# The Ethics of Somaesthetics: Lex Shcherbakov's Inclusive Somatic Practices:
## An Interview with Liza Futerman

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## Introduction:

This interview with Lex Shcherbakov contributes to ongoing explorations in somaesthetics by highlighting how inclusive artistic practices transform not only individual lives but also cultural perceptions of embodiment, agency, and creativity. As Richard Shusterman has argued, somaesthetics expands philosophy into lived, embodied practice, foregrounding the body not merely as an object of analysis but as a medium of experience, cultivation, and expression (1999). In this sense, the dialogue with Shcherbakov situates itself within a growing field of inquiry into how somatic work functions simultaneously as a philosophical practice and as a mode of social transformation.

The interview was conducted in Russian and translated to English by the interviewer, Liza Futerman. This is a semi-structured format, allowing for an open exchange that moves between biography, practice, and philosophy. Shcherbakov, a Russian-born psychologist, physical theatre director, and inclusive arts educator, brings over two decades of experience across Europe and, more recently, in Israel, working at the intersection of psychology, somatic movement, and inclusive performance. His hybrid practice includes creative-somatic training, mixed-ability pedagogy, and community-based performance-making, all of which emphasise embodied sensitivity as both an artistic and ethical stance.

This project emerges from a deep personal and professional investment in somaesthetic inquiry. As a Mixed-Abilities Contact Improvisation practitioner, somatic educator, and researcher, my work has consistently examined the intersections of Contact Improvisation, somatic pedagogy, and mixed-abilities practice. My research and professional engagement in the fields of dementia, mental health, and end-of-life care, together with my involvement in inclusive performance practices and my lived experience as a person with an invisible disability, are grounded in a sustained commitment to perceiving human presence beyond dominant biomedical, functional, or socially marginalizing frameworks of illness and disability.This background informs the approach to interviewing Shcherbakov, situating the dialogue within a shared ethos of embodied attentiveness and transformative inclusion.

As I write this introduction, I am reminded of Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* (1998), starring Jim Carrey. The film offers a vivid example of how individual choice and agency can be systematically denied. Truman Burbank's life unfolds as an elaborate spectacle in which his most intimate experiences are exposed for public consumption, stripped of privacy, and orchestrated

without his knowledge or consent. The film raises unsettling questions about cultural norms concerning agency, spectatorship, and the ethics of treating human life as a social experiment. This critique resonates with contemporary debates about how disability is observed and represented: too often, individuals with disabilities are positioned as objects of scrutiny rather than as subjects of agency. By contrast, somatic practices invite us to shift attention away from what is merely visible towards what is sensed, felt, and relationally co-created. Such reorientation fosters not only aesthetic enrichment but also ethical responsiveness. It is precisely for this reason that I chose to reach out to my colleague and friend, Lex Shcherbakov, whose artistic and pedagogical endeavours explore these themes by cultivating somatic sensitivity, inclusive authorship, and embodied forms of recognition.

The relevance of this interview lies, therefore, in its capacity to illuminate how somaesthetic practices are lived and theorised in contexts of inclusion, creativity, transformation, and care. By attending to Shcherbakov's reflections on practice, values, and somatic sensitivity, the discussion foregrounds the ethical and aesthetic stakes of embodiment in contemporary culture.

## Interview:

## Can you describe your artistic practice?

My artistic practice consists of several strands. Until recently, these strands existed somewhat separately. For more than twenty years, I have recognised myself in three roles: psychologist, physical theatre director, and educator involved in inclusive practices. For a long time, these areas developed in parallel: I worked in organisations and led projects related to inclusion, participated in theatrical productions as director, choreographer, and performer, and taught psychology and related disciplines at academic institutions.

Although I sensed there was an inherent connection between these strands, for a long time I did not have a project that would bring these together. Still, I noticed that in working with professional actors I intuitively incorporated elements of self-reflection, internal sensation, and sensory-system awareness into training and staging (even before I had the words to reflect on these practices as such). I immersed actors in somatic practices without yet having the terminology for what I was doing; I simply realised that this kind of practice helped them become more focused, expressive, and confident.

Gradually, I recognised that this direction was particularly compelling for me in performative contexts. At a certain point, I began to lose interest in conventional theatre where serving the text and projecting one's ego on stage are paramount. Instead, I increasingly turned towards communication practices within the group, caring about participants' personal stories, their mental and emotional states, and how their bodies interacted in the process of preparing a performance or other artistic forms.

