Modul 2: The Bigger Picture

About The Bigger Picture

The Bigger Picture represents the second main module of our practice. In this document we will have a look at what we call „The Bigger Picture" in terms of planning daily life and training. We will see that we humans tend to look at it the wrong way way too often.

A previous text you should have read at this point is About Training. Texts which you should read after are Fatigue and Stress lectures.

The Bigger Picture figuratively stands for what we also call the Nourishment category in our practice. A theoretical category that deals with the topic of nourishment. Care in this case related to the body. It deals with psychological and health issues such as sleep, nutrition, meditation, but also sociological issues and environmental influences. This part is about exploring and explaining how these things affect our lives and that they are the foundation of our well-being. Furthermore, possibilities are to be shown to find a suitable handling and a meaningful integration for oneself.

About The Bigger Picture - What is it?

THE SWEATER METAPHOR - WHY EVERYTHING IS INPUT

As described on the introductory page, The Bigger Picture concept represents the part of our practice that is about nurturing who we are. Ways in which we can do ourselves additional good. To be able to do this, it is important to have an awareness and understanding of what is taking away from us, what is tiring us and what is pulling resources - to see the bigger picture. One thing is important to understand: **Everything is input**.

In his book „Super Training", Mel C. Siff states that training programming could be considered as „managing fatigue". I find this is an interesting consideration, which tells us that in the context of training (planning) it is extremely important to look at the whole process and not just at individual sessions (remember also training vs. non-binding physical activity from the About Training document). We will come back to this later. It also becomes clear that structuring training obviously becomes more difficult quickly - which is nice, because it sharpens our critical thinking skills and the amount of questions we are allowed to ask ourselves. BUT it also needs more attention from us.

Before we look closer at it let us first look at the sweater metaphor used by Katie Bowman about eight years ago. Usually we use these in one-to-one trainings with students who have acute pain or injury to explain that there is no point in just working on the symptom. In this document, however, the metaphor refers to the "Everything is input" issue and is intended as a metaphorical support for it in order to understand with what we are dealing here.

Let's start the metaphor with a question:

"When does a sweater break?". Give yourself a moment of thinking.

I think that at first you shrugged your shoulders and did not find the one answer. And yes, it is a very hard question to answer because, as we know, there are no factors or parameters inherent in that question. We could maybe say "when it's worn down" but then the next logical question would be "When or how is a sweater worn down?" which also leaves space for too many unknown factors. I think it is clear, but I say it nevertheless, the body is NOT like a sweater, but we can find some similarities. So let's take a closer look on the metaphor.

If you pull one end of the sweater, the whole sweater is affected. You could pull the lower-left corner of the sweater and track the load in the upper right corner or even the sleeves. The input of the load would diminish over time but nevertheless, the whole sweater gets affected - just like the body. Further the sweater, especially if it's very fashionable, consists of different kinds of fabric that have different kinds of properties, that break at different rates when exposed to different types of stimuli. The seams are very strong and good at connecting fabric

to fabric but not very elastic. The shoulders of the sweater are thicker and therefore warmer and more endurant but take more time to dry if they get wet, because of their thickness. The cool white print on the front looks cool and gives texture but stains more easily etc.

Do you already see some similarities?

The body is similar in a way that all levels always react to each other. Psychic influences the physical etc. and vice versa. The body is also similar in the way that it is comprised of different types of tissue, with different properties, that respond differently to different kinds of input.

Continuing the sweater metaphor, external forces act on the sweater all the time. The sweater is constantly working with or against these forces. Sometimes (usually after a while) the sweater cannot cope with the accumulated external forces or the conditions under which they are imposed and a tear occurs or the sweater gets damaged. But the important thing to know is: The sweater is constantly being damaged. If we were to make "friction tests" on a sweater that was being used by someone on a daily basis, the sweater wouldn't just resist tears when making those "friction tests". The sweater would eventually break because it was worn down, on a daily basis, over time from when you take the sweater on and off, when you put a jacket on top of it, when you scrape it against a surface etc. Even if we observe something we would call an "instant tear" if you looked at it in slow motion, the tension in the fibers of the shirt would increase and increase until they couldn't cope with the tension anymore and they would snap.

What is nice about this metaphor and what we can derive from it are mainly two things:

a) **Nothing exists in a vacuum**, neither a sweater nor the body. It is therefore a mistake to assume that a physical stressor only affects the physical, or that an emotional problem only affects our psyche. Likewise, it is wrong to assume that adjustments only occur when we isolate them.

- Example 1:

    Fatigue doesn't only spikes when we feel tired or are under heavy amounts of stress.

- Example 2:

    Increasing mobility doesn't only taking place when we stretch.

b) **No injury happens instantly*** and it is therefore misguided to think that we can fully isolate or fully understand what causes an injury.

