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BEAT THE BEETLES


Wie Improvisation dem Krabbellalter entkommt

Wie der Tanz den Film bewegt

MOVING THE MOVIES

SCHOOLS 2003

Improvisation



Two master minds taking a revolution in dance – improvisation – as the basis for a debate on the future of dance education and the art of continuing to live up to the term “contemporary dance”

future works

The Dancer in Search for Ideology

Text: Aat Hougee

Photos: Michael Philip Manheim

There was a time that the identity of a school would be defined by which techniques, which styles were taught and that the quality of a student would be measured in terms of their ability to execute the exercises dictated by these techniques. I see a note on the wall of Tanzhaus NRW: audition, we want dancers with strong technique and experience in improvisation. Do we reali-

ze that 10, 15 years ago this would have been an absolute contradiction?

Education uses the tools of the past to prepare artists to cope with the future. Education collects the results of creativity and through imitation of these results, thinks that a new generation will look almost as good as the one before.

Starting the EDDC School in Arnhem, we tried to do it different: instead of copying the past, we searched for methods that would offer us the ultimate freedom, allowing us to be relevant in our time. The body became the center, movement language the result of the functions of the body. This freedom lasted for a while until again, time took over.

What do we want education to be? A collection of all previous experiences or a constant search for tools which could be useful for a next generation of dancers and choreographers.

At this time, what tools we choose for training contemporary dancers, seems to be relatively irrelevant. We can choose all or some, depending on what's available. The true questions that are in front of us are of a different order: why do we dance?, why do we create?

Techniques, in contemporary dance, can be seen as sets of aesthetic values, designed at a certain moment in time, by an artist, searching for truthfulness. Every technique forms an ideology and none of those ideologies of the past are by themselves useful to enter into the future.

The historic range of styles and the adaptation of these styles for educational purposes, is a dead-end road and merely the result of a thinking which defines change and innovation in terms of form, rather than content.

The attempts made in the 1960s and 70s, to develop an approach which would objectify dance training by using the body as its main source for study, has by the end contributed a next value system to the range of already existing value systems, and is now in process of being accepted by educational institutions whose programs are based in offering a range of styles.

Although this information initially was meant to be an "open" system, a vehicle for ongoing change and the material which forms the content of this "open" system could probably still fulfill this function, the reality is that it doesn't.

When one of my teachers teaching this material said to one the students: "We don't do this", then I knew it was all over.

Does the acceptance of this new information mean that the schools that are incorporating it in their programs are actually changing?. Not really: although the content of this new style added to the program might have some influence on the thinking within the school, the addition of work which includes different approaches to improvisation, body-work etc., seems to spread more as another style than as a vehicle for change. As such, it will not change the ability of a school to deal with the future.

I think that it is quite interesting that the name of Trisha Brown, whose early movement vocabulary was very much based in the body-mind studies of her dancers, is now used to indicate a next technique. This process of ongoing codification seems to be an important phenomena in the development of a school: the school doesn't take the source into its program, but the results and defines these results in terms of what they already know as well as in structures that seemed to have worked until now.

I don't think that those who were at the roots of this development, could have imagined that their revolution would come to a point where it would find its place as a style next to the styles they had been rejecting →



→ so rigorously. But it happened and not just because of the schools that are now offering improvisation, release technique or even Trisha Brown technique as part of their program, but also because of all those teachers and choreographers who, probably without intending to do so, have systematized and formalized their material.

So what is next: are we looking for another style to be added to the menu? And what will it be? Which choreographer's name will be given to the next value system? What is actually contemporary dance? Or, what is it supposed to be? I am using here the term "contemporary dance," although I realize that this term has a different meaning in different cultures.

I think that contemporary dance is the necessity of the dance artist to show something in a different way than the existing information allows. In theory, contemporary dance does not have to relate to the history of contemporary dance, but can be the result of the desire to create dance, which in the eyes of the choreographer, is related to its time. In the West we are now dealing with a very strong history of contemporary dance and because of that "to be contemporary" will for an important part be defined by that history. This history is not just a range of past styles, but it is also a system of development: although we never know what the next step

will look like, we do know how innovation in the context of our modern history occurs: through a process of rejection, purification, reduction to the essential. The question is if this process is still relevant and although it will result in new styles, does it actually create sufficient space for changes that might require different parameters.

