

HOFESH SHECHTER

UPRISING / THE ART OF NOT LOOKING BACK

“HOFESH’S WORK COVERS EVERY HUMAN EMOTION... ANGUISH AND ANGER, LOVE AND LONELINESS, PAIN AND PROTEST, FEAR AND FRUSTRATION: THERE ISN’T A NERVE LEFT UNTOUCHED IN THE SPACE OF 40 MINUTES.”

Debra Craine, The Times



**A RESOURCE PACK FOR
TEACHERS & STUDENTS**

WWW.HOFESH.CO.UK

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for downloading this pack and for your interest in Hofesh Shechter Company.

Through this pack we aim to offer teachers and students further support either before or after a trip to see the Company in performance. It has been designed to help you and your students find your way into the work and respond to it in a way that feels right to you. Within the pack you will find lots of background information on the two works including valuable insight from Hofesh himself into the creation process, numerous quotes from the dancers, collaborators and team and plenty of inspiration for tasks and exercises – both practical, written and aural.

Uprising and *The Art of Not Looking Back* are indeed wonderful pieces to introduce your students to and we thank you for choosing to do so. *Uprising*, which explores boys' behaviour and male relationships is a visual treat. The powerful lighting, the movement, the impact of the strong men as they stride forwards in the opening section of the piece ... it's a wonderfully accessible introduction to dance for those who may not have ever experienced it. Complimenting this is *The Art of Not Looking Back*, a piece for the female dancers within the company which is shocking, moving and demands an immediate response from the audience. We have tried, within the pack, to offer you as many tools as possible to help equip your students with vocabulary and insight in order to sharpen their questions and deepen their interpretation of the work. However, I don't think you or they should ever feel pressured to 'understand' what Hofesh is trying to say. Hofesh often prefers to leave audiences to come to their own conclusions rather than hoping that they get to his. Through the deeper analysis of the work that both this pack and the undertaking of the suggested tasks will bring, we hope your students will feel inspired, enlightened and free to come to their own conclusions about the work, its meaning and its relevance to life today.

If you are a teacher feel free to scoot to relevant sections as appropriate by using the contents page or you can do as I did, and read the whole pack from cover to cover. I realise a teacher's time is precious but I do recommend it if you can find the time! It's a journey worth taking if you can spare the hour or so it will take you to read.

In an attempt to make the pack as user friendly as possible we have addressed your students rather than you within the tasks as we felt this would make it easier, and less work, for you to photocopy relevant sections and distribute them to your year groups. Do feel free to share it via your school/college/university intranets also if that serves you and your organisation's method of teaching.

Making the work accessible to young people has always been integral to the company's ethos as Hofesh himself was inspired to dance as a young boy. He believes wholeheartedly in giving young people opportunities which stand to change their lives and through our participation programme we aim to do just that. If you think we can help you further to make the work real and relevant to your students by developing new resources, visiting your school with a workshop or in some other way do please get in touch as we value your feedback and are constantly developing our offer in response to need.

Best wishes

Melanie Precious, Participation Producer

To get in touch please contact: admin@hofesh.co.uk

SECTION 1: UPRISING

“HOFESH SHECHTER’S UPRISING LANDED LIKE A SUCKER PUNCH IN THE CONTEMPORARY DANCE SCENE... FULL OF TESTOSTERONE AND CONFRONTATION, IT WAS A POWERFUL, VISCERAL WORK...”
Lyndsey Winship, The Times 2009

Choreography and Sound Score: Hofesh Shechter
Original Cast: Hofesh Shechter, Chris Evans, Bruno Guillore, Tim Morris, Young-Shin Kim, Ran Ben Dorr, and Moshe Absalom
Lighting Design: Lee Curran
Commissioned by: The Robin Howard Foundation

Uprising was made in 2006, a fireball piece of male energy – in Hofesh’s own words it’s a piece about “...boys’ energy, boys’ mentality, boys’ behaviour... the idea of playing and fighting...of liking to play and to fight....of how fun it is to be part of a war.” Seven men inhabit the stage, at times gambling playfully, at other times fighting more aggressively. Their groupings seem to gather and disperse randomly, yet as with all Hofesh’s choreography this apparent ‘randomness’ is carefully crafted, there is precision and fine detail in every last step. “When making *Uprising*,” recalls Hofesh, “I wanted first of all to make a piece I enjoyed. Until then making work was wrapped in a lot of suffering, so I decided to start from what I liked doing. It felt like unleashing a dog into the park... I felt like making work with boys, and exploring my own physicality to the extreme.”



THE CREATIVE JOURNEY

Making the piece, Hofesh remembers the need to set some ‘rules’. “I did set boundaries but they were more for myself, or rather for the work, than for the dancers. They sort of follow - I’m like a tour guide... the basic rules for *Uprising* were: there is an outer space, and inner space on stage, and there is a general feeling of trying to penetrate that space; dancers can come in and out to the inner space from any side of the stage including the back; there is a tension between ordered structure and a chaotic situation (so the challenge was to choreograph chaos...or what should feel like a random set of events that came about...); coming together as a group and the group falling apart, then coming together and so on; a constant sense of battling - but it was important to me very early on that we don’t know what or why they battle - the battle itself is the centre of the piece; everything that appears in the piece has to feel somewhat ambivalent, ie it can’t be understood or taken only in one way.”

Working in an all male environment created “...a positive, light-hearted atmosphere,” Hofesh remembers. “Short bursts of hard work. A sort of positive competitiveness, a playfulness which many times leads to things.”

“He knew he wanted to use male energy,” remembers Bruno Guillore the company rehearsal director, who was an original cast

member and still performs in the work 6 years later.. “I don’t know how much else he had decided beforehand. I don’t think he expressed it much in rehearsal. He doesn’t always like to speak about it so much when he’s making a piece...”

Hofesh describes his use of improvisation as just the start of his search for something. He is keen to clarify that for him it isn’t simply a case of finding movement he ‘likes’ when he sets an improvisation up in the studio. He digs much deeper than that...“I’m searching for triggers - these can activate more than just a pleasant place, I wish to find a richness of triggers to create a total experience of sensations, feelings and thoughts. It’s all about getting sharper.”

As part of the creative process, Hofesh and his dancers make a lot of material in the studio, all of which Hofesh films and watches back every evening. He’s looking for something, a flavour of something that he feels gets somewhere closer to what he wants to convey in the work. “With the movement, I look for very specific stuff, but I can’t define what that is.” A good 80% of what he and the dancers make during the creation process is discarded. “I’m totally ruthless,” says Hofesh. “It’s painful, but at the same time when the movement is cut, I don’t care about it anymore... a wonderful dance sequence that doesn’t fit in the work will anyway lose its wonderfulness, so best to just get rid of it.”

“UPRISING HOLDS A SPECIAL PLACE IN MY HEART AS THIS IS THE FIRST PRODUCTION ON WHICH I WORKED WITH HOFESH. I LOVE TO LOOK BACK ON HOW LITTLE I KNEW ABOUT HIS PROCESS AND THE WAY HE CREATED WORK, AND SEE NOW HOW LITTLE HE HAS CHANGED DESPITE THE WHOLE OPERATION BECOMING LARGER AND BETTER SUPPORTED. I THINK THAT UPRISING STANDS THE TEST OF TIME, THE MATERIAL IS REALLY EXCEPTIONAL AND THE WORK GETS A FANTASTIC RECEPTION EVERYWHERE WE GO. I THINK IT’S A TRIBUTE TO HOFESH’S WORK THAT VENUE DIRECTORS SEEK TO PROGRAMME HIS VARIOUS REPERTOIRE OVER SEVERAL SEASONS AND SEE IT AS REMAINING RELEVANT AND IMPORTANT FOR THEIR AUDIENCES TO SEE.” Helen Shute, Executive Director of Hofesh Shechter Company



COMPOSITION, SUBJECT MATTER AND MOVEMENT STYLE

“The subjects the piece raise came from the event itself, of being a bunch of boys in the studio - the group combative energy, the playfulness made me ask how and why boys are like that... enjoying the rush of adrenaline, of competition, of a game... it was a question that floated... whether men being constantly at war stems from this very simple instinct and drive you can find in any group of men...” says Hofesh

The piece begins suddenly with a loud and pounding industrial-style beat and a large bank of fierce lights shining directly into the auditorium, part blinding the audience. Out of the murky shadows stride the men, who come downstage and balance on one leg before they melt and crumble back into the shadows. As the wall of lights fade away a faint spotlight reveals 2 men who embark on a duet that is part supportive - as they willingly give each other their weight - and part aggressive as they wrestle and push against each other. As they end their duet in a gentle lift, other dancers run, scuttle and dart into the space in fast and apparently random groupings.

