



# Meaning-making in the Dance Laboratory

Exploring dance improvisation with differently bodied dancers

*Tone Pernille Østern*

ACTA SCENICA 23

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Tone Pernille Østern

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# Abstract

This study explores the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory, a dance improvisation project with differently bodied dancers in Trondheim, Norway. In the project, dancers with and without disabilities, amateurs and professionals, investigate what dance can be in the meeting between them.

In 2003–2004 Østern collected the main empirical material for the study, consisting of several hours of videotaped dance improvisation classes, in total 25 interviews with eight dancers and a video artist, and field notes from her own teaching.

The investigation is interpreted within a larger framework informed by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and critical, transformative pedagogy. Through a mixed-method approach, Østern voices and interprets what the different dancers experience in the project, the ways in which the project is meaningful for them and what they learn. She seeks to connect the bodily, lived experiences in the improvisation to the meaning perspective transformation shown among the dancers during the project.

Grounded in her lived experience as the dance teacher in the Dance Laboratory, Østern posits a reading of the body as a lived and constructed phenomenon. As part of this reading, she illuminates a tension between cultural and individual narratives about disability. She uses space as a theoretical device and identifies a lived, aesthetic, fictive, cultural, political and narrative space in dance. She suggests that a dance teacher's awareness about how dance operates within, and also creates, these spaces is crucial in order to negotiate about space for differently bodied dancers. In showing that the dancers' meaning-making processes go across categories like disabled and non-disabled, professional and amateur, she deconstructs traditional categories. The different dancers walk as individuals, not categories, through the project.

As a result of her investigation, Østern argues for a poetic, dialogical and transformative dance pedagogy. She feeds in the voices of the different dancers into a broader aesthetic, societal and pedagogical discussion about dance in contemporary time. She emphasizes the importance of managing to *see beyond* what one already knows as a dance teacher and understand body, identity and dance in new ways. She underlines that difference among dancers should not be seen as additional, but valuable, in dance. Difference should not be put on top of an already existing activity in dance class, but instead be defined as the most generative force, allowing this force to really influence the *what* and *how* when dance is created.

Østern uses the voices of the dancers to discuss the dramaturgy of teaching dance improvisation and in this she focuses on dance teachers as agents of change. She points to how dance improvisation can be a generous and spacious learning space where the participants experience, learn and change. In dance improvisation dancers and dance teachers are *constantly on the move*.

# Tiivistelmä

Tutkimus käsittelee merkityksen rakentamisen prosessia keholtaan erilaisten tanssijoiden tanssi-improvisaatioprojektissa, Tanssilaboratoriossa (the Dance Laboratory), Trondheimissa Norjassa. Tanssijat, joiden joukossa oli vammaisia, vammattomia, amatöörejä ja ammattilaisia, tutkivat Tanssilaboratoriossa, mitä tanssi heidän keskinäisessä kohtaamisessa voi olla.

Østern keräsi tutkimuksen pääasiallisen empiirisen aineiston vuosina 2003–2004. Se koostuu videonauhoitetuista tanssi-improvisaatiotunneista, 25 haastattelusta kahdeksan tanssijan ja videotaitelijan kanssa, sekä hänen omasta opetuksestaan tekemistä muistiinpanoista.

Tutkimuksen tulkintaa suuntaava teoreettinen viitekehys nojaa Merleu-Pontyn fenomenologiaan ja kriittiseen, muuntavaan pedagogiikkaan. Monimetodisen lähestymistavan myötä Østern ilmentää ja tulkitsee, mitä projektin eri tanssijat kokevat, millä tavoin projekti on heille merkityksellinen ja mitä he oppivat. Hän pyrkii yhdistämään improvisaation kehollisen kokemuksen merkitysnäkökulman muutokseen, joka ilmeni tanssijoiden tanssimisessa ja keskusteluissa projektin edetessä.

Pohjautuen kokemukseensa Tanssilaboratorion tanssiopettajana Østern tekee kehosta luen-  
nan elettyä ja konstruoituna ilmiönä. Osana tätä luentaa hän tuo ilmi vammaisuuteen liittyvän kulttuurisen ja yksilöllisen narratiivin välisen jännitteen. Hän hyödyntää tilan käsitettä teoreettisena välineenä identifioidakseen tanssissa eletyn, esteettisen, fiktiivisen, kulttuurisen, poliittisen ja narratiivisen tilallisen ulottuvuuden. Hän esittää, että olennaista on tanssinopettajan tietoisuus siitä, miten tanssi käyttää ja luo näitä tiloja, jotta keholtaan erilaisille tanssijoille voidaan neuvotella tilaa.

Osoittaessaan, että tanssijoiden merkityksen rakentaminen ylittää vammaisen, vammattoman, ammattilaisen ja harrastajan kategorioiden rajat, hän samalla dekonstruoi näitä perinteisiä luokitteluita. Tanssijat kulkevat projektissa yksilöinä, eivät kategorioina.

Tutkimuksensa tuloksena Østern argumentoi poeettisen, dialogisen ja transformatiivisen tanssipedagogiikan puolesta. Hän kutoo tanssijoiden äänet osaksi laajempaa esteettistä, yhteiskunnallista ja pedagogista keskustelua nykyajan tanssista. Hän korostaa, että on tärkeä nähdä sen yli, mitä tanssinopettajana jo tietää, ja että keho, identiteetti ja tanssi on pyrittävä ymmärtämään uusilla tavoilla. Hän painottaa, että tanssijoiden erilaisuutta ei tulisi nähdä lisäarvona vaan itseisarvona tanssille. Erilaisuutta ei tulisi lisätä jo olemassa olevien tanssituntien sisältöihin, vaan määritellä se niiden tärkeimmäksi produktiiviseksi voimaksi. Erilaisuudesta kumpuvavan voiman tulisi antaa vaikuttaa siihen, mitä ja miten tanssia luodaan.