In economy there is a law that proves that countries which are ahead at one moment, will be behind later, simply because their equipment has gotten out of date. I think that this law applies to the arts as well. If this is true, would we in the West be able to see that we are getting behind? Since we have most of the economic power, we might not be able to afford to see it and we actually don't have to: with our economic power we can easily maintain our monopoly on aesthetic values.

If education decides not just to base its programs in the results of a development, then we will have to define which are actually the questions which could be the motor that will lead us into a new era. Some time in the 1970s, Simone Forti came to my school as a guest-teacher. Her first question was: do you want me to teach what I know, or do you want me to teach what I don't know? I think in educational terms, this is probably the most relevant question I have ever heard and our task would be to define again what is it what we don't know in the

The Dancer is a DJ

Text: Helena Katz

After improvisation became established as the fundamental tool in the training of the contemporary interpreter, choreographers and dancers alike became DJs. The dancers became DJs of themselves and the choreographers, DJ masters of their cast. Very little thought has been given to this since. However, the effects of this new situation are already being felt when, for example, at the end of any dance festival the inventory shows the co-existence of similar propositions, or when, all of a sudden, material authored by one person gets included in choreographic material signed by someone else - without this being considered plagiarism.

Facts belie myths, but these last keep being put into circulation. Dance people read little of what is published in other fields, thus missing precious opportunities. If we were all readers of Lakoff and Johnson, this question of choreographies being similar would become much clearer to all of us. Actually, "Philosophy in the Flesh," the book published

DJ

by the two researchers in 1999, should be adopted as a Basic Text in the training of any teacher, be it of dance or theoretical physics. The

authors' studies about the role of metaphor in the construction of human thought, and their understanding of how these metaphors become embodied in us, make this book a sort of turning point about processes of knowledge building - no matter if they concern to classrooms or stages.

As a dancer enters a studio to improvise, he is confronted with his ability to use the motor actions he's learned in his training and which have been giving shape to his dance. With these actions he must produce something different from what his body is accustomed to - or better - the dancer must search for a different composition with the information present in his body, just as the DJ uses his hand to interfere with existing material and thus creates new sounds using already made compositions.

When a choreographer works with a cast of improvisers, he becomes the DJ master of a process that in the first place retires the old notions of creation and authorship in dance. Secondly, it widens the



break with the image of the choreographer as merely a continuation of the old *maitre de ballet*, who used to bring to his creation an entire collection of movement-phrases (then identified with their creator and signed by him), ready to be transmitted.

The model based on the figure of the *maitre de ballet* was dominant until recently, and still survives here and there. Such a model, however, has entered into crisis with the establishment of improvisation as "the" identity card of a great part of today's productions.

Transmission of knowledge in dance occurs both through formal teaching, done in schools through the teacher-student model, as well as through the dance we see on stage. Teachers, ch

Aat Hougee begann als Direktor des EDDC in Arnheim 1975 als einer der europäischen Pioniere in Sachen Tanzimprovisation. Im Jahr 2000 hat er seinen Job niedergelegt. Sein «Rückblick» ist eine Kritik der Ausbildung. Was immer seit den 1960ern als Freiheit für den Tanz erkannt wurde, um den Körper in den Mittelpunkt zu rücken, wurde formalisiert, in «Techniken» verwandelt und damit «ideologisiert». Kein Wunder, dass man heute fragt: Warum tanzen wir überhaupt?, wenn Schulen nur noch Techniken miteinander konkurrieren lassen und sie in eine Rangfolge stellen, die sich danach bemisst, welcher Choreograf gerade angesagt ist. Aat Hougee plädiert für einen rigorosen Individualismus an Stelle einer «Diktatur des Neuen». Denn ausgerechnet Freiheit und Wahrhaftigkeit als Grundlagen der Improvisation aufzugeben, um stattdessen um jeden Preis «originell» zu sein, scheint ihm Verbote von Verkrustungen zu sein und Niedergang einer Vokabel, die immer verzweifelter behauptet, «zeitgenössischer Tanz» zu heißen, wenn dieser doch immer öfter wegstirbt.

choreographers and dancers are responsible for what happens to dance in a certain period.