Uprising expands from here, and is characterised by fleeting duets and trios and larger group unison dances, all linked together seamlessly by a range of transitional motifs, many of which have since become synonymous with Hofesh’s name. All this action occurs in a world where aggression spills over but quickly morphs into brotherhood and tenderness. Throughout the piece there runs a thread of humour, as dance critic Mary Brennan once noted, “If Woody Allen had gone into choreography, he probably would have made dance like this...” Glasgow Herald, October 2006

“The dancers take a lot of calculated risks when they perform *Uprising*,” notes Bruno. “They let themselves go, they are quite wild in the small moments of improvisation. That creates the excitement. It looks like a lot of the movement is random but it’s not, in fact the only parts that are improvised are short solos, maybe 2 counts of 8 at most...”

For Hofesh, the key to the piece is for the dancers to forget what it is about. “I ask them to connect to the physicality of the movements, to let the movements and the sensations tell the story rather than ‘push’ a character forward. It is the most common mistake of new cast members to try and ‘play’ the part rather than dance it, simple and humble. The physicality of *Uprising* is the heart of its energy, and it is actually one of the more challenging pieces because it suffers greatly when the simplicity is gone.”



LIGHTING DESIGN

“LEE CURRAN’S LIGHTING ILLUMINATES THE DARKNESS IN DISCRETE SHAFTS. NOT EVERYTHING CAN BE SEEN. FOG FLOATS IN THE BACKGROUND, INTENSIFYING THE FURTIVENESS.”

Charles McNulty, *The Los Angeles Times* 2009

Lee Curran first collaborated with Hofesh in 2006 when he designed the lighting for *Uprising*. Looking back at this process he remembers, “...discussions about various incarnations of what resulted in the line of parcans upstage, and there was definitely a desire to challenge the audience. The original idea for the start of the piece was that the first set of boys would walk straight off the stage and out of the auditorium. I think the opening parcans are one manifestation of that, as is the darkness of much of the piece – shadowy figures moving in and out of pools of light.”

Hofesh has always cited the importance of the lighting in his work, in addition to the creation of an atmosphere, a different ‘world’ on stage. Lee agrees, “I think it’s fair to say the lighting contributes a lot towards the atmosphere and intensity in *Uprising*. The opening line of parcans snapping on is a pretty bold opening statement, and the piece has a lot of dynamic shifts. Clean & clear for the line up, murky and claustrophobic for large sections, then revealing the whole space by lighting the walls before closing back down again towards the end.”

Hofesh recalls his early conversations with Lee about the lighting design. “My starting point for the lights was a fighting ring...then also a sort of nowhere land/wasteland/war zone. Another thought I had was a closed but revealed room, a sense of the ‘cage’. I rolled these ideas with Lee and for the boxing ring he came back with this idea of the parcans bar, lowered down. And I was like ‘Um, it’s a bit Michael Jackson isn’t it?’ But I went with it. I trusted Lee. And he was totally right about it. We discussed the ‘centre stage’ area alot, where the ‘acts’ are happening, and the shadowy edges. Lee connected brilliantly with all these ideas and translated them to real life with the skill and talent that he owns. I remember thanking him after *Uprising* and I said to him, ‘You get more out of the piece because of the lights.’ He saw things in the structure that I didn’t see, then he responded with his design. For me, the lights define that piece totally. We mostly agreed and slightly argued at times...which is when it got very good, as we fine tuned our arguments... it was only because we both care so dearly for the work.”



MOTIFS

Uprising is one of only a very few pieces to date where Hofesh uses contact partner work, and it certainly features here as a motif, with lifts, supports and weight bearing work seen and then developed at various moments throughout the action. Choreographic devices – unison, canon, stillness and repetition all feature in *Uprising*. Certain motifs are seen early in the work, and then are repeated and developed throughout the work - these crouching triplets for example see [clip 2 \(Uprising Crouching Triplets\)](#)

Another travelling motif is this step see [clip 3 \(Uprising Running Motif\)](#) a kind of abandoned running with the arms sometimes trailing outstretched behind the body, and other times flailing about. Bruno remembers the stimulus for this running motif, “We talked about this character in a movie, he’s like the village fool - the one everybody laughs at. He’s half staggering and running about with goggles on, with his arms spread out...”

The piece ends as suddenly as it starts, with the pounding soundtrack giving way to snatches of an uplifting classical melody as the men make a final tableau that is both poignant and funny. See [clip 4 \(Uprising Group Ending\)](#)

Bruno notes another characteristic of the work, the element of danger for the spectator, of not quite knowing what to expect. “In a lot of his work, Hofesh doesn’t really like to announce what’s going to come next. In *Uprising* we often talk about the way that we dance having to be like the way that we improvise - it doesn’t end in a ‘clean’ place. Obviously we want it ‘clean’ so there is a sense of unity, but not like a classical ballet where all arms are the same height. We work hard to try to keep it unpredictable (but safe!) on stage, not too ‘perfect’.”

“SHECHTER PORTRAYS VULNERABILITIES ACHINGLY, WITHOUT SAPPINESS. THIS IS MOST APPRECIATED IN THE ALL-MALE UPRISING, WHICH AVOIDS STEREOTYPES WHILE VIVIDLY CAPTURING THE TENSIONS MEN FACE TODAY AS THEY STRUGGLE TO BALANCE THE INTERNAL WARRIOR WITH THE EVOLVED GENTLE MAN WITHIN. THE MEN DO SPAR IN UPRISING, BUT THE AGGRESSION NEVER LASTS LONG - AN ATTACK MELTS INTO AN EMBRACE, AND THERE’S MORE CAMARADERIE THAN CONFLICT. AND THE ONE ALL-OUT GROUP BRAWL IS DEFTLY FUNNY...” *Janine Parker, The Boston Globe 2008*

AS PART OF THE REPERTOIRE

Hofesh considers the piece, made 6 years ago, and where it sits in his repertoire.

“In the full menu of my work, I think *Uprising* is like a starter... for me it doesn’t matter what the size of a piece is, it only matters if it has a heart.”

Bruno notes the importance of *Uprising* as an early work in Hofesh’s repertoire. “I think he knows it is an important piece, it ultimately gave him the opportunity to do his first full evening of work...in this sense both *Uprising* (2006) and *Cult* (2004) were very important. All his pieces have led to the next opportunity, so each piece is very important in that sense. He couldn’t have gone from *Cult* to creating *In your rooms* (2007) for example, not without everything that came between those two works...”

Hofesh used to perform in *Uprising* himself, but no longer does so regularly. “For me, with *Uprising* it’s no longer about feeling the piece from the inside...” he says. “The piece is what it is now, it’s separated from me and I respond to it like an external entity. I tend to like it more as I get older as I feel more forgiving towards it. Less judgmental - it’s just what it is, and I try and enjoy it and the emotions it triggers when I watch it, without feeling like I need to ‘find’ what’s wrong with it, or what’s good about it. But I don’t think about it in terms of an ‘old piece’ – it’s fresh if the dancers experience it to the full each time they do it - it’s dance, it happens now.”

Bruno reflects on the piece and how it has evolved over all these years of touring. “It’s grown in the sense that all pieces do, when they premiere they are not ‘ready’, they need time and performances to grow. The dancers that perform it now have been working with Hofesh for quite a while, so it makes a huge difference to the quality of the movement. When the piece was created only one of the dancers had worked with him before...”

Lee Curran adds, “I think it’s proven to be a classic piece, and the lighting design withstands the changes of venue and scale well. There are other pieces I’ve designed that I look back on and think, “I wish I’d done that a bit better, or differently,” but I’ve never felt that way with *Uprising*.”

Bruno probably has more contact with *Uprising* than Hofesh does now, as he regularly rehearses the company in *Uprising* for touring. “Perhaps he thinks of it like an older child who has kind of left home, he’s happy to see it now and then...but I don’t think he is too preoccupied by it!”

IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITTEN WORK

UPRISING EXCERPT FOR BREAKDOWN STUDY

“We talk a lot about sneaking into the space, things like that. The middle of the stage is like this no man’s land...”

Bruno Guillore, original *Uprising* cast member

Watch this clip 1 ([Uprising Opening Section](#))

VISUAL SETTING: THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Is there a set in this piece? How is the stage used in terms of what we see and what is hidden?
- How might you describe the different lighting states in this section?
- What costumes are the men wearing? Does their costume give us any clues as to who they are?
- Lee Curran, the Lighting Designer points out that, “...you can see very close correlations between light and sound.” Can you identify some of them?

AURAL SETTING: THINGS TO CONSIDER

- How does the music begin? What adjectives would you use to describe this sound?
- What does the initial pulse develop into?
- Does the tone or speed of the music change through the course of this extract?
- Do you notice how some of the major developments or changes in the movement, follow shifts in the sound score?

MOVEMENT CONTENT: THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Discuss the different combinations of dancers – group, duet, solo, trios
- Are there any motifs in this extract that you recognise as distinctly ‘Hofesh’ style movement?
- The very first balance and melt in the line-up downstage – what might this symbolise?
- Bruno says the middle of the stage is a no man’s land. Does that come across in this extract?

GENERAL THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Is there a tone or an emotion you think this section conveys to the audience?
- Of this first section Hofesh says, “When I see it, if I try to imagine I’ve never watched the piece before, I find it surprising. You’re confronted with light, with ‘man power’. It makes me curious about what is going to happen next...” What were your first impressions of the opening 5 minutes of this piece? Were you surprised, like Hofesh is? Did you know what was coming next?