Østern hyödyntää tanssijoiden näkemyksiä keskustellakseen tanssi-improvisaation opetuksen dramaturgiasta. Näin tehdessään hän kohdistaa huomionsa tanssinopettajiin muutosagentteina. Hän näyttää kuinka tanssi-improvisaatio on runsas ja avara oppimistila, jossa osallistujat kokevat, oppivat ja muuttuvat. Tanssi-improvisaatiossa tanssijat ja tanssinopettajat ovat *jatkuvassa liikkeessä*.

# Abstrakt

I denna studie undersöker Østern de meningsskapande processerna i Danselaboratoriet i Trondheim, ett dansprojekt baserat på improvisation där olikkroppade dansare deltar. I Danselaboratoriet utforskar dansare med och utan funktionshämningar, amatörer och professionella, vad dans kan vara i mötet mellan dem.

År 2003–04 samlade Østern det huvudsakliga empiriska materialet för studien. Materialet består av videofilm från dansimprovisationstimmarna, totalt 25 intervjuer med de åtta dansarna och videoartisten samt forskarlogg från undervisningen.

Studien beskrivs och tolkas innanför ramarna av Merleau-Pontys fenomenologi och en kritisk, transformativ pedagogik. Genom olika kvalitativa metoder skriver Østern fram de olika dansarnas upplevelser i projektet, på vilka sätt Danslaboratoriet är meningsfullt för dem och vad de lär sig. Hon försöker genomgående binda samman dansarnas levda, kroppsliga upplevelser med den transformation av meningsperspektiv som de uppvisar under projektet.

Med basis i sin egen levda erfarenhet som danspedagog i Danselaboratoriet gör Østern en läsning av kroppen som ett levtt och konstruerat fenomen. Som en del av denna läsning belyser hon en spänning mellan kulturella och individuella narrativer om funktionshämning. Hon använder *rum* som ett teoretiskt redskap och identifierar ett levtt, estetiskt, fiktivt, kulturellt, politiskt och narrativt rum i dans. Hon framhäver att danspedagogers medvetenhet om hur dans verkar i, och också skapar dessa rum, är avgörande för pedagogernas möjlighet att förhandla om rum i dans för olikkroppade dansare. Genom att visa hur de olika dansarnas meningsskapande processer går på tvärs av kategorier som funktionsfrisk och funktionshämrad, professionell och amatör, dekonstruerar hon traditionella kategorier. Dansarna går som individer, inte kategorier, genom projektet.

Som ett resultat av studien argumenterar Østern för en poetisk, dialogisk och transformativ danspedagogik. Hon använder de olika dansarnas röster in i en bredare estetisk, samhällelig och pedagogisk diskussion om dans i nutiden. Hon poängterar betydelsen av att se *förbi* det man redan vet som danspedagog och istället förstå kropp, identitet och dans på nya sätt. Hon understryker att olikhet bland dansare inte skall ses på något som kommer i tillägg till dansen, men något som är värdefullt i dansen. Olikhet borde inte placeras på toppen av en redan existerande aktivitet, men istället definieras som en generativ kraft som får gripa in på allvar i *vad* och *hur* man skapar dans.

Østern använder dansarnas röster för att diskutera dansundervisningens dramaturgi. Hon pekar på danspedagogers möjlighet att fungera som förändringsagenter. Hon betonar hur dansimprovisation kan utformas som en generös och rymlig lärandearena där deltagarna upplever, lär och förändras. I dansimprovisation är dansare och danspedagoger *alltid i rörelse*.



*This thesis is dedicated to all those people  
who have the courage to be different  
in order to be themselves*

*and to all those people who are  
not especially brave at all,  
but just themselves, and still experience  
constantly being defined as different*

*and finally,  
to all those people who keep redefining  
what difference actually is.*





# Contents

Abstract	3
Tiivistelmä	4
Abstrakt	5
Photo credits	15
Acknowledgements	17
Foreword	19
1. Dance improvisation in a context of diversity	21
1.1. Introducing a process	21
From moving to feeling	21
From feeling to grounding	23
From grounding to thinking and clarifying	25
From thinking to connecting to previous research and dance pedagogy	27
The purpose of this research project	30
1.2. The Dance Laboratory – a presentation	31
Inspiration on the way and getting started	31
The Dance Laboratory, both an artistic and a research project	34
The dancers, video artist and teacher during spring term 2004	36
Those who did not continue	38
1.3. Methods and procedures	40
1.3.1. The collected research material	40
1.3.2. The methodological frame	42
A comprehensive hermeneutic-phenomenological mode of wondering	43
Making leaps – abduction as a type of research logic	47
Connecting to a pedagogical and dance educational research field	49
Turning to story-telling and narrative inquiry	53
About meaning-making	57
1.3.3. The relevance and validity of this research	60
Relevance	60
Validity	62
1.3.4. Video as research material in this study	64
Video as a dance research tool	64
The role of the video artist	65
Body-poetical stories	71
Studying myself as part of the video material	73
Focus on the teacher's strategies	73
Making choices	73

