

Nordic Dance Meeting
25th Sept 2004
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Thank you for inviting me to share with you a little bit of my research-project "Action towards articulation",

Before I share with you my project I will talk briefly about my own perspective and method.

I speak as former dancer and choreographer with a wide range of choreographic works - and expertise, over the years working with over 80 dancers. It has taken me 27 years to develop my own choreographic art, and I have taught other dancers and choreographers for the same amount of years, and it took over 3 years to finish this research - project "Action towards Articulation"

Is there a recipe for success in dance - making? Of course there isn't, there are many ways, *and* many methods. I have been enabled by Support from the Oslo National College of the Arts to look into the artistic processes of 4 dancers in collaboration with 4 choreographers.

They tell about the inherent qualities of constructive or "groundbreaking" artistic processes. Each dancer talks on video about one specific working process with one specific choreographer - a choreographer they know well after many years of collaboration.

As I see it

The dancers are all on the highest level of artistic sophistication and the 4 choreographers are four important, female "voices" in the forest of Norwegian contemporary dance from the 1960ties to the present day.

I have looked at, observed and listened to dance - artists before, but in this project I chose to also put on the glasses of others in an attempt to step outside my own "bubble". I looked at artist collaborations where I took no part, filming dancers and choreographers talking of their experiences.

The American dance writer and major contributor to observation, understanding and writing about dance, Debora Jowitt jokingly explains this position in her wonderful book, "Time and the Dancing Image", she writes: "I imagined myself an anthropologist skulking in ambush, observing the activities of members of a hitherto undiscovered tribe- trying to discern their customs and social hierarchy before I stepped out of the bushes and made myself know to them." This is A direct parallel to myself hiding behind the video camera, waving the flag, I am one of you...

In my research I was curious to know how the dancers would describe what goes on in this intimate space between themselves and the choreographer in production, which words do the artists use, what may be the content or the meaning of the words and how would they describe what is inherent in what they would call constructive communication when creating new works-what would be for them inspiring success in dance – making. And then finally how do they perceive themselves as performers, how do they reflect on their role as an artist in the moment of production?
And what did I find???

Before I give you a brief insight to these findings by presenting a couple of examples I have to tell you that my research in its totality is compiled on this CD ROM: 8998 written words, approx one hour film. (It can be borrowed at our lovely new library at the Oslo National college of arts)

On the CD ROM I let artists speak of their experiences, compiling them, looking for similarities and differences- aiming to intrigue and open up for more questions to be asked in the light of information given. My aim is to inspire further research and further discussions, (as we have the opportunity to do today) and build interest for this complex field of study.

I would like to show you an example of gathered information that I think inspire research.

The choreographer Kjersti Alveberg has generously allowed me to include one minute thirty-two seconds from a rehearsal with dancer Ingrid Lorentzen. The choreography was given the name JUST NOW

Show film (excerpt)

I have shown this excerpt from a rehearsal with dancer Ingrid Lorentzen and choreographer Kjersti Alveberg because

I think it is an example of the sophisticated level of communication, in which there are not many words, rather supportive commandoes, and a unique togetherness in the exchange of rhythmic phrasings. What the choreographer wish to see is visible in the dancers movement in the same movement. ?

A communications consultant, Nini Bach Evensen, said *to me* after looking at this material and the interviews with dancer and choreographer that it was apparent *to her* that the level of communication is sublime since both dancer and choreographer perform on elitist level.”

This I think is visible through what we have just seen, the precision and the unity between choreographer and dancer in the musicality, the accents and the phrasing of the movements and the togetherness in the dancers involvement and the choreographers verbal guiding, she says: wonderful, and she also says: ”enjoy the moment”.

Why does she say exactly that at that moment? The choreographer would probably answer ”by intuition”, but to me it is a more complex blending of experience, intuition and trust.

(What constitute an elitist level of performance of a dancer and a choreographer in a creative situation? I had a chance to look into this through this project and to establish differences between the teams in what they chose to focus at as the deepest themes of their art, and its methods, and the influence of what I would call craftsmanship, experience and artistic sensitivity.)