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR WRITTEN WORK AFTER SEEING A PERFORMANCE

“The piece is dealing with boys’ energy, with boys’ mentality, with boys’ behaviour...mainly with the idea of playing and fighting...of liking to play and to fight....of how fun it is to be part of a war, you know?” Hofesh Shechter in conversation for *The Culture Show*, 2008.

What themes emerged for you when you watched *Uprising*? How do you think these themes were presented – in a positive or negative light? With humour, or in a serious way?

Did you have any favourite parts in the piece? Why did these particular moments stay with you after the show?

The opening section of the piece is literally blinding, as a huge bank of lights shines out over the audience. How did this make you feel as a spectator?

“There is a sense of extreme and emergency in the piece, but one of the things we often say before a show is probably the opposite to that...to be simple. It comes from the simplicity and the honesty of the music and our movement...of the relationship with the others on stage, the energy between the dancers.” Bruno Guillore, original *Uprising* cast member

Discuss these juxtaposing themes within the piece: urgency and the chaos that ensues, versus simplicity.

“The ensuing tussle between palliness and bestial aggression is a dense, meticulous, and furiously energetic cocktail of steps that range from nightclub style grooves to simian lolloping.” Mark Monahan writing about *Uprising* in *The Daily Telegraph* in 2007

‘Simian lolloping’ or what we might recognise as the fast and low triplet motif, has become very characteristic in Hofesh’s work. How would you describe this particular movement, seen throughout *Uprising*?

To remind yourself of this motif see [clip 2 again \(Uprising Crouching Triplets\)](#)

“At times, the dancers seem to be on a makeshift civilian battlefield; at others, they appear to be at a dank after-hours club...” Charles McNulty, *Los Angeles Times* 2009

Where did you think this piece was set? What kind of ‘world’ or atmosphere do the dancers create on the stage?

Of this piece Hofesh said, “I know my task is to keep each individual in the audience bubbling with questions.” What questions did you have after watching the piece?

Could you envisage this piece with female dancers in the cast? Explain how this might change the fabric of the piece.

See page 15 for questions comparing and contrasting the two pieces.

“A WITTY TAKE ON THE FRAGILITY OF MALE BONDING...” Mark Monahan, *Daily Telegraph* 2007

MOVEMENT IDEAS

Before you start, allow some time to warm up and get into the right frame of mind.

Use this clip below to see how Hofesh works when he warms up with his company. Either work with this clip interactively, following his directions alongside his own dancers, or take some of his tasks and work through them at your own speed.

www.bigdancefilms.com/view-films#!__view-films/hofesh-shechter

HOFESH INSPIRED WARM UP IDEAS

IDEA 1: FEET

Standing in parallel, loose and open in the space.

Take a moment to feel a freedom in all the joints, allow the hips and shoulders to 'breathe', the spine to feel soft and fluid, the head to float.

Start to create movement in the feet – trying to create many tiny twists, turns, pushes and pulls in all the small muscles of the feet. Push against the floor as much as you can. The body is relaxed and loose. Let your weight transfer across your feet, everything is quiet.

“This looseness creates stretches in your back, your pelvis, in your legs....it naturally warms you up...it creates more movement...”

IDEA 2: STRINGS

Imagine pieces of string attach your palms to your centre. Stretch the arms apart, feeling tension in the imaginary strings, but looseness in the body. Try to stretch the strings in many different ways and directions.

“Feel that you are stretching this elastic, the further you stretch the more tension there is...the body stays soft, very casual...”

Allow this stretching to affect your body more and more.

IDEA 3: STRINGS DEVELOPMENT

Continuing with this idea, your imaginary strings are now also attached from each foot to your centre, and for your head to your centre, and from your palms as before. So your body is connected with 5 rubbery strings. Move continuously as you stretch your strings. Start to imagine the strings get thick and hard to stretch, and then loose, light and easy to stretch. Notice how this affects your movement.

“The idea is that the whole of the body is connected, there is a sense of totality....”

IDEA 4: WEB OF STRINGS

Now your strings can be attached between any body parts (head to shoulder, knee to hip etc.) as well as to your centre. You can also imagine external strings pulling you from other parts of the space. Allow this to expand your movement further, pulling your body in different directions.

“This inspires you to move in different ways but you also keep a sense of connection between your body parts....it's like you are in a web of strings...like somebody is using you like a puppet.”

IMPROVISATION TASK FOR WARMING UP

See [bigdancefilm task](#)

Using all these ideas, follow the task in this link above with Hofesh's directions.

IDEAS FOR CREATIVE TASKS

“When a work is in essence dealing with very simple human emotions and if it has a level of integrity, then hopefully it works. People can connect to it.” Hofesh reminds us that using emotion as a starting point is a powerful choreographic tool. Think about this as you work through some of these tasks.

SOLO WORK: BALANCE AND MELT

Look at this clip 5 ([Uprising Balance & Melt](#))

Use the opening section of the piece as your inspiration, and find a strong pulse/drumbeat track to work with. As a group start in stillness, each dancer in their own space. Take 8 forceful strides in any direction. Strike a balance for 8 counts. Keep a strong, defiant focus. After these 8 counts, slowly melt away from your position and slope off to a new spot in the space. Face a new direction and repeat this task with renewed energy and commitment, each time with a different balancing position.

Intention – think about how you walk. Stand tall and swing your arms, take large strides. Be as bold as you can. Hit your balance and try to sustain it. Think about showing off, trying to gain somebody's attention. Towards the end of your balance, change your mood...suddenly you don't feel so important or so strong. Dissolve your balance so that it crumbles away into nothing.

After you have played about with this idea as a group for a while, try sharing these 'balance & crumble' solos in smaller groups. Look for a real contrast between the bold, confident balances and the fragile, insecure crumbings.

IDEAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- Join up with 3 or 4 other dancers and try creating your own *Uprising* opening section - all start in a line, as the dancers in *Uprising* do, facing the same direction
- Stride to the front of the space to hit your balance. As you crumble away, regroup at another starting line up, facing a new direction. Repeat
- Teach each other your different balancing positions, so that sometimes you all hit the same one, and other times you are all balancing differently

SOLO WORK: TRAVELLING

Think about all the different travelling steps the dancers used in the piece:

- Running in a wide circle, arms held out to the sides
- Scuttling in a crouch very close to the floor on feet and knuckles
- Low running, body bent forward over legs, hands just brushing the floor

Discuss how they differ, and which ones you really liked. Can you remember any more?

In a space on your own, choose 3 of your favourite travelling motifs from the piece and explore them, finding your own version. Link these 3 motifs together in any order you like.

As a group, all find a space in the room as your fixed point. Taking an interesting pathway rather than just a straight line, use these 3 travelling modes to get yourself to a new point in the room, as far away from your starting point as possible. Repeat this a few times.

IDEAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

You now have 2 different pieces of solo material, Combine these solos linking them together seamlessly to create a longer phrase that you can then put on a 'loop'.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- explore different levels in space you are using and try to accentuate them
- Play around with the speed and energy that you dance with – can your balance and melt movement be fast and bold, whilst your travelling runs are more fractured and uneasy?
- Think about the different moods you wish to portray through this different solo material. Are you confident? Showing off? Anxious? Insecure? In a hurry? Feeling chilled out? How can you show these different moods through the quality of your movement?
- It's not just about speed! Think about your focus, your posture, your body language, your face...
- *Uprising* has been described as both epic and fragile – can you show both these extremes in your solo work?

DUET WORK

In the opening section of *Uprising*, there is some duet work. Can you recall the main elements of this? To refresh your memory look at this [clip 6 \(Uprising Duet Work\)](#)

DISCUSS THE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS IN THIS DUET

- Weight bearing and support
- Counter balancing away and towards each other
- A sense of struggle and play fighting

Using this as your inspiration, with a partner explore and play with the idea of fighting – use your weight against your partner's body. Find 3 different moments where you are both giving each other some of your body weight. How can you lean against each other? Think about not just using your arms – can you lean against each other using your backs? Your sides? Your thighs?

Throw no punches! Did you notice how we knew the dancers were in a struggle, and yet they weren't lashing out at each other? So think about the intention of your movement, about creating an image of fighting, a tussle – which you have to dance without hurting each other in reality. This requires some skill – be responsible for your own body, but as part of a duet you also have responsibility for your partner's body. As a dancer, this is really important to remember.

Once you have found your 3 moments of weight bearing, link them up with some transitional movement – eg. breaking away from each other, one dancer shaking the other off, slowly walking around each other to assume a different place...etc.

IDEAS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THESE DUETS

There are a few simple lifts/supports in this duet – can you remember them? What are their key elements? To remind yourself look at this [clip 6 again \(Uprising Duet Work\)](#).