1.3.5. Interviews as research material in this study	74
The interview guide and model	75
Situating the interviews	78
Interpreting the interviews	79
The researcher-dancer relation	86
Different story-telling languages among the interviewees	90
1.3.6. Feeding back	93
2. Negotiating about space with differently bodied dancers – the body as a lived and constructed phenomenon	95
2.1. Cultural narratives of disability	96
2.2. The body as an agenda for identity, pedagogy and change	104
2.3. Different bodies balancing on the splinters of a dualistic worldview	110
2.4. The lived body	115
2.5. The cultural body	119
2.6. The body constructed through touch	123
2.7. Discussing lived experience	127
2.8. Different perspectives on space in dance	130
3. Improvisation as a spacious discourse filtered through the Dance Laboratory	135
3.1. The lived space	135
3.2. The fictive space	138
3.3. The aesthetic space	141
3.4. The narrative space	149
3.5. The cultural space	152
3.6. The political space	160
4. Meaning on the move – formulating the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory	167
4.1. Opening up and interpreting the video material	167
4.1.1. The body-poetical stories	168
Story one: Warming up	168
Story two: Exploring form	181
Story three: Listening into a duet	199
4.1.2. Teacher on the move	206
4.1.3. A developing interpretative tool	212
4.2. Opening up and interpreting the interviews	214
4.2.1. Creating meaning perspectives	215
4.2.2. Change	223
4.2.3. Meaning perspective transformation	234

5. Difference as a generative force in dance	
– suggesting a poetic, dialogical and transformative dance pedagogy	263
5.1. Discussing the validity of this research project	264
5.2. Seeing beyond	267
5.3. The learning space within a poetic, dialogical and transformative dance pedagogy	274
5.3.1. Knowledge hooks telling about <i>what</i> and <i>how</i> in dance improvisation class	276
5.3.2. Aesthetic-pedagogical principles	280
5.3.3. The dramaturgy of teaching dance improvisation	282
5.4. Negotiating about a generous and explosive space for dance	284
Summary	287
References	291
Appendix	303

# Figures

Figure 1 (Østern). The teacher-researcher's different perspectives on space in dance.	132
Figure 2 (Østern). Processes in the dialogue created in the improvisation between Vera and Anna in the body-poetical story three.	203
Figure 3 (Østern): The developing interpretative tool, including different perspectives on space in dance, dimensions in the video material and knowledge hooks to spin dance improvisation around.	214
Figure 4 (Østern). Examples from the procedure of condensing bodily-somatic meaning themes and constructing the bodily-somatic meaning perspective based on the answers in interview one.	219
Figure 5 (Østern). Creating a continuum from low to high degree of previous dance experience among the dancers in the Dance Laboratory.	219
Figure 6 (Anttila, 2007, p. 86). Eeva Anttila's groups of topics in her analysis of introspection by four female professional dancers.	241
Figure 7 (Østern). Karen's meaning perspectives deepen and transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.	256
Figure 8 (Østern). Mona's meaning perspectives deepen and transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.	256
Figure 9 (Østern). Vera's meaning perspectives deepen or transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.	257
Figure 10 (Østern). Ida's meaning perspectives deepen and transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.	257
Figure 11 (Østern). Heidi's meaning perspectives deepen and transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.	258
Figure 12 (Østern). Teresa's meaning perspectives deepen and transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.	258

- Figure 13 (Østern). Paul's meaning perspectives deepen or transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004. 259
- Figure 14 (Østern). Anna's meaning perspectives deepen and transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004. 259
- Figure 15 (Østern). Knowledge hooks that dance improvisation can be spun around, forming a bank of possibilities for the dance teacher. 279

# Tables

Table 1 (Østern). Locations and dates for the different interviews.	78
Table 2 (Østern). Organising meaning themes and meaning perspectives based on the dancers' responses to question two/interview one: What does dance mean to you?	220
Table 3 (Østern). Organising meaning themes and meaning perspectives based on the dancers' responses to question three/interview one: Why do you want to join this project?	221
Table 4 (Østern). The bodily-somatic meaning perspective constructed through the dancers' answers in interview two.	226
Table 5 (Østern). The existential meaning perspective constructed through the dancers' answers in interview two.	228
Table 6 (Østern). The intrapersonal meaning perspective constructed through the dancers' responses in interview two.	229
Table 7 (Østern). The community meaning perspective constructed through the dancers' responses in interview two.	230
Table 8 (Østern). The aesthetic meaning perspective constructed through the dancers' responses in interview two.	232
Table 9 (Østern). The methodological meaning perspective constructed through the dancers' responses in interview two.	233

# Photo credits

I am thankful to the photographers who have allowed me to use the photos they have taken at different times in the Dance Laboratory for this study. These photographers are:

Cover photo, front: The Dance Laboratory during improvisation class, spring 2004.  
Photographer: Pekka Stokke

Cover photo, back: The Dance Laboratory performing the piece Body Bending together with PAS dance company, spring 2008.  
Photographer, dance teacher and choreographer: Susanne Rasmussen

Photo 1. The Dance Laboratory creating the piece Body Bending together with PAS dance company, spring 2008. 20  
Photographer, dance teacher and choreographer: Susanne Rasmussen

Photo 2. The Dance Laboratory and PAS dance company creating the performance Code name dance, spring 2007. 94  
Photo, teaching and choreography by the author.

Photo 3. The Dance Laboratory during discussions about improvisation, spring 2005. 134  
Photographer: Per-Anders Østern

Photo 4. The Dance Laboratory performing the piece The Photographer's Moment, spring 2005. 166  
Photographer: Carl-Erik Eriksson

Photo 5. Dancers from the Dance Laboratory and the Dance Theatre 55+ in their joint performance Kropp a'long, spring 2009. 262  
Photographer: Bente Skille





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*Trondheim July 30, 2009*

*Tone Pernille Østern*

# Foreword

## **About the use of pronominal form**

For the case of this study, I have decided to use the pronominal form *she* for all references to the third person which could be both a *he* or a *she*. This decision is due to the fact that most dancers involved in this project are women.