- Some days you roll your ankle and bounce it back other days you roll your ankle and sprain it - you cannot predict which days which is going to happen.

- Some days your shoulder feels weird after weeks of intense training and during a "badly executed movement" other days you felt great and as if you did everything right but you discover a weird sensation in your shoulder post training. Again, we cannot predict which day is which.

*excluding injuries due to the influence of force majeure.

After we have understood the metaphor and in the best case got a better picture of „Everything is input", we now look at the ways where the body is not like a sweater:

• It can regenerate - it constantly builds itself back up.
• It's adaptive, it doesn't only build itself back up to how it was before, it rebuilds itself to better handle the damage imposed upon it (hopefully) —> it's **antifragile**.
• It's made up of different kinds of tissue (like mentioned earlier) and the different kinds of tissue handle different kinds of input in different ways (you'll learn this at another point of your process with us)
• It is a neurological component in us called our nervous system. We are not only affected by stress but maybe even more by how we interpret stressors and how our state of mind is when experiencing physical & mental stress (more about it in the Stress lecture).

For now, we can suffice with somewhat the same ideas used in the sweater metaphor. Our Central Nervous System (CNS), when talking training and recuperation, is constantly being affected by all sorts of factors that are not directly related to training. Our organism is constantly trying to manage all the inputs and figure out which is the biggest stressor so it can adapt to it to get itself back into balance (homeostasis). In doing so, the body doesn't distinguish whether we call something "a stretch", "a strengthening exercise", "climbing" or "lying on the couch". It will simply always take care of and adapt to the strongest stressor first.

It gets good at what we do a lot.

So that's why the Eastern Europeans realized that it was important to track and regulate almost every aspect of their athletes' lives. Because if you want to achieve top performance on day X, it plays a big role which stressors influence you **outside of your training** and in what form and to what extent they do so. And of course, if I train "only" to feel good, to be active and to move for the sake of moving, then none of this plays a big role. But if I pursue specific goals with my training, it is interesting to consider the topic of stress and „everything is input" in this context.

To make this a bit more clear one more time, here is another example:
Let's take Mary and Alex as an example. They both train handstands for two hours a week according to the same plan. While Mary is making great progress, Alex just isn't getting anywhere - even though she always follows through with her training. At first glance, there is no explanation, since both do the same training and both follow through with the same discipline. But when you get to know them better, you discover some interesting differences. While Mary is currently unemployed, has no steady relationship, lives in a sunny place, and has nothing to stress her out except training, Alex has a 40+ hour work week, a relationship that requires a lot of inner emotional and social work, and lives in a place where it is often overcast, even rainy. In addition, Alex has to deal with some unconscious fears from his childhood, which are reflected in the training and additionally burden her.

What should be clear in this example is that although both are doing the same training with equal effort, Alex's organism has to take care of far more strong stressors on the side, so it gives little to no attention and positive adaptation to the handstand training. Because it doesn't know that the handstand is INTENTIONALLY her priority. So no matter how great the training is set up, until Alex succeeds in weakening the other stressors (by eliminating them from her life or dealing with them better) she simply won't make any real progress - even though she trains diligently every week.

This is often where the vicious cycle begins. Since, despite regular training, nothing progresses, Alex begins to question herself, to evaluate negatively and to deny herself talent or abilities. Unfortunately, she questions herself in the wrong place and thus does not get to the root cause. She becomes more and more frustrated until eventually one day she stops and holds on to it as truth: I can't do this OR the plan was shit. That's drama, baby! BUT: Now that Alex knows about it, she can approach the matter with a different consciousness and try to change and adjust certain things in her life. This requires absolute honesty, choices, extra training and effort, but it pays off in the long run.

You see this was a rather extrem example but I think you got the point. When you want to care about yourself, about your students and about the training of you then it is important to be aware of that everything is input. Try to see the bigger picture to better nourish yourself/your students and plan your/their training.

Interim Summary

We now know that nothing exists in a vacuum, everything is input and our organism just takes it as that. In addition to obvious stressors, there are also many "invisible" stressors that we are not even aware of, but which may affect us greatly. Such things can be supposed trifles, such as the Wi-Fi at night, the lighting conditions throughout the day, emotional fears etc.

When it comes to nourishing the body and sustainable training planning we have to consider it also as managing fatigue and not just focus on overloading the system.

The question is how to get aware of all stressors and then what to do with knowing them? The four **Ps** offer a process of problem solving. On the following pages you will learn what they mean and directly get the task to apply them to yourself. Enjoy!