- In this lift there is close body contact, a slow turn, a supportive cradling of the neck... Can you find a similar lift with your partner and add it to your duet? Keep it simple and safe
- In the piece, this duet ends with both men walking off together after another dancer runs past them. Decide how you want to resolve your duet - do you make up after all the struggling against each other? Do you break away and move in opposite directions? Decide what you want to portray

GROUP WORK

Look at [clip 7 \(Uprising Group Unison\)](#) for a great example of unison work in the piece. Watch it through a few times and notice the different elements of unison, canon, and smaller duets and trios breaking off and returning to the group. All of these groupings look random and chaotic, and yet they are crafted and choreographed with great attention to detail.

Can you recognise any common movement motifs that run through this extract? Get into groups of 4 or 5 and watch the clip through again, pointing out motifs as they appear and then reappear.

Choose 2 contrasting motifs – for example 'aeroplane arms running' and 'elbow-led turning'. As a group devise your own version of these two motifs, remembering how you warmed up using the strings imagery and the "totality of the body" as Hofesh calls it.

Once you have worked on a phrase that can be repeated, experiment with how you might dance it in unison and then in canon, without stopping. Think about how you might employ the different groupings that Hofesh uses. You are trying to choreograph what appears to be random – it's much harder than it appears at first!

Share your work with other groups for feedback and input.

“IN THIS PORTRAIT OF THE MALE TRIBE THERE ARE ALSO MOMENTS OF TENDERNESS, HUMOUR, ANGUISH AND FRUSTRATION. MR. SHECHTER SUGGESTS ALL OF THIS PURELY THROUGH THE MOVEMENT, NEVER LETTING AN IMAGE SOLIDIFY FOR LONG ENOUGH TO BECOME OVERSTATED.”

Roslyn Lucas, *The New York Times* 2008



SECTION 2: THE ART OF NOT LOOKING BACK

“THE ART OF NOT LOOKING BACK MAY BE HOFESH SHECHTER’S FIRST ALL-FEMALE WORK, BUT IN ITS PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL POWER IT IS AS HIGH-VOLTAGE AS ANYTHING HE HAS MADE FOR MEN. STRIDING THE STAGE WITH THEIR FISTS BUNCHED, THRASHING UP A PERFECT STORM OF ENERGY, THE SIX DANCERS ARE RECKLESSLY, STRIDENTLY FULL-ON - AS IS EVERYTHING ELSE IN THIS WORK.” *Judith Mackrell, The Guardian 2009*

Choreography and Sound Score: Hofesh Shechter
Original Cast: Eulalia Ayguade Farro, Winifred Burnet-Smith, Victoria Hoyland, Yen Ching Lin, Sita Ostheimer, Ino Riga
Lighting Design: Lee Curran
Costume Design: Becs Andrews
Additional music: Excerpt from *Litany IV* from *Six Litanies For Heliogabalus*, composed by John Zorn, performed by Mike Patton, solo voice, used with the kind permission of Tzadik recordings

“The Art of Not Looking Back was never planned as a touring work – it was a special treat made for the Brighton Festival 2009 as a one-off project. With only 4 weeks rehearsal I still don’t know how Hofesh managed to create such a complex, unrelenting and challenging work that took him into a completely different aesthetic. We’d been so nervous that the creation time was too short for Hofesh to make such a radical departure from his previous works *Uprising* and *In your rooms*. It was really overwhelming to discover such an accomplished, difficult, and moving work. And the female dancers are extraordinary – they just own the stage and the auditorium, it’s spell binding.”
Helen Shute, Executive Director of Hofesh Shechter Company

It has been a piece that has divided the dance critic community, and for some it remains a piece that is uncomfortable to watch. Yet years since Hofesh made his all female work, it continues to tour internationally to great audience acclaim. Made in 2009 for 6 female dancers, it was commissioned for the Brighton Festival where it premiered.



THE CREATIVE JOURNEY

Here Hofesh remembers making the work - the choices and decisions he made when making this intense and emotionally challenging piece.

“The decision to make this piece was verging on random. I was challenged by the idea that I may have been ‘working better with men’. I was fully aware that this notion was out there because *Uprising* was making waves, so I was curious to try working with the opposite sex in the studio. The title of the work... ‘not looking back’...is a question, or a way of living life. I guess there is the opinion that it’s important to delve and look back, in order to resolve past issues. And then the opposite opinion, which is to forget and enjoy the moment...just have fun. I really don’t know what’s better...if an absolute answer exists for all... but the girls’ piece is raising the question. If you were a ‘digger into your past’ type of person, are there things that are just better not going into? Things just left alone to dry in their own, for time to delete them slowly? It’s an open question, an interesting one to me.”

Winifred Burnet-Smith (‘Wins’ as she is known in the company) was an original cast member. She remembers the creation period very clearly. “The early days of making the piece, I found them so terrifying! I was literally terrified going into work every day! Hofesh was getting us to do stuff, scary things, a lot on our own, exploring things completely out of our comfort zone. I remember one day, he asked us each to set a task for another dancer, something that would really challenge them. Then we had to do this challenge, as a solo, in the circle, in front of the rest of the dancers. It was a hard process, not physically, but emotionally. Though I think it was the making of us as dancers. To be able to open up as a performer, expose your inner self - I’d never experienced that before. What we worked through in the making of the piece, means that you really got to see the different characters emerging in the work, because he worked so much on us getting our emotional ‘woman-side’ out. He’d never worked with just women before. It was a new thing for him. I think maybe he made the piece to challenge himself? Perhaps he thought he wouldn’t enjoy it so much....but actually in the end something really interesting came out of it.”

COMPOSITION, SUBJECT MATTER AND MOVEMENT STYLE

“There’s something grotesque about the movement, something ugly. When we were making the piece Hofesh talked a lot about scary animals, maybe a huge sea creature, something that moved very slowly and without grace...” recalls Wins.

The piece begins in total blackout as a male voice addresses the audience. This monologue combines blunt facts ‘My mother left me when I was two....’ with distorted speeded up language that we can’t understand. It ends in a long, brutal scream, which gradually turns into anguished sobbing. Lights fade up slowly, revealing six women in a loose spotlight centre stage, looking out at the audience blankly.

As the piece unfolds from there, it is characterised by much of the movement happening in unison, out of which the women will sometimes break from their grouping into jerky, uncomfortable, pained movements at breakneck speed. As in all his works there is a sense of randomness in these groupings and spacing that is in fact meticulously planned and rehearsed with a precision that is stunning. Hofesh’s work has sometimes been mistakenly described as very improvisation-based, and it would be easy to assume that with *The Art of Not Looking Back*. However there is a vast amount of skill at play - being able to create complex motifs of movement that look like they happen randomly, has come to be something of a Hofesh trademark.

Whilst the piece can be seen as very ‘personal’ with the opening statement of ‘My mother left me when I was two’, Hofesh is clear “I don’t feel that it exposes me, or my personal life,” says Hofesh. “People have no idea who I am, and knowing one fact about my life still doesn’t tell them anything... again what matters here is the story telling, the subject is much greater than my personal life, and it’s the subject the people are curious about, not me. The atmosphere in the studio was heavy...cautious. Kind of mysterious. The process did feel a bit therapeutic, but again I was much more loyal to the piece than to the truth.”

LIGHTING DESIGN

Lee Curran returned to work with Hofesh once more with this piece. He remembers their early conversations about it. “To be honest, when Hofesh explained the staging for the piece, I was initially struck more by the limitations than the opportunities! Primarily that the sidewalls would limit positions for sidelight, and that’s often the foundation of a lighting design for dance. It’s also more difficult for dancers to be isolated or ‘disappear’ against a white background. So, it was challenging but then you also have the opportunities – the vividness of the colours, the possibilities of silhouetting figures against the background, a little light goes a long way in a white box, and ultimately the fact that it is a very beautiful setting.”

The piece has beautiful contrasts between the white bleached lighting states, and the red more claustrophobic states. Lee explains the stimulus for these clear shifts in lighting, “There is a marked change in the choreography and the music at this point in the piece, so it felt natural to take the same approach with the lighting and do something dramatic. One of the advantages of the white walls and grey floor is the way it shows off colour so vividly, and so after a first section dominated by white light, the red has a lot of impact. It’s also a change of angle, using backlight for the first time, so we get a sense of the women emerging from darkness. It’s not dissimilar to moments from *Uprising* in this respect. Sometimes the problem-solving aspect of making a design can provide inspiration of its own – working within and kicking against practical limitations can be good exercise for the creative muscles. It can force you to take approaches you might not otherwise consider.”

MOTIFS

Within the piece there are certain motifs that appear, for example this side kicking step that appears throughout the piece see [clip 3 \(AONLB Side Kicking Step\)](#)

In this link, the side kick motif appears in a section of the piece that Hofesh and the dancers call 'desert storm'. "It's where the music really kicks in," says Wins. "I love that moment..." Working in rehearsal with the dancers in preparation for the next tour of the piece, Bruno Guillore the company rehearsal director, gives the dancers very specific instructions "The emphasis comes not from the back. It comes from the extremities, from the feet kicking out, and from the elbows, and then the back moves in reaction to that. Be careful not to do it the opposite way around, it changes the movement completely....". Another travelling motif is this step see [clip 2 \(AONLB Travelling Steps\)](#)

It looks quite simple to do – moving forward rhythmically with bent knees, beckoning with the hands. And yet there are layers and layers of information to unpack. Sita Ostheimer, another original cast member now teaching her part to a newer company member gives a lot of information on the background to these 8 counts. "It doesn't need to be desperate. You need to lie back into the step a little...It's a bit aggressive, yes...but it's also confident, a bit boastful. And the chest needs to drop more into your body...."