## **The collected empirical material**

The empirical material in this study consists of several hours of video taped dance classes, 25 interviews with 8 dancers and the video artist in 2003–04 and a number of evaluation sheets covering the period 2001–2008. All this material is kept in the researcher's archive.

Extensive parts of the video material are transcribed and included in this thesis, as are long parts of the interviews. Interviews one and two with all eight dancers as well as the interview with the video artist are rather short and they are all included in the text with only slight editing by me. Interview three is longer with most dancers. The parts of the empirical material that are not included in the actual text are not included as an appendix, but instead kept in the researcher's archive. The Norwegian transcriptions are also not included as an appendix, but stored by me. The reason for this is mainly to give the dancers at least some protection, as the project is rather transparent and in Norway it is quite easy to find out who is who.

## **Thinking Swedish, talking Norwegian, writing English, tutorial in Finnish**

The accomplishment of this study has been conducted within a constant stream of different languages. This fact might need explanation.

To live in a constant mix of languages is the normal state of being for me. I come from a Norwegian-Finnish home, and in Finland I belong to the Swedish-speaking minority. Swedish is my mother tongue and strongest language, closely followed by Norwegian. As a child and teenager I went to Swedish-speaking schools in Finland. The majority language spoken in Finland is Finnish, although I have mainly lived in parts where Swedish is spoken by the majority. As an adult I have studied at Swedish, Finnish, Norwegian and English universities.

At the Theatre Academy in Helsinki, I could choose whether I wanted to write this PhD thesis in Finnish, Swedish or English. The choice fell easily on English, both because my dance vocabulary is rather English and in order to reach out to readers outside the Nordic countries. Also, this choice allowed for me to have an English-speaking tutor.

The empirical material for this study has been collected in Norwegian and all the dancers in the study (except Paul) have Norwegian as their mother tongue. My tutor, Soili Hämäläinen, has given me tutorials in Finnish, whilst my other tutor, Ann Cooper Albright, has tutored me in English. I have experienced this language mix situation as a richness and as an additional learning opportunity. It has allowed me to keep up with and develop all my languages.



*Photo 1.*

*The Dance Laboratory creating the piece Body Bending together with PAS dance company<sup>1</sup>,  
spring 2008.*

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<sup>1</sup> [www.pasdansekompani.tk](http://www.pasdansekompani.tk) (accessed 18<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

# 1. Dance improvisation in a context of diversity

Philosophy does not raise questions and does not provide answers that would little by little fill in the blanks. The questions are within our life, within our history; they are born there, they die there ... It is a past of experience that one day ends up at this open wondering.<sup>2</sup>

*Maurice Merleau-Ponty*

What is it that we do with the dance? What is it that we want with the dance?<sup>3</sup>

*Anna, participant in the Dance Laboratory*

## 1.1. Introducing a process

### From moving to feeling

The process which led me to this research started with a feeling. It was just a vague feeling of “hey, something special is going on here”. This feeling came while dancing: it emerged during my first experience in a dance improvisation context with both disabled and non-disabled participants. This was at a workshop led by Adam Benjamin<sup>4</sup> in Brighton in 1996.

Benjamin was the artistic leader of CandoCo Dance Company<sup>5</sup> at that time, together with Celeste Dandeker. I was a student at the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance in London. Interest in CandoCo Dance Company, which was to become the first European internationally touring dance company with both disabled and non-disabled dancers, had just exploded in England. That workshop in Brighton was my first meeting with the company’s work. The workshop presented a way of thinking about dance which I see today as a turning point which my own work pivots around. I was left with imprints, on my *beminded body*<sup>6</sup>.

I deeply lived this workshop and my memory from it is highly bodily oriented. My overwhelming memory from the one-day workshop can be summarized in one word: flow. On a bodily level, my memory has nothing to do with ability or disability. Instead, what I remember is the special feeling of flow and freedom in my body, and all the thoughts this led to.

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2 Merleau-Ponty (1968/1987, p. 105)

3 Quote from interview 3 with Anna, August 2004.

4 There is up-to-date information about Adam Benjamin, now a world-wide freelance choreographer and teacher, at [www.adambenjamin.co.uk](http://www.adambenjamin.co.uk). (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

5 There is up-to-date information about the CandoCo Dance Company on the web pages [www.candoco.co.uk](http://www.candoco.co.uk). (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009). CandoCo started to develop in 1990 from a meeting between Adam Benjamin and Celeste Dandeker.

6 Horton Fraleigh (1987, p. 11) writes that *the body is besouled, bespirited, and beminded*, to show that there is no split between body and mind. She writes that “Soul, spirit and mind are not separate from what we call the physical; rather, they are intrinsically tied up with it”. In this study, I seldom use the word physical. Instead, I frequently use the concept *bodily*. With this I then mean the beminded body. A bodily experience is not simply physical, but one where the body moves-senses-feels-thinks-relates-communicates, all at once.

We did an exercise called leading-and-following, which is one of the exercises that Benjamin uses a lot. The person who is the follower closes her eyes. The only contact point with the other one is through the wrist. The wrists of the two dancers function like a junction; the wrists gliding above, under and towards each other. Around this contact point the follower can move freely.