This shift marked the beginning of a new artistic quest, which altered both the content of my work and its aesthetic framework. Now I define this as artistic-somatic or creative-somatic practice. At the same time, the inclusive component remains vital: I continue working with neurodivergent and disabled individuals. This is no longer a separate strand in my work but a necessary component of what I wish to achieve as an artist, thinker, and individual. I regard inclusivity in the arts as a distinct domain, one that does not necessarily require staged expression.

I believe there are practices that do not require to culminate in a performance. My aim is to create a sustainable process in which people with mental differences begin to sense their bodily presence and social inclusion, perceiving shared sessions as part of their lives and routines. Such work develops their communicative and bodily skills while broadening their expressive

repertoire. Although distinct from conventional stage practice, the exercises and scores I use with such groups often prove equally relevant to participants who see themselves as performers.

The dynamics and timing of these tasks may differ, but from my perspective a universal quality emerges. The understanding of tasks remains lively, flexible, and evolving. It is difficult for me to say that my approach is fully developed, but I feel it is becoming increasingly integrated — both in work with people with disabilities and with those oriented towards performing arts.

## What first led you to pursue this field of practice and research?

My first encounter with an inclusive project happened during adolescence in Moscow. I joined an organization known then as a sociocultural rehabilitation center working with children and young people with intellectual disabilities. I became involved as a volunteer, initially taking on a tutor-like role: helping to organize sessions as well as create and hold spaces where participants could better orient themselves within rules and goals.

It was incredibly engaging, not at all tied to altruism, my motivation was more exploratory and deeply internal: I was genuinely curious. We, as teenagers, were engaged in many activities—from folk and theatre games to craft workshops. Particularly impactful were moments of living a shared rhythm: for example, establishing and sustaining a daily cycle together with individuals with evident mental differences. It felt like immersing myself in an entirely different world.

I am deeply grateful to the individuals, especially Natalia Timofeevna Popova, who created that environment and gave us, as adolescents, the opportunity to be a part of such a rich world of possibilities. This experience shaped me personally and later, professionally. It gave me an understanding of how an inclusive society might feel like, how one might interact within it, and what genuine togetherness means. I realised that mutual understanding is also an artistic form—one that can be explored, developed, and supported. It was a whole cosmos of impressions and experiences. I would not be exaggerating if I said that it enabled me to build my identity, to recognize myself and my place within the community and in the world at large.

This practice gradually shaped what I do today. As an adult, I also came to be interested in the performative field. After completing a master's degree in psychology, I went on to study directing. This strand initially developed separately, with the same passion and enthusiasm as with inclusive practices. I eagerly explored theatre and choreography.

Over time, all these separate elements merged through embodiment. It became foundational. Through contact improvisation, Feldenkrais practices, and other somatic approaches, I delved deeper into the field of bodily presence and expressivity. That's how I arrived at what I now call my artistic and research terrain: a place where inclusion, somatics, performativity and pedagogy come together.

## In what ways does your teaching practice engage somaesthetic principles?

My teaching experience encompasses a variety of courses and workplaces. I have taught psychology and pedagogy at academic institutions in Europe, at a music and dance academy in the Czech Republic, and at a faculty of art therapy, also in the Czech Republic. In addition, I have conducted numerous courses and trainings for diverse groups of performers, psychologists, psychiatrists, communities brought together by a shared idea or task, adolescent refugees from Ukraine, and many others.

For the purposes of our conversation, I wish to highlight my work with art therapy students, where the task was to expand their bodily expressive capacities. In the course of such trainings the theme of interpretation inevitably arises because basic bodily practices in and of themselves

are not always rich enough for expression purposes. I was aiming for devising tasks that could both develop motor skills and engage the whole personality, involve work with one's presence, and connect metaphorically with each participant's experience and background.

Many students observed that through movement they were able to transform their understanding of verbal therapy. They recognised that when we discuss a situation in words and search for solutions, the so-called problem remains confined to the verbal domain. However, when we act and move, it becomes apparent that the solutions reached intellectually often diverge from the actions taken physically. These levels – the verbal and the physical – can be profoundly divided within a single person: the bodily aspect of the personality may not correspond to the verbal one. In some cases, a person feels confident and competent, while in others they lose confidence and regress to a level resembling childhood. This opens up a vast space for creative methods in the context of therapy. Students, equipped with a broad theoretical foundation, can apply it to emerging bodily experience, which constitutes a great richness. I am convinced that every psychologist and every therapist should have experience of somatic bodily practices, as these broaden the professional foundation and enhance the quality of care, making it more sustainable and effective.