And as with much of his work, there is repetition that somehow manages not to feel like a repeat. Wins explains, "There is a section we call Zorn, named after the guy who composed the music for that part. We're very jerky and angular in it. And then it comes back later in the piece – we touch on things you've seen earlier. In the end, a lot of the movement vocabulary is the same...but the way you do it is different. It doesn't matter what steps we do...for Hofesh it matters how it's showing in your body. It's not about execution."

The piece ends with a section called 'reverse'. It's a simple choreographic device that Hofesh explores in later work too. It is described beautifully here by well-known dance critic and Shechter admirer Judith Mackrell, "At the end, the clamorous electronic soundtrack gives way to an Urdu song of extraordinary sweetness, and the women begin to backtrack through the choreography. As their movements accelerate to near inhuman speeds, it is like watching the home movie of a life unravelling. The pathos and strangeness of this device are like nothing I have seen before."

Wins talks about this final section of the piece as a resolution, for her. "That section feels really good, it's like 'ok, that didn't really just happen. We're ok. You're all ok...' Hofesh never said anything, so this is my own interpretation....but for me maybe he didn't want the audience to leave with a bad taste in the mouth. Maybe he didn't want them to leave feeling heavy. He wanted them to feel a bit uplifted at the end. You know...'maybe it didn't happen, or maybe there's a way of it being ok'. Yes that final section feels like we make something better for just a moment."

Hofesh recalls an idea he had when he made the piece "At the last part when one dancer stands on her own on stage being un-forgiven, I originally had the image of her standing on her own on stage and a 'random' audience member gets up (front row-ish) and throws a bucket of water on her. It was an image of complete humiliation, in front of an audience. The 'I don't forgive you' later on felt sufficient, and allowed more freedom to the imagination of others watching it."

SUBJECT MATTER

As for the subject of the piece, it's fairly explicit for the audience. However it may be surprising to learn that this weighty topic of childhood abandonment was not touched on in the creative process. Wins recalls, "Hofesh never really touched on the subject matter with us, he never really told us what it was about. We didn't discuss what it is, what it says it is....In the studio he never put across anything to do with his mother. It was never part of the actual process. That made it easier for us to explore ourselves...and find what it was for us. The creative process was much more about discovering what and who we were as females, as women."

Hofesh describes his starting questions for the piece here. "Can I confuse the victimised and the victimising elements? How many faces of a woman can I show, looked at through a man's eyes? (in this case mine). And there was a big question about 'cold' and 'warm', being very involved with something or being there but detached...."

He also ponders his audience here, and their reaction to the subject matter in the piece. "Of course, I consider the audience's response to the work, and to its beginning - setting the tone, or grabbing their attention and focusing them on something. It's not about shock as a rule, but sometimes it is about snapping your fingers saying 'hey, over here!' "

AS PART OF THE REPERTOIRE

When asked what she thinks the piece adds to Hofesh's repertoire, Wins says, "I think this piece shows off his women....in a company that is very 'male'... It's always a really enjoyable piece to do. That probably sounds strange...but for me, more than the other pieces in the company repertoire, even though it deals with something quite dark, it's really meaty. It's just half an hour long, but you can really get yourself right into it, the movement is very juicy! It's very personal, how we each feel about the piece. Maybe the other girls would have a different response! I also think the piece caused a switch in perception for Hofesh....up until then everyone was thinking 'oh he's a very male choreographer. His work is driven by male energy.' *The Art of Not Looking Back* changed that perception totally..."

For Hofesh the piece has not changed at all since its early days. "No it hasn't changed at all... but again the cast has, and so the energy morphs."

MALE VERSUS FEMALE

"Girls are more serious. Much more serious!", laughs Wins, when considering how different the creative process was, compared to the making of other mixed pieces. "When the boys are there you walk into the rehearsal and there is laughing, joking, it's loud. The atmosphere is easy. With the girls' piece, you come in and it's silence. It's very different. Hofesh would still crack a joke, there was still a light energy. But not having the boys there really changed the company. Not as nice in a way! It's good that they bring a lightness to things. I think the girls in the creation of *Art of Not Looking Back*, we were all quite in our heads, not so light. We were able to joke a little, but we maybe challenge him a bit more. We ask 'why' a lot!"

Hofesh adds laughing, "Yeah, making Art was pretty much just heavy. No...just kidding - we had lighter moments, and in the piece there are actually some, I'd say, near parody moments...but we had a great, hard-working atmosphere in the studio. I think the girls were motivated to take and give all they had to the work and that was fun."

IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITTEN WORK

THE ART OF NOT LOOKING BACK EXCERPT FOR BREAKDOWN STUDY

Watch this link, part of the 'desert storm' section see [clip 1 \(AONLB Desert Storm\)](#)

"For me this section is about the dam breaking. The whole piece so far you've been stopping little bits of water leaking here and there, but then eventually the weight of it is overwhelming and the water explodes through the wall. The music kicks on. Emotions take over. This is the storm..." Hofesh explains the imagery behind this section for him.

VISUAL SETTING: THINGS TO CONSIDER

- What is the set comprised of? Discuss its size, shape and colour – might any of these factors in this extract influence the viewer's perception of the movement and what it symbolises?
- What atmosphere is created on stage through the lighting state in this section? Refer to Lee's thoughts on his design, page 12.
- What are the women wearing? Does their costume give us any clues as to their characters?

AURAL SETTING: THINGS TO CONSIDER

- What noises do we hear at the start of this extract?
- What does that background scramble of sound become?
- Could you describe the music in this extract as coming from a particular musical genre?
- Does the tone of the music change through the course of this extract?

MOVEMENT CONTENT: THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Discuss the use of both unison and canon within this extract
- Motifs – the side-kick step appears as a thread that runs through the piece. How often does it appear in this extract and in what formations?
- What other motifs can you find in this extract?
- The downstage folk dance line-up – what might this signify?
- Wins has talked about the ugly, scary animal image in the creation process. Can you find elements of that in this extract?

GENERAL THINGS TO CONSIDER

- The dancers call this section 'desert storm'. Watching the extract, why do you think they arrived at that name?
- Is there a tone, an emotion you think this section conveys?
- "The question I would ask anyone after watching this is 'how did it make you feel, and what did it make you think about?' I am fascinated by the constant internal battle when we look at something, between what we feel, and what we think. The emotional versus the analytical."

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR WRITTEN WORK AFTER SEEING A PERFORMANCE

What themes did this piece suggest to you? Some were explicit from the voiceover, but were there other underlying themes at play too?

"For me there is something odd and frightening about the piece. When we were making it with Hofesh we used the image of a dangerous animal quite a lot, and I think you can really see a flavour of that in the piece." Wins, a dancer in the original cast

Did you think the piece had a frightening element to it? Discuss this, and how you think the use of specific visual imagery in a rehearsal studio can 'flavour' a piece as Wins suggests. Can you talk about an example in your own experience of making pieces or dancing in pieces, where a visual image has brought about a change in the way movement is performed or perceived?

The piece ends with a structural reversal.

Of this section Hofesh says, "What I love about the reverse in the end is the sense of perspective over a very short period of time - you get to re-experience all the emotions at once. It's like working hard making a soup, it takes time, but then when you taste it...all the flavours hit you at once, and you get sense of understanding of the whole."

This last section has been likened to a home movie unravelling before our eyes. What other metaphors might it suggest?

"The six dancers are driven to fill their own world with movement that ranges from body-shuddering abandon to delicate lines of folk dance." Judith Mackrell writing about the piece in 2009 in *The Guardian*

'Body-shuddering abandon' is a fantastic way to describe some of this movement material. Can you brainstorm other descriptions of the physical vocabulary of the piece? Have a look at this clip from the beginning of the piece to refresh your memory see [clip 6 \(AONLB Shuddering\)](#).

Think about the stunning lighting design in this piece. Can you remember at least 3 contrasting lighting states? Discuss the lighting design as an integral element to the work. Think about what Lee Curran said about his design for this piece on page 12.

Discuss the sound score for the piece. Perhaps write a list of everything you remember from it? If you were to listen to the soundtrack alone, without the movement or lighting elements of the piece, what might it lead you to imagine at various stages over the 30 minutes?

When asked about how much the soundtrack influences the emotions running onstage for the performers, Wins says, "I think I can speak for most of the girls in saying that we don't listen to the text except when we're using it for a cue. I might be wrong! But I remember talking after some performances and us saying 'oh I hadn't heard him say that before...' But the soundtrack, the sounds that happen, the screaming, all these ripping sounds, yes they really help us, they certainly get us where we need to be."