I found a partner to work with and we kept working together the whole day. He led me first. I put my wrist on top of his and closed my eyes. As my eyes closed, I received heightened awareness of our contact point. It felt warmer and more alive. The gentle touch between our wrists became very important; it was my only safety line in a dark universe. Starting only with following the breath between us, movement started to develop in my body. I was swaying, to and fro. I transferred weight to the balls of my feet, to one side of the foot, to the heels and then to the other side. I made a little circle, like Paxton's "small dance"<sup>7</sup>, on top of my feet. The contact point between my partner and I was there, safely. I started testing out more. What could I do? Where could I go? Slowly, movement accelerated in me. The tempo was going up. My hips released and gravity allowed me to drop down and into new directions taken by the knees, head, and shoulders. My joints felt oily and flexible, and it was easy to follow the impulses which my body and the situation presented. The easiness made me feel weightless. I was like a satellite tumbling around in space, only guided and protected by the contact point between me and my partner. It was a very sensuous experience. I was alone, but still strongly connected to my partner. With my eyes closed, all my other senses became wide open. I *was* my dance. It was a relief to close out visual information and instead rely on touching, listening and even smelling as a guide to movement.

As I was dancing, my back stroke past a rubbery, metallic part of something. It was hard, but it gave way and revolved on an axle in response to my body weight. O, yes, it was the wheel of the wheelchair. My partner was a black man in his 30's using a wheelchair. As the wheel revolved, the dynamics which were created shaped a new path for me to roll along. I sensed the force of friction working on me as I rolled over the floor and up on my feet again.

As I already said, my lived memory of this workshop has nothing to do with disability. I just remember the flow in movement. I also remember the connection between myself and my partner. Conceptually, though, it was such a surprise to discover that it actually became meaningless that my partner was in a wheelchair. The important thing was simply that *he was there*, to guide and support me in this weightless situation where I could investigate movement. In addition, I discovered as the day passed that his wheelchair was not an obstacle for the dance, but quite the opposite. Actually, it was very meaningful that he was just the person he was. I learnt tremendously much from our meeting.

It took a long time before the vague feeling of "something special", which this very first workshop gave me, developed into clear questions. For years, the feeling just buzzed as a wondering in the background of my awareness. In the meantime I was dancing, improvising, taking classes, meeting and mingling with other dancers, studying, all the time looking specifically for mixed ability dance improvisation contexts. It was something there which triggered my curiosity.

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<sup>7</sup> Steve Paxton, who is regarded as the initiator of contact improvisation, developed an exercise which aimed at creating awareness around the subtle inner movements of our body and sensing the pull of gravity while standing. This has been called *the small dance*, because it is, very simply, about dancing while standing still. See, for example, Kaltenbrenner (1998, p. 100–101) for a thorough explanation of the small dance.

## From feeling to grounding

My story as a dance artist working with differently bodied dancers starts with my own lived dance experiences, like the one just described. It is the lived experience of movement, dance and relations to different dancers which form the ground I rely on as a dance artist and teacher today. I have always danced: as a child, a teenager and as an adult. Still, that experience of dancing in a context with both disabled and non-disabled movers opened up for something that I had missed in dance. It felt like in that context I had found another approach to dance, or even another definition of dance. The aspect which seemed to be highlighted in this context of body and diversity, was the aspect of *not knowing*. And I recognized that *not knowing* is a place where I feel comfortable and alive. Instead of being instructed, corrected and given movement, in the mixed ability improvisation class I could work and dance differently. And, very importantly, I was allowed to do that together with dancers who were not like me. Being used to working mostly with young, able-bodied, white female dancers like myself, it was truly refreshing to work with a black man using a wheelchair. I felt open, intrigued and challenged in his company. Our meeting made me dance in a new way.

This mixed ability dance context had deep resonance with me. Since I am not disabled myself, this might seem strange. When I started working with the Dance Laboratory<sup>8</sup>, and the work with disabled and non-disabled dancers really became a main focus for me, some people have asked me why I find this so interesting. Some people have even asked me if I do it for money, assuming that a focus on disability will more easily release funding for my work. This is a strange thought, which is far from reality. Some people also suspect me of wanting to be nice to disabled people. This is also far from my motivation. To explore dance with differently bodied people is not about being nice to people in wheelchairs. I would say rather the opposite: it is about *not* being nicer to people with disabilities, but instead seeing them as equally interesting and active as non-disabled dancers. My motivation is that I find mixed ability contexts loaded with possibilities to explore dance beyond what I already know about dance. My deepest impulse to work with dance is the *finding out* aspect. When I teach, it is always teaching like a teacher-choreographer, searching for close dialogue and investigation with my students-dancers.

In my work with dance the totality of my life and dance experience shows itself; my beliefs and disbeliefs, the way I move, the things I understand and the things still to be understood. This is so because dance is a complex phenomenon which both mediates and changes existence, worldviews, ways of moving, ways of approaching others and society. I will come back to this thoroughly in chapters two and three. Here, a short story of me might be appropriate in order to backtrack and ground how this research came into being. I started dancing as a child, first dance for children and later jazz dance technique. Neither classical ballet nor contemporary techniques came into my life before I was a teenager, improvisation and contact improvisation still a bit later. As soon as I discovered the field of contemporary dance, improvisation and contact improvisation, this is where my interest has remained. My formal education consists of a BA and MA in special education from Åbo Akademi University in Finland parallel with dance

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<sup>8</sup> See [www.danselaboratoriet.no](http://www.danselaboratoriet.no) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)



studies at Jyväskylän Yliopisto University, a professional diploma in community dance studies from the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance in London and a contemporary dance teacher's qualification from Danshögskolan University College in Stockholm.