When it comes to teaching psychologists or social workers, one of the topics I address is the expansion of the concept of the 'cultural form.' This concept is closely connected to inclusive practices, because situations often arise in which we do not know how to organise activities, largely because many of our routines are based on structures that either do not require – or are unwilling to consider – individual needs. When working with people with intellectual disabilities, we must reorganise our priorities and reframe what we understand about culture and form.Such work may influence additional domains of care and education practices and support a shift from system-oriented models toward person-centered care and education.

I understand cultural form as any form of organising activity or social experience. This is not a scientific but a practical understanding: a cultural form can be a café, a workshop, a festival, a theatre studio, and many other examples. All social phenomena can be considered through the lens of cultural form. A cultural form has specific qualities, and we can approach it as a platform to engage with. For instance, a café can exist in different modes, but it is important to understand how to make this form as inclusive as possible. What conditions are necessary for people with intellectual differences to participate? The same applies to theatre and other forms: it is crucial to account for the individual characteristics of participants rather than grouping all people with intellectual disabilities as having the same particularities.

To make it happen, we must identify the basic aspects required for this cultural form to exist. During the course, we analyzed various cultural forms from the perspective of inclusivity. At the end of the course, students developed their own inclusive models, where the key element was the student's personal interest in a particular cultural form: ceramics, music, theatre, cooking, sewing, or any other activity. Students identified the inclusive aspects of this socio-physical activity and shaped them into a cultural form accessible to people with intellectual differences.

Thus, one of the most important aspects in the learning process is the student's subjective involvement in the activity. This enables each student to expand their understanding of the activity itself and transform the experience into an inclusive space.

## How does somatics influence your practice?

Somatic disciplines, or somatics in general, have become the primary focus of my attention—both in daily practice and theoretical interest. I draw inspiration from reading articles, observing

new directions, reflecting, and communicating with colleagues. The field of somatics today is remarkably vibrant and dynamic—it's developing, expanding, and is enriched with new meanings and discoveries. It's not merely a subject of study—it's already part of my everyday practice, part of my way of life.

On one level, somatics is a tool I use to address concrete tasks in my work. On another, it's a living presence with which I interact. Somatics for me is simultaneously object and subject. It plays an increasingly central role in both inclusive and performative contexts.This becomes especially evident when working with people who come to performative practices as adults without professional theatre experience. We inevitably enter somatic territory: through attention to sensory systems, slowing down, engaging with internal sensations. We learn to notice subtle bodily signals, to make them conscious and meaningful, and to see how they affect movement expressivity, presence, and contact. Without this approach, contemporary performative work is unthinkable to me.

When working with people with disabilities—especially those who are non verbal—embodiment becomes the main, if not the only, channel of interaction. We work with movement, while physically engaging with objects, space, and the group members. Sometimes this isn't strictly somatics in the narrow sense—but it still involves movement as a way of knowing, awareness, and expanding capacities. Through physical action arises understanding of a situation—and with it growth, communication, and transformation.

## What are you working on these days?

I am currently working on several projects, all of which are inclusive and engage with somatics to enhance the socio-physical understanding of the body in space and time. In Jaffa, at the Mendel Cultural Centre, I lead a social group for parents and children with special needs. The group is divided into two subgroups: children and adolescents. We engage in physio-social practices through simple movement tasks and interactions with parents and volunteers, we create a shared space where movement and bodily interaction form the basis for spending time together.The project has now been running for a year and has already developed into a warm community. Beyond bodily practices, the social aspects are becoming increasingly important: meetings and celebrations, such as birthdays and holiday gatherings. Community formation, in my view, is not of lesser importance but rather the ultimate goal. The physical practice here is a means to an end. A somatic community is a space where parents of children with special needs can share difficulties, worries, discoveries, and achievements. This is evolving into a self-sustaining group of openness and trust.

In the future, the project is expected to grow into a social space where somatic practices will take place, and where professionals and people interested in inclusive activities and research will meet. It will also offer space for siblings of neurodivergent individuals to come together and participate in creative and artistic projects that will help family members process their lived experience through somatic–artistic engagement. I feel inspired and motivated in working towards this goal.

Another major project these days—as a newcomer to Israel—is my integration into Israel's cultural environment. I'm going through this process slowly while fostering my local artistic and professional community. I recently completed a residency at the Kelim Choreography Center under the supervision of Natalie Zuckerman, which has helped me develop my artistic practice and meet other artists who are passionately involved in the local inclusive artistic creative scene.