COMPARING THE TWO WORKS

Have a think about the evening as a whole, 2 very contrasting pieces of dance. How did they compare to you? Were there common elements or themes in the 2 pieces for you?

Uprising is often referred to as 'Hofesh's boys' piece', whereas *The Art of Not Looking Back* definitely feels like a piece about women rather than 'girls'. Discuss these labels, why you think they exist in relation to these 2 pieces of work, and perhaps how they apply to the perception of male versus female in wider society.

Uprising is always performed first in this double bill. Helen explains, "It was never a question for Hofesh, as far as I'm aware. For him the journey was very much *Uprising* first then *The Art of Not Looking Back* which was created to be the end of a programme with the reverse running back through the evening. We've never performed it any other way." The pieces seem to sit well in that order. Can you think about how the evening might have felt different to you, if the pieces had been performed the other way around?

Can you remember particular motifs or choreographic devices that occurred in both pieces? Or did they feel very different in movement content? If you watched them in isolation without any context, is it possible to imagine they had been choreographed by different people? Were there common elements of the movement style in both pieces?

Compare the soundtrack of each piece. Both composed by Hofesh, both quite challenging in different ways. Discuss the importance of sound scores in each work, referring back to your thoughts in previous questions on each piece. Can you remember common elements in the 2 sound scores? Or did they feel radically different from each other?

Hofesh says "They are both quite passionate pieces. The vibration, the frequency is similar, but they are different worlds. I think *Uprising* gives an exciting experience, it turns your senses and instincts on. You feel something not very defined...you're with the boys, it has a lot of high energy... maybe it can make you think about things. But with the women's' piece you get to a place where you think much more. It's a bit more clearly emotional. It's not as high in energy as *Uprising*. Together I think they give a rich evening." Compare the energy of the 2 pieces. Do you agree with Hofesh?

MOVEMENT IDEAS

IDEAS FOR CREATIVE TASKS

Refer back to page 9 for warming up ideas to prepare you for these creative tasks.

SOLO WORK: BUCKET

Look at [clip 4 \(AONLB Bucket Solo\)](#) Notice the 3 different solos. They were created simply, using the idea of being empty and frustrated, versus being overwhelmed and about to flow over. "I was thinking about the most obvious thing when we worked on this...of feeling full or feeling empty. It was such a simple task," remembers Hofesh. You could translate this literally (see Wins making a circular shape with her arms) or a little more abstractly.

Wins remembers this 'bucket solo' (which we find a longer version of, at the start of the piece) as something that was made very quickly. "...it's exactly that idea of trying not to overflow. This came out of an improvisation task and we never really touched it too much after that. I was feeling like I was totally full up with water, trying so hard not to spill over, staying in charge of myself, just..."

Compare the 3 women's solos in this link – look at what they have in common, perhaps in intention, dynamics, or actual movement vocabulary.

Use these, and the idea of being a vessel that is about to overflow, as a stimulus to create your own short piece of movement. Don't overthink it. Start literally and see where it takes you.

Think about how you use the space. Look at the dancers' starting places upstage. Notice the ways they come into the space - walking purposefully, crawling slowly, or exploding out of the line – to begin their solo phrase. Then how they return to their starting place. Play around with this idea – of contrasting material to enter and exit, juxtaposed with your solo phrase.

Notice how the dancers use different levels in space as they power through their solos. Think about using movement that directs you towards the floor, and also about getting up into the space above your head, either with your arms or by using a sudden jump.

After you have explored this idea on your own for a while, try sharing these 'bucket' solos in smaller groups of 4 or 5 dancers at a time. All start upstage in a line, and agree on an order in which to leave the line, come into a space, and show your solo material. Return to the line again when you have finished.



IDEAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Perhaps this solo work might form the basis of an improvisation task. Set some basic 'rules':

- All start upstage in a line
- There must be no more than 3 dancers in the space at any one time
- Never leave the space empty
- Dancers can re enter and perform their solo as many times as they wish
- When you notice your universal motif in another dancer's solo, you can echo this if you are standing in the line
- You can enter the space and leave again without sharing your solo
- What other boundaries can you set yourselves? Try to use 'rules' that allow for freedom and exploration of the material, rather than those that will curtail the movement and hem everyone in.

DUET WORK

Hofesh's work is not particularly characterised by duets in the conventional sense. In fact the 'duets' that occur in this piece are very simple. Two dancers moving at the same time, in close proximity to each other, either using their own material or an identical phrase. Look at the end of the [clip 4](#) to see an example of this. In this piece there are many fleeting moments of duet, when 2 dancers are momentarily engaged in a similar movement, before they unravel into a different grouping.

Working with a partner and with this in mind, look for any motifs that your solos have in common. Agree to explore this 'universal motif' within your solo, try and pull it out a little, give it some emphasis, so that the solos have a common fragmentary element.

Try developing the shared element of your solos, as the dancers do in [clip 4](#). Try dancing your solos simultaneously, then morph into a shared motif to show a glimpse of unison duet work.

GROUP WORK

Look at this clip of group unison work see [clip 5 \(AONLB Group Unison\)](#).

Note the different motifs at play as the dancers cluster, disintegrate and regroup in different ways.

Use some of these group motifs as a stimulus to create your own group unison piece including:

- a low side-kicking step
- your version of a line up
- fast hand gestures above heads
- swooping, rounded travelling movement on the diagonal

Work in small groups to find your unison movement. Allow time and space for everyone to offer up ideas. Perhaps try to find two versions of each motif, so that more than one person's contributions can be used in your piece.

Once you have agreed on a phrase, repeat it so you have it on a 'loop'. Practice dancing it as a group, noting how you need to be aware of all the other dancers in the group in order to dance in perfect unison.

Think about how you might share this piece of work, how you all enter and leave the space. Perhaps think about some of the flocking and grouping that you see in Hofesh's work, and see if you can find ways to disperse and regroup in different combinations of dancers, until you are all in the right place to dance your group phrase.

SECTION 3: HOFESH BEHIND THE SCENES



“I DON’T THINK ABOUT ONE THING THAT I WANT TO COMMUNICATE TO THE AUDIENCE, FOR ME IT’S NOT ABOUT ‘CONCLUSION’... THAT THE AUDIENCE LEAVES AND UNDERSTANDS SOMETHING AND TAKES IT HOME. I THINK MAYBE IT’S MORE AN ENERGY THAT I WANT TO CREATE... A BIT OF A SENSE OF BROTHERHOOD.... A FEELING THAT WE ARE ALL IN IT TOGETHER.” Hofesh Shechter, 2011

Hofesh was born and raised in Jerusalem, where he was a pupil at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance from the age of 15, initially as a music student before switching onto the dance course. This decision was to change the course of his life. His subsequent experiences as a young dancer with Batsheva Dance Company (Israel’s leading and internationally renowned dance company), fed him with plenty of inspiration for his years as a choreographer to come, but music was still a passion. He studied drumming in Tel Aviv before moving to Paris as a student with the Agostiny College of Rhythm. From there he arrived in the UK in 2002 and danced with Jasmin Vardimon Dance Company for a few years. Then in 2004, after a month off in which he made a short choreography for a competition in Finland, he decided he should give choreography a real shot. “I decided to drop everything else and not take any other dancing job. I would instead give a year of my life to try and be a choreographer, and to really go for it.”

Since that moment his rise has been well chronicled. He has an impressive output of work, (see www.hofesh.co.uk/works) not just with his own company, which he formally created with Executive Director Helen Shute in 2008, but also with collaborations in the worlds of theatre and art. He has been described as “a true original” (Judith Mackrell in *The Guardian*), with his 2007 piece *In your rooms* cited as “Probably the most important new dance work to be created in Britain since the millennium.” Luke Jennings, *The Observer* 2007.

“Hofesh is extremely prolific at creating movement. It just flows out of him. And it is movement that is of real quality. He does this so easily, it seems...” Jason Jacobs, a former dancer with the company said this about Hofesh a few years ago. Hofesh agrees, “I do feel that movement comes in a flow out of me. It’s like a huge well, and it responds to thoughts and feelings and ideas that are in and out of me... but many times it also feels like a struggle to find something specific, because you don’t know exactly what you look for but you have a feel for it, so a lot of movement can be dismissed as it’s ‘not it’- you only recognize it when it’s there and it’s about that feeling you have or an image being focused into a physical manifestation.”

An Associate Artist at Sadler’s Wells Theatre, the Resident Company at Brighton Dome, the recipient of numerous awards and nominations, and with an extensive touring schedule, his success as a choreographer and composer has been truly remarkable. Hofesh has a punishing schedule, but he still managed to find the time to answer a few questions about what makes him want to create, and keep creating work.

Let's start with the big question. Why do you create work? What drives you to keep making pieces?