I will now talk a little bit more about the role of the dancer in the moment of creation:

The dance writer Sondra Horton Fraleigh has through her thoughts and philosophy about the ”Dance and the Lived Body” and her special concern and interest in the French philosopher Maurice Merleau - Ponty suggested to me specific ways of listening to the dancers when they speak about themselves as performance artists.

Horton Fraleigh suggest that after Maurice Merleau - Ponty we should look at the dancers not as a tool but as the Dance itself. Difficult sentence, maybe say twice?

I will share with you one example of what the dancers I included in my research say and emphasize about their understanding of themselves as performers.

Dancer Ellen Kjellberg says: "In This role (namely Haugtussa a choreography by Edit Roger) I had to dive into my own emotions to depths that I did not know existed."

Ingrid Lorentzen says about the works with choreographer Kjersti Alveberg (which we have seen in rehearsal)

"I am a medium between the choreographer and the audience"

Dancer Cecilie Lindeman Steen says about the work with Ina Christell Johannessen (who is here in the panel today):

"In this work my consciousness is widened, not only to what I am doing, but also to what the other dancers are doing".

And finally; Sigrid Edvardsson says:

"What is fun with working with Ingun Bjørnsgaards choreography is that we are a group of dancers that collaborate towards creating something good together."

It is interesting to observe the differences of experiences seen and felt by the dancers:

From Ellens Role and diving into her own emotions- to Ingrids perceiving herself as Medium- to Cecilies awareness and Consciousness- and- the- Other to Sigrids experience of the Collective dimension.

One can sense a development within dancer - choreographer collaborations and relations. As I see it the relational aspect within dance - making has developed through time, from the 1960's to the present day, influencing a more blurred division and definition between being a choreographer and performer.

Who has the responsibility for the creative process?

Has the choreographer become more of a director, guiding ideas rather than giving them all?

Is the dancers ability and responsibility to reflect, develop and create become more important? Has their focus from diving into emotions to find their role or being the medium for the choreographers changed or developed

towards a greater awareness and experience of a collective responsibility for the artwork in the making?

Does this point towards particular working methods that again need particular attention when working towards success in choreographic practice?

In collaboration the dancer and choreographer articulate what happens in the body. They attempt to articulate the artistic process where so much happens in muscles, bones, through physical interaction, gesture, and rhythmic punctuations,

Much of the process develop in silence, being wordless and intuitive. The body is triggered, the skin the bones and the muscles "spit out" the movement, and the movement become dance - phrases, Dance - sequences and in the very end whole dance works. As I see it the development of choreographic-practise has given the dancer and the choreographer a more joint responsibility for the content of the performance. Much work is process orientated and accentuates the dancer not only as a tool but as the dance itself. (referring to Merleau-Ponty)

(Can dancers and choreographers explain the blending of inspiration /craft and method? I think **yes**,

The experienced dance artists **can** shed light on this popular term when we say "it works", it is clear to me" or "it feels right"...))

The engaged insight that competent dance artists achieve through training and experience- tell me that insight knowledge and understanding is in and of the dancers and choreographers body, what Sondra Horton Fraleigh calls: the Lived Body

(Some call it silent or tacit knowledge and argue that we cannot verbally say something about it.) Many dance artists will insist that there is some special knowledge (kinetic knowledge) that that may help us remember long movement combinations in detail without notes, remember more dance pieces at the same time, remember detailed spatial positioning and complex weight nuances in partner work, accurate timing and awareness of rhythmic changes, and an accurate eye for differences in energy flows.

This expertise and knowledge is part of what dancers bring with them into the rehearsal studio and which the communications consultant I referred to

saw as a reason for their ability to engage in a sublime level of communication in artistic processes.

Finally, & THIS IS MY MESSAGE:

It is vital to bring the voices and the energy of the performing and creative artists into the field of research in the arts. What anthropologists, philosophers pedagogues, art historians and psychologists can contribute with / in research/ is vital, but my concern as an artist and teacher is that it is urgent that the artists **themselves** find the courage and support to research and bring into the discussion **what it is to them** (!) that define and support a good /successful artistic process, and push what **to them** are vital issues to the forefront, and discuss these issues in a way that is in tune with dance practice as physical expression.

Thank you.