This has been a wonderful experience and has provided a fruitful platform for me to keep

developing the performative piece, called *Café ULYSSES*, I've started working on during the residency. This work draws inspiration from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a novel that has left a profound and lasting impression on me. An initial twenty-minute pilot performance was presented at the Tzomet Festival (*Crossroads*), a platform dedicated to independent choreographers in Israel. The presentation of the pilot generated significant public interest in the theme. Following this, a grant proposal was submitted and successfully awarded, enabling us to proceed.

Currently *Café ULYSSES* brings together disabled dancers as well as dancers from Galit Liss's company—female performers aged 60 and above—together with contemporary dancers from Israel. The project engages with the mythic trajectory of the Odyssey while simultaneously referencing Joyce's reworking in *Ulysses*. It seeks to investigate the intersections between the domestic and the mundane on the one hand, and spaces of deep transformation on the other. In doing so, it addresses how everyday routines—sometimes monotonous, at times destructive—intersect with essential, inner, and potentially spiritual dimensions of lived experience.

Additionally, I lead several groups for adults who have no professional theatre backgrounds. Participants come to discover embodiment as a potential resource and a field of curiosity. It allows them to see new pathways of development within an established self, to uncover unexpected horizons, and perhaps gradually form a lasting interest in physical theatre that includes somatics.

Recently, I came up with a practice I like to call 'Ball Contact', a training using large fitness balls aimed at developing technical contact-improv skills especially for people who are new to Contact and for Contact Improvisation instructors who work with individuals who have little to no experience in Contact Improvisation. This practice helps to develop sensitivity to weight sensing, to embody support, balance and other skills essential in contact improvisation but that come only with practice. This is not a random set of exercises, but a meticulously assembled somatic routine, almost like a step-by-step manual that enables deeper understanding and technique. I personally enjoy Contact Improvisation jams, yet I feel that for me to interact freely and deeply in a jam space, it's important to undergo embodied development and expand understanding of the language of Contact Improvisation. That's precisely why I chose to develop this particular practice: in order to expand the palette of movement possibilities.

Finally, there are the collaborative projects with you, Liza. One of our endeavours is entitled *Embodying Identities in Space and Time* and it explores contact improvisation as a practice that develops physical, communicative, performative, and social skills. Our primary focus is the inner world of the practitioner: exploring how embodiment connects to psychological content of the personality, and how somatic practice can access deep layers of experience and nurture a collective group space. This work is anchored in Contact Improvisation and somatics. In these workshops, we explore identity through the lens proposed by Contact Improvisation scholar, instructor, and practitioner Nita Little, who defines identity in Contact Improvisation as the generosity of weight-giving from one body to another (Little 2014).

I've also joyfully joined the preparation for Liza's MDance recital performance at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance under the artistic supervision of Iris Erez. This performance entitled *When Things Fall Apart Together* explores the function of touch in contact improvisation as a healing apparatus for traumatized bodies. The exploration of agency and choice through active and passive touch in contact improvisation practice materialises through the moving and speaking body as it explores its identity by interacting with another body, with objects and with gravity. Through this work, we also examine modes of non-hierarchical leadership, as well as the political and educational applications of contact improvisation. The piece premiered at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance on December 3, 2025, marking the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Following the premiere, we were invited

to showcase the work at a special learning summit at Vertigo Eco Art Village for Feldenkrais teachers involved in a project teaching mathematics in elementary schools. The presentation and subsequent discussion aimed to support educators in fostering a growth mindset through process-oriented learning.

Liza and I have different biographies—I've been in Israel just one year; Liza has lived here most of her adult life. We both speak Russian, but her Russian is in a "dormant" state—she speaks Hebrew and English fluently, whereas for me Russian remains my primary language, English and Hebrew secondary.These differences, much like the gender difference, become a point of intersection from which a new way of communication is born. Although communication between us is fractured, it is rich with meaning and overlaps that make this work interesting since we constantly find ourselves lost and found in translation. This work weaves together Contact Improvisation, spatial awareness, internal sensitivity, text, and multilingual layering. In this inter-linguistic, inter-embodied space, we observe and become aware of our identities, allowing them to manifest and interact in a performative form.

Recently, fate has unexpectedly brought me the opportunity to work with students at an arts high school in collaboration with disabled dancers from Vertigo's *Power of Balance*. I'm co-facilitating this group together with Liza. The goal of this project is to explore the possibilities of mixed-abilities Contact Improvisation annual workshop that is transformed into a 7-minute performance. But more importantly, as I see it, the goal is to foster a meaningful encounter between two diverse groups.