I can't imagine my life without creation. It's not just that I love it, yes there are things that I love - creating images, working in a studio with dancers, things happen, you discover things, it's a little bubble in the studio, but you also learn things about physicality, relationships and so on. I don't know what other art form or form of earning a living is so rich, has such a fullness to it? Yes it's very rich. It's very complex. But it's also simple! This interest drives me. It's a very mysterious art form. When I'm thinking about making a new dance piece, there is something scary about it, but also something exciting about all the things we'll discover that weren't there before. Though maybe they were but I just didn't know it. In the end when the piece is made, it's out there and I can share it with people. I feel privileged to have that opportunity. It's true, sometimes I feel like I'm hooked inside a massive system...the train is going, and I'm like 'I'm not sure I can do this ride today...', but I always stay with it...because it hugely enriches me, it's an amazing opportunity to be with other people, which I find more and more important in my life...to be with people, to share with people, a sense of sharing experiences."

A few years ago you said when you were not making or touring work that your passion was tennis. Is it still? Or has something else grabbed your interest?

Still tennis. It is the dance that is the hobby...

Earlier this year you collaborated with Anthony Gormley, and have worked in the past with theatre directors. Do you have a preference - being in total charge and having the final cut, or being part of a larger creative team?

Being totally in charge. Defo. One meal - one chef. Saying that, I like trying to deliver someone else's vision - it's a refreshing thing and in a way easier, less responsibility. It also throws you into new unexpected worlds.

You once said that the only thing you had on your iPod was some Bach music. In fact you called yourself a Bach-nerd. What is it about this particular composer that gets to your core?

He made good music... music that is highly sophisticated yet appears simple, highly mathematical yet with immense emotional effect. It's a combination of complexity and simplicity in Bach's music that does it to me.

Your work is often described as filmic, and you are a huge fan of cinema. Would you like to direct a film at some point in your future?

I hope so. The choreography I make is to do with vision, how the stage looks, what we're seeing in that frame. For me cinema is the same, storytelling with images. Timing is so important in any flow of work...in dance, in film. Sure, cinema is more complex it gives you more options. On stage there are time parameters, we all have to leave the theatre at a certain point that evening. The use of text in cinema is different too...I'm really curious about that.

What is the best thing anyone has ever said to you about your work?

"I didn't get it, but it was f&\$@ing amazing..."

And the worst thing?

"That was the worst hip-hop show I've ever seen."

What lessons has life taught you so far?

Nothing takes 5 minutes.

When are you at your happiest?

When I don't think about it.

The Simpsons or Family Guy?

Tough one here... I think I'll go with Family Guy because it's slightly more openly outrageous.

How would you like to be remembered?

Not that guy, the other one, what's his name...?



For a detailed biography of Hofesh Shechter

www.hofesh.co.uk/artisticdirector

For full information on his company of dancers and musicians

www.hofesh.co.uk/dancers

Find out more about the off stage team

www.hofesh.co.uk/theteam

"The team we have now, well...they are amazing," says Hofesh. "I feel privileged. A lot of this, building the team behind the scenes is down to the genius of Helen Shute (Executive Director of the company), she has a genius mind; she can manage human relationships brilliantly. At the moment the company is in a really healthy place, everything is getting ready for the new work ahead. The office is well oiled and efficient - we have people who have been with us from the beginning, like Colette (Hansford, General Manager) who are excellent at their work. The technical team know exactly what they're doing. When we had less experience, when we were a younger company, I was more involved in the organisation of everything and it was pretty exhausting. However now I have more time to do the most important thing in my job, which is to be an artist."



CHOREOGRAPHIC STYLE

“IN ANOTHER’S HANDS, THIS GRAB BAG OF STEPS COULD BE CHAOS. IT’S THE FIRST CLUE THAT SHECHTER HAS THE RARE GIFT OF NATURAL CRAFTSMANSHIP. HIS MOVEMENT IS - AND NOT IN THE NEW-AGEY SENSE - COMPLETELY ORGANIC. ONE MOMENT RUSHES BEAUTIFULLY, HONESTLY, INTO THE NEXT. WE DON’T SEE THE WORK BEHIND THE WORKMANSHIP. STAGE PATTERNS EMERGE OUT OF WHAT SEEMS TO BE A CONFUSED HUBBUB; GORGEOUS, CRISP DANCE PHRASES SPRING FROM PEDESTRIANISM. THE MOVEMENTS RIPPLE ACROSS THE PROSCENIUM; AN OBSERVER FEELS IT IN THE GUT.” *Janine Parker, The Boston Globe 2008*

There has been much written in the press over the years about Hofesh Shechter’s style. Hofesh himself is very clear that he feels his ‘style’ comes from a rich mix of influences – both in dance and film. His years as a dancer with Batsheva Dance Company, under the direction of Ohad Naharin, were an early and important influence often cited by Hofesh. During this time he also worked briefly with Wim Vandekeybus, an experience that, though short “...was a very powerful one...it kind of unlocked some energy inside me.” He also credits William Forsythe and Pina Bausch as choreographers whose work he connects to.

Hofesh’s pieces are often described as filmic. This comes as no surprise when you learn that he is a huge fan of cinema, with Stanley Kubrick as one of his favourite film directors. “The world of film and the way it is dealing with image and sound is something I love,” he says.

“The movement...it’s not just about the shapes you see on stage. These shapes are a translation of a feeling. When someone watches them, it translates back to a feeling”
Hofesh Shechter, 2010

Here two of Hofesh’s long-standing dancers Wins and Bruno, discuss his choreographic style.

Bruno “The Style...I can’t really describe ‘the style’ but I can talk about some characteristics of the work...The first thing you notice I think is that he often tries to give the impression of something quite loose in the way things look, but to arrive at this place of organised chaos...the choreography is actually super-organised. It might look like it’s happening quite randomly in some sections but they are actually really REALLY set.”

Wins “Simple is a good way to describe it. Simple physicality. So that you’re open... and being grounded is another of the main things. We use a lot of our extremities to lead the movement. We work on the idea of strings a lot. (See task link page 9) It’s an integral part of his work, it runs throughout all of his pieces.”

Bruno “Another important characteristic of the work, because he has such developed skills with music and rhythm - his style is extremely rhythmical. So this is a big aspect of the work. I’m sure he thinks about it but it’s almost like a second nature to him I think...this is a big part of the work - the syncopation, the changes of rhythm...”

And another thing - there are a lot of 'grooves'. The way that the body is held, the way the choreography is made, yes a lot of grooves, but not 'cool' grooves... they are quite earthy grooves. The rhythm makes it groovy, the body is quite loose, it echoes it bounces and moves, it transforms a lot...it gives this bubbly rhythmical thing. He would never use a groove just to be cool. It's there but it's almost like a reaction or a consequence of how we use our bodies. It's always there, an underlayer of the work..."

Wins "A really important part of Hofesh's style is the totality of the body. There's not much that happens in isolation really. Everything is working as one."

Bruno "Yes I agree with that, it's a huge aspect of his style - the totality of the body. This aspect is everywhere in his work. If something is a pulse there is no isolation, the whole body is involved, even if it is just the hand pulsing. Totality of the movement and totality of expressing something with this movement is very important to him."

Bruno "One thing Hofesh is really looking for I think, is the diversity of the movement. It's a necessity of how he creates - he will go out of his natural way of moving to find material he needs to express whatever feelings he's looking for. That's why I think his pieces all look different. Look at the opening sections of *Political Mother* and *Uprising*. There is nothing similar in that movement. A lot of the material will come from the necessity of expressing a certain idea or feeling. I think that's why there is diversity in his style."

Wins "For me, I'm not sure if this is the same for others, maybe it's because I've been dancing his work for many years....but for me, it feels quite organic for my body. I'm not sure if everyone would say that, but for me it feels nice to dance. Very natural for my body."

Wins, Bruno and the other dancers have been gathered together by Hofesh over the years, alongside newer arrivals in the company. When asked what it is he's looking for in a dancer, Hofesh replies simply "...a strong sense of humility, alongside their talent." The audition process is often lengthy, but many describe it as fun, rather than stressful. Hofesh explains, "The auditions are fairly straight forward - a lot of dancing... the team I work with now is built from dancers I found during different periods of my work- some are with me for over 6 years, some 4 years, and some just a year or two, but the idea is simple - when I find people that I feel connect with my work and can potentially enrich it, I ask them to join me, and if I'm lucky they agree!"

Uprising and *The Art of Not Looking Back* are such different pieces in style and content. So it is interesting to learn that Hofesh uses the same process every time he creates a piece. He explains further, "On the one hand I make a lot of movement out of my own body and experience, I then play with throwing the dancers into 'situations' - this is more for me to learn about the energy in the room, the characters, than to find more movement material. It's like I study the material I'm working with, which is both the dancers' bodies but also their spirit..."

Asked to describe his process when creating and sharing movement Hofesh thinks for a moment. "Um...imagery and spoken rhythms... yes! It's about making them understand how it feels, this thing I'm looking for, rather than what it looks like or what it's suppose to mean - it's how it feels in their body, in their being. I try until we all get it... trying every angle and access point to their connection with the body. I'd say that resilience and persistence are the main qualities I own in the studio."