The 4 Ps

My Stressors - Awareness, Knowing, Dealing

As said at the beginning, training programming could be considered as managing fatigue. While it is of course also about managing strength adaptations and optimizing progress, fatigue could be considered more important because it can limit the other factors.

Fatigue is classified as that which determines one's ability to sustain a specific type of effort. With endurance being defined as one's ability to resist fatigue.

While many of us are keen on scheduling our daily life and training very rigidly or at least filling our schedules as much as we can with stuff and training, some important questions to ask ourselves are: When was the last time I consciously managed my energy tank/level? When was the last time I took two days off from training, work, my relationship etc.? And even more important: When was the last time you took two days off from all this purposefully or with a good conscience?

Because not having time to cram training or other things into your schedule shouldn't be confused with understanding the importance of deloading! What I want to say and it is really important to understand this, is, that you're not "resting" just because you don't have time to train, are not creative for work, you can't really spend an evening with your partner because of work etc. - you should realize that deloading is part of a (training) process and not something that happens because you cannot make time to do something. You will learn more about the concept of deloading in the course of time.

Let's get back, how can we plan and structure our daily life and training with an eye of our fatigue? Of course you can use this concept „managing fatigue" for other scenarios in your life as well. If you're clever and open-minded you will see again and again how you can apply ideas, principles and concepts you learn in training to your general life.

So before you start a training phase or a training week, you should think about all the activities i.e. stressors that will accompany you during this time. For this process you could think about the four Ps which are:

• problem identification,

• prioritizing,

• planning,

• pacing.

Of course it is not possible to make a list once and not adjust it again. Life remains dynamic and requires constant updates and adjustments. So again the aim is to think of the four Ps at the beginning of each day, week or at least phase to help you manage your energy levels. It can take a while to master this way of thinking, but it's worth being patient with it because it can make a difference and help you to get a bigger picture of yourself.

Step 1, Problem Identification - It's easier to manage your fatigue if you can work out what stressors might be adding to your fatigue and thinking of ways around them. Think about your life and all you do and what is affecting you (of course there are many things you don't know and you cannot think about). First write down all the activities you do that you believe have the highest rate of fatigue in terms of volume or intensity. We want you to record both the common ones and also the outliers, no matter if positive or negative, just create a big brainstorming map.

Again, it's not just training we want you to record. Here are some examples of non-training related activities:

• Spending 5 hours on your phone every day (most smartphones these days have an inbuilt setting where you can see how often you activated it, how long you spend on each app, and also in total each day);

• Working a lot during the week;

• You had a fight with your partner (maybe a one-off fight, or a recurring discussion/ argument);

• Maybe you're an introvert, but you have some great friends who you like spending time with;

• Maybe you play a computer game and you get super frustrated when you lose or when a team-mate does something you deem to be stupid, etc.

Before going over to step 2 rate the stressors you've found - means, is a stressor negative (taking resources) to me or positive (eventually also taking first but in return giving energy) and also how strong is this stressor from a subjective perspective?

Step 2, Prioritizing - Now it becomes important to prioritize or rate your stressors. You can prioritize in two different ways:

• which negative stressor is the strongest?

• which one is the easiest to remove?

Step 3, Planning - In the next step try to plan what you want to achieve that day, week, phase and then match your plans with your stressors and decide what stressors are getting in the way of them and how you can eliminate them to have a realistic chance of achieving your plans.

Questions you could ask yourself:

• Does this really need to be part of my day/my week?

—> If not, how can I remove it?

—> If yes, are there any possibilities to improve the way I deal with it?

• Does it need to be part of my life at all?

—> If not, how can I remove it?

—> If yes, are there any possibilities to improve the way I deal with it?

• Do I have to do it, do I want to do it or can I ask someone else?

• Can I get someone to help me with parts of a thing?

• Can I break the task/scenario which is stressing me a lot into smaller more achievable parts that can be spread over my day/week?

• Could I change the time at which I do this or that task?

For example, plan to do bigger tasks at a time of the day when you tend to have more energy.

• Is there something I could use to counteract the stressor?

For example, plan lighter activities and rest breaks around like for example a power nap. Also plan activities you enjoy into your day, it's not just about getting tasks and chores done. Taking part in activities you enjoy can improve your mood and energy levels even if this may once be contradictory to your actual life and values. You enjoy what you enjoy and not what society tells you should enjoy. It's your fun.

As an general example, if cleaning your house is becoming an overwhelming task and using up so much energy that you find it difficult to do anything else, how could you make it easier? Would it help to get a cleaner? Sometimes we all have to pay someone to help get a job done. If it means you have more energy to do other things, such as relaxing at the lake or doing a training session after a long day of work the benefits should be greater than the cost.

I'm not saying you should pay someone to clean, of course that was just an example. What I want to say: Often small changes can alter the amount of energy you use and the way you feel about yourself.