The project's title is "*From Workshop to Stage*" and it fully aligns with my approach to building stage materials: material emerges from the laboratory process, from exercises and real interactions among participants, and then gradually takes shape into a performative work. I am deeply grateful that this is happening here in Israel. It enables me to integrate into the country's creative landscape and to continue working in a familiar format, where my personal experience and professional skills can develop further and find meaningful applications. Special thanks go to you, Liza, to Tali Wertheim, the manager of the Power of Balance Integrated Dance Center within Vertigo's dance company, and to the arts high school for making me part of this project and for trusting my professional and artistic interests as well as for recognizing the meaning and value of this collaboration.

## What do you hope to achieve?

My current aim is to deeply immerse myself in the Israeli environment, both within the somatic community and the theatre-dance field. Simultaneously, I dream of creating a space where these practices can organically co-exist and become an integral part of life. Life practices in the sense that they contribute to personality formation and horizon expansion.

To deepen my practice and expand my network and reach I've joined Vertigo's Power of Balance mixed abilities Contact Improvisation teachers' training certificate program—a wonderful community and brilliantly organized model. Their approach and internal structure align closely with what I seek as a foundation for my own practice and future development.

Furthermore, building interdisciplinary connections is essential to me. I find inspiration in collaborating with medical professionals: psychiatrists, physiotherapists, movement researchers, artists, and, of course, people with differences. I see my role as creating a space that functions as a resource: a milieu where these specialists can meet, enrich one another, initiate new projects, and support each other through dynamic professional and human interaction that will help foster inclusive and supportive models of being together.

The more comprehensive dream I have is *MAKOM* which in Hebrew means both "place" and "space," a dual meaning that precisely reflects the idea I seek to manifest.

The vision of MAKOM is to create a shared environment where diverse social worlds intersect. Where people with pronounced intellectual disabilities, people without disabilities, artists from different disciplines, and professionals engaged with the themes of embodiment, cognition, and consciousness can come together and co-create. Some steps in this direction have already been taken. I have formed groups engaged in social gymnastics, object-based practices, and communication in the absence of verbal means. Gradually, I intend to establish a permanent venue, a cultural venue where people with intellectual disabilities can be present together with those open to interaction.

Direct contact with people with significant intellectual differences is not always simple. For such encounters to occur, one must undergo a certain process of *attunement*. This begins with attention to oneself—one's sensations, needs, and limitations. Somatic, bodily, and theatrical practices foster this attention. By cultivating them, participants find it easier to enter a dialogue, even where no shared spoken language exists. It is precisely such an environment of acceptance that MAKOM seeks to create.

The center is gradually taking form: we are opening additional groups, accessible to anyone who wishes to join. Many volunteers come to try it out; some stay, while others leave once they realise that ongoing participation requires time and energy. And this, in fact, is one of the key conditions for development: only through continuity can a unique language of interaction be formed. Communication here is not built on formal language but on the creation of sustainable modes of contact.

It is essential that we don't see this environment as an altruistic project. Rather, it is enriched with meanings and resources that nurture all participants: the development of bodily and communicative skills, the broadening of personal experience, and the discovery of new forms of interaction. Engagement with people with cognitive, sensory, or physical differences becomes a resource for everyone, provided it is approached as an opportunity and not merely as a social obligation.

At present, the center's work unfolds along several directions:

1. Work with Parents.

Parents are among the key participants in the project. They possess unique experiential knowledge of living and interacting with their children, often reorganizing their entire lives around this constant presence. This knowledge is invaluable: parents can share it with others—especially those with younger children—as well as with volunteers and the broader community of the center. At the same time, parents themselves need emotional and psychological support. Their perspectives, developed under challenging conditions, are deeply meaningful for the centre's work.

2. *The Special Gaze* Project.

This year we plan to launch a new strand of our activity, inviting specialists from diverse disciplines to observe and participate in the social gymnastics groups. Each professional brings a particular perspective on the body and human subjectivity. Their insights will help us identify new areas for future development. *The Special Gaze* will serve as a mentoring and facilitative addition to our own practices, broadening the horizons of the center.

3. Social Gymnastics

Social Gymnastics is a strand in which we employ basic exercises of interaction and contact. These are usually performed in pairs, and sometimes in groups.

The aims are twofold:on the one hand, to explore and highlight the capacities of participants

with intellectual disabilities. On the other, to develop bodily skills among participants without disabilities, preparing them for inclusive interaction.

At a certain level, the bodily tasks of both groups converge. The exercises function as a kind of proto-language: while they do not yet create fully developed verbal exchange, they establish points of contact and interaction. Attention is given to bodily reactions including vocalisation, muscular states, and other aspects of physical engagement. This allows participants to collectively sense the direction of movement and co-create within space, establishing direct bodily contact that is free of abstract verbal mediation yet rich in sensory and practical experience.