Having completed my education in Stockholm in 1999, I moved to Trondheim in Norway, where I have established myself as a dance artist. Here I have the possibility to regularly attend contemporary classes arranged by PRODA<sup>9</sup>, a state funded system which provides training opportunities for professional dancers in Norway. Some of the Norwegian dance artists who have taught extensively at Proda Trondheim are Susanne Rasmussen, Luis Della Mea and Mari Flønes. In addition, I have regularly travelled and taken classes and workshops other places, for example at the Movement Research Centre in N.Y., Ménagierie de verre in Paris, Kuopio Tanssii ja Soi in Finland and KHiO (Oslo National Academy of the Arts) in Oslo. The different teachers I have studied with at these places mostly work through a mix of release-based, flying-low contemporary techniques and improvisation. Some of them are Lisa Race, Bill Young, Lola Keraly, Gustavo Lesgart and Eugenia Estévez. In addition, I have taken improvisation and contact improvisation classes and workshops with, for example, Kirstie Simson. After the workshop in Brighton, which I told about in the beginning of this chapter, I have also taken many workshops with and stayed in dialogue with Adam Benjamin. All these teachers, classes and studies have clearly influenced who I became, or continuously *am becoming*, as a dance artist.

The reason why I set up and developed the Dance Laboratory is first of all curiosity. I wondered which discoveries still lay in front of me in meeting with different dancers. By some reason, I identify with people who are easily defined as “different”. I feel more alive and also more relaxed in heterogeneous contexts than in situations where everybody seems similar and live similar lives. One explanation might be that I all my life have lived in some kind of a minority situation. I am half Norwegian, half Finnish. I was born in Norway, but I grew up in Finland, before moving back to Norway at the age of 28. Being a Finnish citizen, I belong to the Swedish-speaking minority, which is around 6 % of the Finnish population. This is a very well integrated minority in Finnish society and it needs to be underlined that the Swedish-speaking minority is not an oppressed one.<sup>10</sup> But however well the minority I belong to lives intermingled with the majority population, the experience of belonging to a minority group has made me live with an awareness that communication between people might take problem-solving, struggle and creativity. I grew up just outside the city of Vasa in Western Finland, which is a bilingual city and area. Despite the fact that two language groups live next to and intertwined with each other, my experience is that there are few conflicts and problems around this issue. This means that I am used to situations where people co-exist, communicate and create despite differences. I am used to the fact that this is seen as richness, and not as a problem.

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<sup>9</sup> See [www.proda.no](http://www.proda.no) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009) for Proda nationally in Norway or [www.dansit.no](http://www.dansit.no) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009) for Proda in Trondheim

<sup>10</sup> For demographic studies on the Swedish-speaking Finns see, for example, Finnäs (2000), Finnäs (2002) and Folktinget (2007)

## From grounding to thinking and clarifying

The concept of integrity is a good place to start developing a mixed-ability dance project. Integrity is a derivation of integrate, a much and often wrongly used word. In Norway the concept “integrate” has become such a cliché that, within the school system, many teachers avoid the word integration and instead talk about inclusion.

What about rather re-creating the meaning of integration? “Inclusion” in my ears rings of a more superficial meaning, implying that it is enough to include somebody into the circle and then believe that the work is done. But to teach or work with people with different life experience, backgrounds and abilities needs active effort if the meeting is going to lead towards integrity for everybody in the group. Through mere “inclusion” you often end up re-establishing or even worsening culturally established narratives about the body, teaching, and in this case, dance. What is the point of “inclusion” if it leads, for example, to a situation where a boy with autism is left to wander around by himself in a class of non-disabled children, as I have experienced?

Another situation I recall was in 2008 when I was teaching a workshop for A-level students in dance and drama. As I was about to start, I realised that there was a student in the class who used walking equipment. I had not known that in advance. Within the two minutes that I had before the class started, I reorganized the whole plan which I had thought of teaching. With this student in class, the important thing became to focus on meetings and problem-solving between the different members of the class. Most of the time I had them work in pairs, creating a duet. After some preliminary struggle because of the unusual situation, the student who could not walk and her classmate who worked together with her produced some great moments. The best spot was when the non-disabled dancer climbed onto the walking equipment and was walked around in space by her friend. Their usual roles were turned up-side down and new possible scenery was created. Through my background from the Dance Laboratory I was prepared to make this switch, a switch I strongly believe would be of value for a large group of dance teachers. Not least, I suggest that would be of value for the development of dance and methodology for teaching dance.

This is why I still prefer to talk about the importance of *integration*, not inclusion. Integration goes deeper and demands a conscious effort to find new ways of working. I really like Benjamin’s<sup>11</sup> statement that the goal of integration should be integrity. A person who has integrity is in harmony with herself. A group of dancers, who have integrity, is a group where every individual within that group is appreciated and used for her unique contribution to make up a new whole. I also find it intriguing how Benjamin<sup>12</sup> has traced the linguistic root of “integration” to the Latin *tangere* which means “touch”. This tells about how integration is about putting divided parts into touch with each other. In Norway politicians often say that “immigrants need to be integrated into Norwegian society” (I never hear them talk about disabled people), but this makes it sound like integration is a one-way activity. The whole point is that it is not. Integration goes in two directions and has implications for everybody involved. Everybody has to find out what

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<sup>11</sup> Benjamin (2002, p. 12–18)

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin (2002, pp. 13–14)

her contribution is to *get in touch* with others and create a new integrity. It is also important to remember that “integration” has no linguistic connection to, for example, disability and should be avoided as symbiotic with disabled people, immigrants or other oppressed groups. Instead, again, integration has implications for all of us. This again invites problem-solving as a means to reach integration. That means then, as Benjamin<sup>13</sup> concludes, that integration and improvisation invite similar ways of working: problem-solving and finding out.

When all this is said about integration, I wish to stress that there is no such genre as “integrated dance”. As I will come back to in later chapters, this is a label which is often used by journalists or others to describe work where dancers with and without disabilities create together. To me, the work done in the Dance Laboratory is about contemporary dance improvisation, not about “integrated dance”. Diversity and different voices (different bodies) are a sign of contemporary time and therefore, I suggest, a general challenge for contemporary dance teaching.