Today it has become official currency to identify improvisation as the divider between what's contemporary and what isn't. But what, in fact, matters in terms of improvisation, shows very clearly the tight connection between classroom and stage. It's easy to agree that, after being raised to the position of indispensable tool for today's dancer and becoming the differential that would allow him to move between different choreographic proposals, improvisation has become part of the curriculum of any good dance school anywhere in the world. Once institutionalized, it became a technique and, in this case, a technique without an unique synthesis, containing

year 2002? But in order to do this, we might have to convert what we think we know into not knowing as well. An education that would be valid for dancers and choreographers of the future should again be based on questions, not on answers and it will be the task of the teachers to help students to define these questions. And again, I think, these will be questions dealing with content, not with form.

Two years ago I left my school. The reason was that I realized that I had been at the beginning of an era as well as at the end of an era. I tried to re-define the questions that should be the source for our education and I realized that again, like in 1975, the structures needed in order to deal with these questions, were not there.

Instead of leading you through my questions, I would just like to pass them on to you and it is up to you to decide whether they carry any relevance:

Multiplicity: how do we make the change from searching for the truth, to the acceptance of the co-existence of multiple solutions, on one stage, in one body, in one mind?

Good, better, best: how do we define perfection? Perfection of diversity. Multiplicity: not the "one" solution defines perfection, but the collection of possibilities. Not reduction, but collection, not the painting, but the sketch. Are we able to develop a different sense of perfection? The perfection of "design" versus the perfection of the "sketch", on the

different ways to realize improvisation. (In this text, technique is understood as any system of instructions toward specific ends). This technique searches for rearrangements of motor actions already mastered by the body.

The new gestures and movements emerge with one single ambition: to be selected and live long enough to be identified as belonging to that body which has produced them. As can be seen, it is an evolutionary process like that of the gene, and it deals with very complex variables.

When thinking of the choreographer and the dancer as DJs, one can't forget the process of the insertion of dance into mass culture. Having become ever more present in the majority of events dedicated to the marketing of music (shows, video clips, etc.), dance has even contaminated advertising. And, like a virus, in the sense used by Richard Dawkins, this relationship between music and dance, in the end, has infected dance itself.

The flow can't be stopped. Nature doesn't respect operations in parenthesis for very long. For this precise reason, the most urgent task to which any contemporary choreographer must dedicate himself, is no longer the realization of his new show.

stage, in the body, in our minds. Why do we create? How do we create the space necessary to replace some of our aesthetic values with fearless emptiness? A lack of individualism as well as the dominance of the concern about the self, both seem to lead to group choreography as a multiplication of the solo. Are we able to re-define the idea of collective? In order to learn and to develop, we steal. When we steal we feel guilty, because we should be original. It is nice what you do, but it is not new.

Are we able to define what change could be about in this time, or are we stuck in our Western history of radical change: the dictatorship of the new.

Do we want our students to choose for dance as a product which can be sold by managers and organizers, or dance as a tool of change? When the value of art is no longer defined by the art itself, but rather by its importance for managers, organizers and subsidizers, what will then be the choice education will make?

Aesthetics of diversity: the co-existence, on one stage, in one body, in one mind, of multiple solutions or, just another attempt to define an aesthetic value system which cannot be formalized and cannot be added to the range of historic aesthetics.

Dance as a search for truthfulness: education as a search for what actually defines our sense of truthfulness.

What he needs to do most at the moment is to create an adequate model with which to face questions such as these, brought on by the institutionalization of improvisation. It is necessary to think of an intelligent way to bring together bodies who master the techniques of mixing information, with methods conducted by a choreographer-DJ.

The old model of the dance troupe based on hierarchy is outdated for these new bodies, and for the types of shows created by them - and the basic reason for this lies in co-evolution and globalization.

After the body has proven that contaminations are just the natural consequence of being alive, choreographers and dancers, all of them DJs, must accept the viability of a new system of production as their biggest challenge. This will be, no doubt, a work of art in itself.

Nicht nur Gott ist ein DJ. Das Sampling von Bewegungsmustern für die brasilianische Tanzkritikerin Helena Katz das Wechselspiel von Improvisation. Jeder Tänzer sampelt Bewegungen, der Choreograf stellt allenfalls ein zentrales Mischpult dar. Darum ist kein Niedergang des Erfindungsreichtums in Sicht, im Gegenteil, es geht um Techniken orientierter sondern evolutionärer Remixe der begrenzten Summe menschlicher Bewegungsmöglichkeiten durch den Verzicht auf Hierarchien die Fortentwicklung des