4. Work with Materials

Here, participants engage with diverse tactile substances such as clay, sand, flour, coffee, beans, and more.

The aims are to:

- develop participants' sensory capacities.
- create processual objects that reflect movement and interaction with the material.

In the process, participants shape the movements of the hand, arm, and other parts of the body, and then observe the *trace* of their interaction with the material. Even in cases of difficulty or limitation, participants create tangible objects, which enhance their reflection and awareness of their own movement and physical presence in space.

By the end of the course, parents and children create together objects out of these materials, drawing on the skills acquired throughout the process. The goal is not technical mastery, but rather the discovery and reinforcement of the unique possibilities and modes of relating that emerge from the interaction with persons with intellectual disabilities. Parents adjust themselves to these specificities, thus producing a shared outcome.

The central idea here is that the language of interaction is already embedded in the participant's particular capacities. Our task is to perceive it, render it visible, and make it intelligible both to the child and to the parents.

5. Work with Volunteers

Another important activity the center advances is training volunteers. The aim is to cultivate bodily sensitivity, awareness of one's own body, movement, and spatial orientation.This preparation is crucial for the subsequent involvement of the volunteers in work with people with intellectual disabilities and in other inclusive projects. Without awareness of one's own body and movement, it is impossible to attend to the nuances of interaction with others—especially with those who have special needs.

## What inspires you?

It's difficult to pinpoint exactly what inspires my work. Perhaps the word "inspiration" doesn't fully capture my internal process. Rather, it's *motivation*: a deep inner imperative combining feelings, desires, and the necessity to be involved and act.

The main source of that motivation for me is interaction with people. I am deeply moved by how we can find common language, how we can hear and understand one another, even with individuals for whom communication through conventional channels (verbal or intellectual) is impossible. A sense of understanding arises through somatic practices, movement, play and shared presence. This multi-layered interaction is probably my chief source of inspiration.

I care deeply about creating sociocultural forms that function as spaces of encounter, where practices bringing together diverse lived experiences can emerge and evolve. I believe these forms are especially effective for engaging with difference, otherness, conflict, and the multiplicity of

human experience. Participation in such practices is always a choice—to be present, to approach the other, and to remain open. Within that choice lies a significant resource: it reveals who we are and affirms our capacity to connect, to be understood, and to understand others.

I increasingly believe we are deeply interconnected—and that interconnectedness imbues life with meaning. The practice of communication and shared experience allows society to become less divided and closed. My dream is to expand community boundaries, making them more permeable, flexible, and alive. I believe each person holds inner resources capable of including diverse people with various abilities into shared spaces—and perhaps there lies the very essence of my personal meaning of inspiration.

## How does somatics influence your everyday life?

How somatics influences my everyday life is indeed an important question. First and foremost, it is a matter of sensitivity—more precisely, developing hypersensitivity: to my inner state and the external aspects that affect it. I've become much more selective—both in daily activities and in what I allow into my sensory system.

This touches everything: content (literature, music, films), social forms, and relationships. I've become more attuned to what drains me or compromises my functionality—and accordingly I've started rejecting those sources. This shift has also affected interpersonal relationships: being more sensitive to others' expressions while also striving to be careful and considerate in interaction.

This sensitivity emerges from long-term somatic practice. At the same time, it is important not to overlook the theoretical dimension: what I read, how I absorb information, and how these processes shape my thinking and decision-making have also changed. I increasingly attune to elements in my environment that are meaningful to me and carry value. Even everyday routines begin to shift, becoming more "somatic"—that is, more oriented toward bodily sensation, attention, and spatial engagement.

My practice is grounded in working with people from diverse professional backgrounds, including both trained performers and participants with no prior experience in theatre or physical performance. This work takes place within social and creative projects in which the shared task is to develop a performance or staged action, even though participants bring markedly different levels of preparation and experience.

The approach I have developed renders the staging process substantive by grounding it in somatic practices. Rather than emerging solely from the choreographer's or director's initial concept, the work is co-created with the participants of the laboratory. One example of this process comes from my work in Chemnitz, Germany, at the Komplex theatre space. The group consisted of Ukrainian refugees, people with developmental differences, German citizens, and migrants from Middle Eastern countries, forming a highly heterogeneous collective.