Another aspect which is important to clarify right from the start is that the Dance Laboratory is not a therapy project. Maybe it should be unnecessary to say this, but I have experienced so many times, especially in the beginning of the Dance Laboratory’s history, that people have come up to me and asked or talked about dance therapy. For me it is quite striking that many people’s first association with “disability” is “somebody who is in need of therapy”. This reveals a rather passive view of disabled people. The thought of disabled people as possible, active contributors to aesthetic processes represents an opposite view. For many people this seems to be a long stretch of imagination. One explanation for this, I suggest, is that – at least in Norway – there is a silencing of disabled people in creative settings. Since disabled people become invisible in artistic settings, a public debate about disability, body and identity is lacking. After the premiere of the first performance I made in Stockholm with both disabled and non-disabled dancers, a dance teacher came up to a dancer in wheelchair and told him that she also was involved in dance therapy. I remember how the dancer in wheelchair replied, approximately like this:

– I am not doing dance therapy. If I had problems I would go to a psychologist, but now I am dancing simply because I want to dance.<sup>14</sup>

The work done in the Dance Laboratory is not therapy. The intention is not to take away or cure problems in the group. I am not there as a therapist, but as a choreographer and teacher. I have a steady focus on dance as an art subject and I aim to investigate what dance can be in the meeting between different dancers. The fact that a dancer, for example, cannot walk is taken as a challenge to find other ways of moving. The “problems” that arise in the meetings between different people are dealt with, not taken away or “helped away”. The Dance Laboratory is also not a therapy situation, because in a therapy situation one is usually seen as the helper and the other as the receiver of help. In situations with disabled and non-disabled people, the non-disabled person usually – often in a tacit way – looks at herself as the one who can “help” the disabled one. This is not the starting point for the work done in the Dance Laboratory. Quite to

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<sup>13</sup> Benjamin (2002, p. 14)

<sup>14</sup> My memory of an answer by Carl, a journalist and dancer in a wheelchair whom I worked with in a production in Stockholm, 1999.

the contrary, the intention is to meet, explore and create *as equals*. This implies a view of both disabled and non-disabled dancers as active and creative contributors.

When saying that the work done in the Dance Laboratory is not therapy, this does not, of course, mean that it cannot be a therapeutic experience. Dance often gives a feeling of flow, connectedness and joy, which in itself is therapeutic. Many of the experiences that the dancers tell about in this project can be seen as therapeutic experiences and this is true for both non-disabled and disabled dancers. Still, the starting point for the Dance Laboratory is that it is an artistic group, working through creative processes of exploring, relating, communicating and finding out in dance.

### **From thinking to connecting to previous research and dance pedagogy**

In order to move from thinking and clarifying to the setting up of this research project I have connected to a lively field of dance, research and pedagogy. I have seen numerous different performances, attended festivals, seminars, workshops and classes; engaged in discussions with a range of different people on the dance field. I will mention many of these meetings and influences as I am in the process of describing and interpreting.

For the sake of this study I have also read the work of many different researchers and writers. Here, I will mention the main literature I have been influenced by. I have kept reading throughout the interpretative process and have clearly been inspired by many researchers and writers. Some authors have influenced me more than others.

The first one I should mention is probably Adam Benjamin<sup>15</sup>. He is the previous artistic leader of CandoCo Dance Company, now a worldwide freelance choreographer and dance teacher. I am inspired both by his practical and conceptual work, which is visible throughout this thesis. Regarding a contemporary cultural-political understanding of the body, including body and disability, Ann Cooper Albright<sup>16</sup>, Sally Banes<sup>17</sup>, Petra Kupperts<sup>18</sup> and Carrie Sandahl & Philip Auslander<sup>19</sup> have been particularly important.

The research within dance pedagogy of Soili Hämäläinen<sup>20</sup> and Eeva Anttila<sup>21</sup> at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki has influenced me. They are carrying out interesting research about the importance of dialogue in dance education, and I go into dialogue with the work of both of them in this thesis. Within research in dance pedagogy also the work of Leena Rouhianen<sup>22</sup>, Sherry Shapiro and Svi Shapiro<sup>23</sup>, Jill Green<sup>24</sup> and Isabel Marques<sup>25</sup> has been particularly inspiring for me.

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15 [www.adambenjamin.co.uk](http://www.adambenjamin.co.uk) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009) or Benjamin (2002)

16 Cooper Albright (1997; 2003; 2007) or [www.oberlin.edu/girlsinmotion](http://www.oberlin.edu/girlsinmotion) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

17 Banes (2003)

18 Kupperts (2001; 2006)

19 Sandahl and Auslander (2005)

20 Hämäläinen (1999; 2006)

21 Anttila (2003; 2007)

22 Rouhianen (2008)

23 Shapiro (1998), Shapiro & Shapiro (2002)

24 Green (1999; 2002–2003; 2007).

25 Marques (1998)

The Finnish dance artist and researcher Rouhiainen<sup>26</sup> has also been important for my understanding of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology<sup>27</sup>. My understanding of a phenomenological-hermeneutic mode of philosophizing, including an actual understanding of my own research process, has been hugely deepened through my reading of her doctoral dissertation<sup>28</sup>. As I will come back to later, my whole work as a contemporary dancer and researcher confirms the results of her study among freelance Finnish dance artists. Regarding my development of a holistic body approach, in addition to Merleau-Ponty, my reading of George Lakoff & Mark Johnson<sup>29</sup>, Shaun Gallagher & Dan Zahavi<sup>30</sup> and Gunn Engelsrud<sup>31</sup> has been important. John Shotter<sup>32</sup> has been inspiring regarding writing about living moments and Valerie Briginshaw<sup>33</sup> for my understanding of the concept of space within dance. In addition, there are several more authors who have been important during my research process. I will refer to them as I go along.

