is first hard to accept that you are “broken”, that it will take time, energy and that you need to help your body and mind in new ways, you cannot just continue as you were doing. At least, for me this was a first big step.

Then, I started this work, that was in the beginning just a journal to show to the school what I was doing during these months out and I am really happy that it created something that I am so interested in. It was not that easy but as I realized that the injury journey was going to take even more than six months I switched something in my mind, I was not trying to do an assignment but also trying to help my future coming back process and with it, my future artistic development. I started to feel even more connected and I agreed to put energy and time into this project. As new ideas came up, I got more and more motivated to work...I then started to have new ideas popping out and wanted to work on, discover things around it. I am thankful for this.

The question “Who is this work for?” came a lot. The answer is changing as I am working on it. In the beginning it was for me a way of staying in touch with my practice, it was giving me something to do and to work on. Then I kept on working on my project to be able to interact and exchange with other artists/students. They made me want to give a complete or at least on-going research about my practice. When I showed the first part of my work to my classmates, feedback that came out were that some were less scared of being injured. I gave them the feeling that even injured they could still do something and because I anyway am in this strange period (strange in a sense that I cannot practice “as usual”). I feel like I need to continue explore this period to help maybe others to go through this though moment, help them keep a positive mindset of something negative. But the most important to say is that I enjoyed doing it, I learned a lot and I am even looking forward to explore more and more.

I encountered some boundaries on my way, physical ones and technological ones. I would not like to change any of the physical problems I had to face because this is what made the research happen. However, in the technology field a little help could be interesting. To have better quality pictures would mean I could play even more with them, someone that would move or start the camera when necessary, could be a super nice help. But this would be great for the future, I think I was happy to start with what I had. I am happy I got the chance to learn how to use the features of the camera and I am happy I struggled with the pictures

which made me think about the videos. All the problems I was facing gave me impulses to put in my work, I cannot ask for more.

This work that started from something negative became a wonderful project that I am really thankful for. I grew up in my practice, in my relation to the wheel, in my way of working and in my mind. I discovered a new direction that I love to explore. It gave me another field to work on, another place to search on. I really want to continue this project, maybe sell it to small exhibits, get more pictures, ask people to try and listen what they think of it. It feels nice to have a project that does not only involves only my body physically.

LAST WORDS

I am really happy to give a special thank you to all the people that helped me during these months. I was not an easy living every day but you all helped me a lot! To all the people that drove me to appointments; the ones that made me train when I really did not want to; the ones that taught me how to edit, take or see my pictures; the ones that read and gave me advices on my writing; the ones that came up with the perfect questions to make my work go forward; *thank you.*

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