Our primary task was to establish a trusting environment in which each person's specificities were acknowledged and accepted. Within this environment, participants were able to openly share their experiences, hopes, fears, and the meanings that mattered to them.The basis of the work was a series of simple improvisational physical exercises that gave participants a sense of comfort and confidence in their own abilities. From this foundation, conversations arose about the challenges of adaptation, the reasons for leaving one's homeland, and other pressing concerns. As a result, the group created several performances of high artistic quality that were presented on different stages. At the beginning, participants could not even imagine performing in front of an audience. Later, however, one of the shows attracted around 400 spectators —

a significant number for a non-professional ensemble. The participants received meaningful feedback from their interaction with the audience, and in many ways responded as professional performers would.The group continues to exist and to develop, even though I have since moved from Germany to Israel. We stay in touch, and I follow their progress.

As I reflect on this experience, it is clear to me that this group also carried profound personal meaning. I myself left Russia because of the war, and working with this diverse collective became a way to live through and process the trauma of the rupture between our two peoples, while contributing something meaningful on a personal level.

## What values do you gain through somatic practice, and how do they reflect in your creative path?

When speaking of values that I can articulate and clearly link to somatic practices, I would foreground sensitivity. Through somatic practice, an intention emerges to discern and recognize the deeper essence of the person with whom one is interacting.

I do not claim to possess this sensitivity in a complete or infallible way, nor to be able to perceive another person's needs with absolute clarity. Rather, in moments of interaction, I begin from the assumption that such deep needs exist. Through somatic practice and bodily attunement, it often becomes possible to "feel around" and gradually sense these needs.

This orientation directly informs the creative process and the structuring of work with a collective—actors, dancers, or performance participants. It becomes essential to cultivate an atmosphere and modes of interaction that attend not only to rational considerations but also to bodily, sensory, and deeper experiential needs. In particular, this includes the body's need for movement, expansion, fullness, and meaningful presence in spaces created to serve life.

Sensitivity to the body, attention, and internal state thus becomes a central value. Attunement to sensory experience and to internal bodily processes, as well as to both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, is essential. Such sensitivity enables not only the perception of another person's state, but also the offering of appropriate forms of interaction, tasks, or practices through which genuine connection may emerge.

To continue, when I think about the values that emerge through this kind of work, it is important to note that for me this practice constitutes a meaning-making part of my identity. I do not want to use lofty words such as "service" or "contribution to society," because that is not how I see it. As mentioned earlier, I do not experience it as an altruistic gesture— not at all. Rather, it is something that gives me meaning, because within the context of what is happening in my life and my personal experience, this activity becomes significant. An anchor.

I have relocated several times, not because I sought a change of residence, but because of wars. At present I find myself in a situation of acute social and existential crisis. I cannot say that I find much meaning in the contemporary social order as it currently exists. As it happens, my entire life background has been tied to inclusive projects. My identity has been shaped within that context, and the values that developed for me — and that were shared by the environment in which I lived — are grounded in unmediated interaction.

Our initial reactions, even toward ourselves, are often quite crude. The sensitivity we show and the way we are affected by the surrounding world can be very primitive. Thanks to the experience I now have, I can say that I sense different qualities of being in different environments. I also perceive the social environment of communication — the values transmitted by media or political agendas. These values are not alien to me; they are easy to understand, especially when unpacked and viewed in context. Very often, however, what stands behind them is simply the

desire to suppress or to impose one's own worldview.

By contrast, in an environment where another level of sensitivity is required, we encounter values that encompass diverse ways of existing, multiple forms of communication, varying sensory registers, modes of movement, and types of contact. Working in such an environment cultivates in me essential qualities and expands my sensitivity. It gives me an understanding of the human being as a complex and rich creation — a being with enormous potential for understanding, reflection, interaction with others, co-creation, and presence.

I categorically cannot accept situations directed toward aggression — whether against society at large or against members of another religion, worldview, or perspective. These are deeply archaic modes of existence, and in the context of contemporary practices, technologies, and science, they appear both obvious and tragic. The lack of capacity for humanity to pause, to stop and consider the results and possibilities before it, leads to devastating consequences.

One of the ways I forsee transformation to take place in cultural norms and values is precisely through sustained attention to inclusive projects. Of course, this is not the only path — there are many other important and necessary forms of care — but inclusive projects, in particular, provide transformative experience and generate values that I can wholeheartedly recommend.