Another important thing regarding the planning is that you should try to stick to your daily or weekly plan, but don't beat yourself up if you can't do everything. If needed talk with other people about your struggles to figure out they have similar ones and it's just very human.
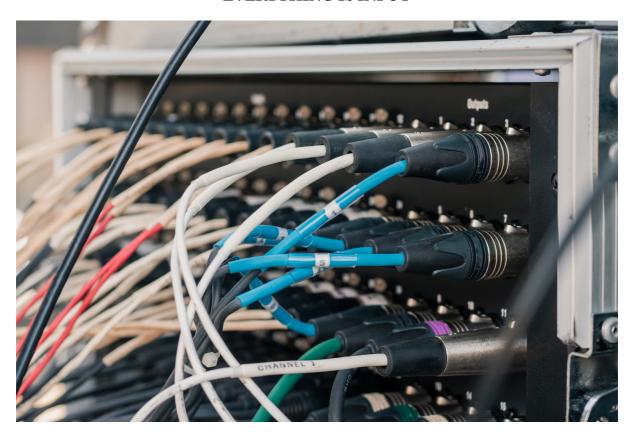
Also I wouldn't plan to change everything at once. See also here the process. Good things take time. Slowly let your old structures overlap with your new ones. At least that's what works best for most people. For some, radical may be the smarter way. In the end, it's individual.

Step 4, Pacing - Try to not using up all your energy in one go. We've already talked about breaking activities into smaller tasks, particularly ones that you'll need a lot of energy for. You could then spread out these pieces of activity over the course of a day, a week or longer.

For example, instead of doing one big and long thing and then feeling wiped out later that day and the next day, could you spread it out over the day, a few days or a week? This could make it more manageable and less overwhelming.

Manage your stressors and resulting fatigue before all the focus goes to the actual training. Then realistically match your training with these and plan meaningful deloads. We will talk about realistically setting goals in the course of time. Make sure there are few to no stressors that are stronger and more impactful than your training. As a final scout, look for more "positive" stressors to support the training (which we also will share with you through our Nourishment Practice in the course of time).

EVERYTHING IS INPUT

Summary

As written in the interim summary we now know that everything is input and our organism just takes it as that. In addition to obvious stressors, there are also many "invisible" stressors that we are not even aware of, but which may affect us greatly. Such things can be supposed trifles, such as the Wi-Fi at night, the lighting conditions throughout the day, emotional fears etc. To be aware of your activities/stressors and manage fatigue it can help to work with the four Ps and start a process of problem solving. One important thing I would like to mention here is to keep in mind that this process should not lead to more stress. So if you notice that you are putting too much pressure on yourself with the implementation, then you are on the wrong track.

The more experience we gain and the more sensitive we become different stressors come to affect our training and life more. This makes it more and more important to be aware of your stressors and to include them in your daily life and training planning and NOT to consider single training sessions or daily tasks as isolated. Keep caring more about **The Bigger Picture**, your bigger picture.

This by the way, would be also important to remember for faculties in dance and circus schools and is why it again is important to write things down, because we are biased towards immediate impressions much higher than long term statistics. Read the book of Daniel Kahneman „Thinking Fast and Slow", a very insightful book on how we process information and how we make choices based on that. Let me tell you: we're not very good at it. I'm sure it has happened to all of us that we've had a bad session and it has really gotten us down, up to days afterwards. It's a lot easier to remember that in your last session your archer pull-ups felt much easier but completely forget that two months ago you weren't even close to being able to do archer pull-ups. This is just one of endless more examples.

Some of you are certainly aware of the contradiction in which knowledge stands. The more I know, the better. It may be. But it also makes many things more difficult, because I think about too many factors, I notice too many things or I am only busy with theory. The same applies to this subject area. We are slowly but surely starting to give you so much information that you might think "holy shit!" there is so much to think about now and it is terrifying how much I have to take into account. There are a couple of easy answers to this if you want to stay motivated and keep progressing:

• Intensity/complexity should gradually increase.

• Take care of your stressors. You do not have to consider all these factors - you cannot. However, if you start realizing that there are countless factors beyond your comprehension that influences the simple question: "How do I get better at my discipline/how do I make my students better", THEN you are one step ahead of most people. Because then you will realize

that most answers, including your own, are just attempts at answering questions and these attempts will only sometimes work.

- You should slowly get the awareness that you are choosing to focus on a few elements of the bigger picture and ignoring other elements - this is fine, but it's good to be honest about it.

- You will hopefully come to realize that somewhere out there, someone has studied some sort of answer to your question or solution(s) to your problems so there are usually tools to be found when bumping into issues.

- We are there to support you on this **journey**!