"Do I think my style has evolved over the years and the pieces I have made? Yes. The movement texture responds to the feel, the ideas, the atmosphere and subjects of each piece, and these evolve. The 'story' requires different qualities and characters for each piece, and I allow this to be the driving force in finding new movement vocabulary." Hofesh Shechter, 2012

Hofesh's work has a strong audience of young people, his shows have often been likened to gigs. Melanie Precious, the company's Participation Producer, feels his work is very accessible to a young audience. "The combination of cool movement, the urban vibe it has, the floorwork, the animalistic rawness, the way it looks so easy and the fact that Hofesh's movement always stems from an energy or a feeling rather than from technique, all contribute to making the work so appealing to young people. For many young people it offers them a real alternative to the type of training they may have received. It is not neo classical, you won't see an arabesque, and even though he uses a lot of unison to create impact in his work he does so in a way which captures the dancers' own personalities - they are not clones. Hofesh's methodology draws on his dancers' individuality and this can be a totally enlightening and eye-opening experience for young dancers either studying GCSE or A Level or even in full time dance training."

Some current A Level dance students discuss what draws them to his work here.

Gabby "I love the way Hofesh constantly plays with dynamics in his movement and his vast use of space. I love his use of unison as a way of showing power and unity within the group and the dancers are amazing! When I watch one of his pieces I realise I'm holding my breath because it's so intense and powerful and overwhelming - I just wish I could learn it all!"

Charlotte "I love Shechter's work particularly *Uprising*, I loved the power and uniqueness of the movement. It was so effective, like nothing I've seen before. When watching it I feel very inspired, it urges me to want to get up and dance!"

Their teacher Lucy Muggleton, has been bringing her students to see Hofesh's work at the Brighton Dome for many years. Here she explains why. "As an A level dance teacher I'm always so excited to be able to show students Hofesh Shechter's work. I know they will love it and immediately respond positively to it as they can connect with his themes and identify with his movement language. The music he creates is so atmospheric and you feel like you enter a subterranean world where these incredible dancers have to unite to exist. I think students identify with this along with his themes of isolation and the struggle to communicate. For the boys I have in my group *Uprising* is a great work to show them as they are always inspired by the power of the all-male cast and the strength of the movement. Back at college in the choreographic tasks I set them, I can see their versions of 'Hofesh movement' appearing..."

Melanie also believes this style translates across all the education work the company does. "The dancers come from a range of backgrounds and experiences - some having trained in dance for years but a surprising number having not danced for very long at all. Their stories can provide incredible motivation for young people and are proof that anything is possible for those who are willing to put in the time and dedication. Our dancers always maintain that aspect of being 'real'. They are not unattainable, ethereal beings who you admire in wonder. They all look like they could be your mates and I think young people see them and think "I could be him/her"..."

MUSIC COMPOSITION

Hofesh creates the sound scores for all his work. A trained percussionist and former musician in a rock band, for him the creation of the movement goes hand in hand with the creation of the music. The sound scores for his works are complex and masterful, widely admired by his audience. "Actually, the music was the first thing I started with, when I made my first choreography... and it's very convenient being your own composer. I understand all my demands very quickly...I can spend a lot of time looking for sounds that will portray exactly the atmosphere in the space that I'm trying to find...."

"I create sketches of sounds and I take them into the studio... and that starts to inspire the dance piece."

"It's very challenging doing the music, but also straightforward. If I want to shorten a section, maybe 5 seconds then I just do it. If I want to add some sounds that will make the work feel different at a certain moment, then I just do it. It's very convenient."

"Starting with music is simply more practical as I can do it at home, on my laptop/guitar/piano/voice, and it can be an immediate part of my thought process and 'rolling' ideas in my head. It's this initial part of creation where I collect ideas, jot down on paper thoughts, emotions, images and sketches of sounds that interest me and later on serve as a base to making the work in the studio with the dancers."

Here Hofesh explains how he composed the music for *Uprising*. "For this piece, Track 1 consists of over 60 multi-tracks that were edited on Nuendo. Many of the digital sounds were created on Reason (and then exported to Nuendo for editing) and the better electronic sounds were made on Virus, which is a physical electronic device (unlike the other two which are computer programs). I bought the Virus especially for that piece - it cost me £1,200, which I totally didn't have!!...(thank God for credit cards). The audio sounds of all the drums, voices etc were recorded in my bedroom on the floor. One of the better, kind of 'woody' stick sounds that appears in the piece repeatedly, was made by tapping with my fingers on a praying stool that was left in that room - the house was a converted vicarage. Other than that I recorded myself playing snare drum in many ways with brushes and one cymbal. There are also recordings of finger tapping on CD packs, hands rubbing, carpet thumping, and clapping, along side heavily effected singing. It is the most home-made track one can possibly imagine...."

Hofesh's music composition is an important 'way in' for many young fans of his work. Melanie explains "Hofesh's scores are often complex rhythmically and feel very 'current'. He uses lots of cool drums and percussion and sometimes guitars, but he also uses strings and sections of classical music such as Bach so it's a wonderful way to introduce young people to a range of instruments, sounds, and genres."



COLLABORATION

Hofesh has collaborated with Lighting Designer Lee Curran since 2006 when they worked on *Uprising* together. Lee's designs add beautifully to the intriguing atmospheres Hofesh creates on stage. Here Lee considers their relationship over the years. "I can't speak for Hofesh, but it's been an incredible partnership for me. It's amazing, but also slightly strange, to have all these pieces that I've lit for the company, in rep at the same time and to see the development of our partnership from piece to piece. Through working together repeatedly we've developed a set of shared reference points, and a language that allows us to communicate our ideas to each other more quickly and easily. We've also developed a sense of trust so that when either of us comes up with a... let's say unusual... idea, the other is prepared to run with it and see how it works out. I think we've been successful in developing a distinctive style without allowing it to stagnate, and I hope we're able to do that again in the future."

"I don't know why it works but it just does," says Hofesh. "The first time I approached Lee, I did so (this is going to sound weird), because I thought it wouldn't work. Let me explain! I was doing the Place Prize and he was doing the lights for Rafael Bonachela's piece, which won the prize that year. When I started to make *Uprising*, a few years later. I thought of Lee. The design he did for Rafael was amazing though not to my taste at all. But I knew he had a great talent, to make the space really intriguing, to grab your attention. There is something dark about my work. I thought 'maybe I need to bring somebody in who is very different from me. Let's see what happens.' So that's why I approached Lee. I thought he's not just going to listen to me and do what I ask, he's going to have a lot of ideas... I was trusting in his sense of skill, his talent. We worked on *Uprising*, it was amazing, and it was sometimes difficult. He would come with ideas and I would think 'Ok, I would never do that!' Then I had another voice in my head saying 'Yeah, that's a good thing!' My question was always 'does it serve the work? Does it make it good? More powerful?' That's all that matters actually. It's an amazing relationship. It's a part of me that I always know. Ok I don't know what the piece will be, but I know the lights are going to be great! I know he's going to get underneath the skin of the piece, really try to understand it. The lighting designer for a dance piece is like the sound designer in film. There is a lot of pressure. It's great to work with someone who really gets that."

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

USEFUL LINKS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

View all of the Uprising/Art of Not Looking back videos here
www.vimeo.com/album/2175032

Password: AONLB

www.hofesh.co.uk

For full and in depth information on Hofesh, his work and the company. Includes press, video links and image downloads.

www.hofesh.co.uk/media

For footage of the company in performance, plus interviews with Hofesh for Sky Arts and BBC2.

www.jamd.ac.il

Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance where Hofesh trained as a youngster.

www.batsheva.co.il

Batsheva Dance Company in Israel, where Hofesh danced professionally before he came to the UK. He cites Artistic Director Ohad Naharin as a key influence in his work.

www.sadlerswells.com

Where Hofesh is Associate Artist.

www.brightondome.org

Hofesh Shechter Company are resident here.

www.artscouncil.org.uk

Hofesh Shechter Company is one of the Arts Council's National Portfolio Organisations.

www.leecurran.net

For more information about Lee Curran, long time collaborator.

www.sadlerswells.com/page/screen/23928279001#

Footage of research and development undertaken in 2008. Hofesh discusses his passion for music, and rhythm, and the relationship between movement and music.

www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/jan/15/hofesh-shechter-antony-gormley-survivor

Review of collaboration with Antony Gormley staged at The Barbican in early 2012.

www.u-dance.org

The first youth company of its kind, the U-Dance Ensemble, recruited young dancers from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The company was created in 2011 by Youth Dance England and commissioned their first piece from Hofesh.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98TgOax3zbg>

Taster clip of Tank, created by Hofesh for the U Dance Ensemble.

WORKSHOP INFORMATION

The company offers workshops and residencies suitable for young people aged 13 +. These can be developed for a range of ages and experiences.

See here for more information www.hofesh.co.uk/participate or contact info@hofesh.co.uk

COMPANY INFORMATION & CREDITS

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This pack has been written by dance education specialist Lucy Moelwyn-Hughes in consultation with Participation Producer Melanie Precious, Hofesh Shechter, and Helen Shute.

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