## Analysis: Positioning the Practice within Pragmatist Aesthetics and Somaesthetics

Lex Shcherbakov's inclusive and somatic practice can be productively understood through the lenses of pragmatist aesthetics and somaesthetics, with additional resonance in the feminist perspectives offered by Carolyn Korsmeyer. John Dewey's seminal text *Art as Experience* (1934/2005) redefined art not as an object isolated from life but as a heightened form of experience that emerges from the dynamic interplay between the individual and their environment. For Dewey, aesthetic experience arises through processes of doing and undergoing, where perception, action, and reflection intertwine. Shcherbakov's work resonates strongly with this framework: his community-based theatre and somatic workshops do not aim to produce aesthetic objects in the traditional sense, but rather cultivate conditions in which participants—both disabled and non-disabled—can co-create meaningful experiences through embodied interaction.

This emphasis on participatory experience aligns closely with Shusterman's project of somaesthetics. In his disciplinary proposal (1999), Shusterman argued that philosophy should concern itself not only with abstract reasoning but also with the cultivation of bodily awareness, habits, and practices. Shusterman distinguishes between the analytic dimension of somaesthetics (critical reflection on embodied experience), the pragmatic dimension (designing methods for improving somatic practice), and the practical dimension (the actual performance of somatic exercises). Shcherbakov's practice traverses all three.

Analytically, his reflections on sensitivity, inclusion, and value formation interrogate the cultural and ethical stakes of embodied practice. Pragmatically, he devises innovative frameworks such as "social gymnastics" and "work with materials and objects," which structure somatic encounters between participants of diverse abilities. Practically, his ongoing facilitation of workshops demonstrates somaesthetics in action, where bodies in motion become sites of perception, negotiation, and co-creation.

Korsmeyer's *The Bodily Turn* (2023) emphasises how contemporary aesthetics must regard with embodiment not as a secondary consideration but as central to how we engage with and create meaning. Her work extends the pragmatist insight into art-as-experience by foregrounding the body's role in interpretation, affective resonance, and social communication. Shcherbakov's

practice exemplifies this bodily turn: the cultivation of sensitivity and attentiveness through inclusive somatic practices reveals how perception is not neutral but always corporeally mediated, shaping both aesthetic and ethical encounters. His work suggests that to transform social relations, we must begin with the body's capacities for sensing, responding, and fostering co-presence.

## Conclusion

Positioning Lex Shcherbakov's practice within the frameworks of pragmatist aesthetics, somaesthetics, and feminist aesthetics highlights the philosophical significance of his work. Relying on Dewey's perspective, Shcherbakov's practice exemplifies the potential of aesthetic experience to transform everyday life by dissolving the boundary between "art" and "ordinary experience." From Shusterman's standpoint, it demonstrates somaesthetics' capacity to function as both philosophy and practice: cultivating somatic awareness, designing embodied methods, and enacting them in real, transformative encounters. From Korsmeyer's lens, it shows how embodiment is inseparable from meaning-making, revealing how inclusive arts practices foreground the body as both medium and interpreter of values.

As the interviewer, my own background in mixed-abilities Contact Improvisation, somatic pedagogy, and grief-informed artistic practice echoes and extends these frameworks. Like Shcherbakov, I approach somatic practices as "life practices," where bodily sensitivity, attentiveness, and shared authorship are not limited to performative spaces but permeate pedagogy, research, and community-building. This dialogical dimension underscores somaesthetics' central claim: that philosophy, art, and everyday life are inseparable when practiced through the cultivated body.

What emerges most forcefully from this interview is the recognition that inclusive somatic practices are not supplementary to artistic or educational activity but integral to the cultivation of democratic, empathetic, and pluralistic modes of living. By foregrounding sensitivity, attentiveness, and embodied dialogue, Shcherbakov's work — in resonance with my own — contributes not only to the advancement of inclusive arts but also to the broader project of somaesthetics: reimagining philosophy as a discipline grounded in the lived, felt, and shared practices of human beings.

Finally, the interview with Lex Shcherbakov underscores how somaesthetic practices can reclaim transformation from the alienating cultural frameworks through which it is often represented. If at first I suggested *The Truman Show* as a framework through which to consider the question of agency and choice, now I propose to reflect on Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915/2009) through the lens of othering the self. The narrative depicts transformation as something that isolates the subject, turning it into an object of spectacle or estrangement, rather than illuminating transformation as a universal condition of human life and life as such. Against this backdrop, Shcherbakov's work insists that somatic and inclusive performative practices can imbue transformation through its relational, creative, and ethical dimensions. By cultivating embodied presence, sensory awareness, and intersubjective dialogue, his practice allows performers and participants—disabled and nondisabled alike—to engage transformation not as alienation but as co-creation. This positions somaesthetics as a philosophical and practical framework that reorients cultural perceptions of disability, dance, and community toward recognition of transformation as the very ground of our shared humanity.

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