For the dancers involved, my most important role in the Dance Laboratory is that of dance teacher. I am in the project also as a dance development worker, choreographer and researcher. Still, for the dancers in the group I am foremost their dance teacher. This research project offers insight into my lived – and often very sweaty – experiences as a dance improvisation teacher. Throughout this study I allow my lived experience as a teacher to go into dialogue with existing, relevant theory. That includes a dialogue with theory developed within the field of dance education. I will come back to the pedagogical frame for this project more thoroughly in Section 1.3.2. The methodological frame. My awareness of the dance pedagogical value of this study has grown as I have developed with the research project, and I will keep coming back to the issue of dance education throughout this thesis. Here, I will only start connecting to the field of dance education by directing focus on dance teachers as historically active persons, borrowing this expression from Britt-Mari Styrke<sup>34</sup>.

To pay attention to dance teachers as historically active persons means looking at how dance teachers administer, continue or dare to change stereotype attitudes which dance techniques and teaching styles inhabit. Through their teaching, dance teachers exercise power over their students' bodies. Green<sup>35</sup> writes about the Michel Foucaultian<sup>36</sup> technology of power and how this functions in dance education, where dancers' bodies are often moulded to fit the outside gaze of the teacher authority. A lot of dance teaching operates within a traditional mimesis-culture: the student learns by copying the master teacher. Traditionally, very little time is given to reflection

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26 Rouhiainen (2003)

27 For example, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1994; 1962/2002)

28 Rouhiainen (2003)

29 Lakoff and Johnson (1999)

30 Gallagher and Zahavi (2008)

31 Engelsrud (2006)

32 Shotter (1993; 1999a; 1999b)

33 Briginshaw (2001)

34 Styrke (2007, p.1)

35 Green (2002–2003, pp. 118–122)

36 Foucault (1988, p. 18) identified the technology of power as one of four technologies of the self. By technology of power he meant a technology which "determines the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject".

and surprisingly little attention is given to the dancers as subjects. Hämäläinen<sup>37</sup> has conducted dance research with focus on dialogue in the dance class. As a result of this research Hämäläinen draws attention to the fact that there is an enormous lack of dialogue in dance classes. Her research also shows that dance students long for feedback from their teachers – and they long very much. In front of their teachers, dance students are most vulnerable.

In her doctoral thesis, Anttila<sup>38</sup> focuses on the question of what teaching is. She ends up claiming that teaching essentially is about listening and encountering. She portrays the rich and manifold dialogue that can take place in education. This dialogue can lead towards conversation, reflection and critique. My interpretation of the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory supports both Hämäläinen's and Anttila's conclusions about the need for a rich dialogue in the dance class. The dialogue is important for the different dancers in a dance class but also, I propose, for the development of dance aesthetics (what dance can be) and dance pedagogy (how dance can be taught) in dialogue with the surrounding society. In this way, I suggest that not only can a dance class based on a dialogical teaching model lead to conversation and critique, but also to change.

With this study, I will focus on dance teachers and their possibilities to act as agents of change. The teacher in dance improvisation has the opportunity to teach differently and thereby in a new way influence the lived experiences of the students. I want to use Cooper Albright as an example of a dance teacher who acts as an agent of change and who sees her opportunity as an historically active person to break with tradition and teach towards a more human and reflected dance body. In a paper, Cooper Albright<sup>39</sup> tells about a dance project for girls which she leads. The project is called Girls in Motion<sup>40</sup> and it has the saying Move smart-Talk smart-Be smart as motto. In this project Cooper Albright consciously tries to use somatic forces – a mix of dance, yoga and sports – to influence and develop certain ways of thinking and moving. Her aim for the girls in the project is to develop fitness, create somatic awareness, better self-esteem and a critical attitude towards what is given to them as girls in contemporary time. Cooper Albright directs focus on how young women today are trained *not* to take up the full space around them and *not* to use their full physical capacity. With her project she, conversely, wants to teach girls to use themselves fully and enjoy their bodies. She is trying to create a dance environment where girls can stretch out fully, find their voice and touch on bodily experience as a means of re-constructing their bodies and identities. This is a unique opportunity that dance improvisation teachers have, then acting as agents of change.

Through this research project, I have realised that as a dance teacher in the Dance Laboratory I also act like an agent of change. This was not very conscious for me when I started the project, but it has become clear through the research process. The way I teach and choreograph implies an underlying emancipatory wish to investigate and change cultural narratives about dance, body

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37 Hämäläinen (2006), paper at the NDEO-conference "Focus on Dance Education: Celebrating the Whole Person" in Long Beach, California.

38 Anttila (2003, p. 287–289)

39 Cooper Albright (2007), paper presented at the joint CORD and SDHS conference "Re-thinking Practice and Theory. International Symposium on Dance Research" at Centre National de la Danse, Paris.

40 Girls in Motion, [www.oberlin.edu/girlsinmotion](http://www.oberlin.edu/girlsinmotion) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

and identity. Thus, the Dance Laboratory and this research project can be positioned within the frames of a critical dance pedagogy, which I will reflect more about in Section 1.3.2. The methodological frame. This research, then, can be read as a desire for change and a broadening of the field where I exist, act and contribute: the field of contemporary dance.

The research also can be read as an argumentation for a continuous development of postmodern aesthetics within contemporary dance. With postmodern aesthetic I generally mean an aesthetics which is aware of and sensitive towards multiplicity. Greene<sup>41</sup> describes postmodernism as an understanding of the fact that there is not one general culture or a universal comprehensive understanding which can win over all differences. Instead, postmodernism, according to Clifford Geertz<sup>42</sup>, acknowledges that there are multiple ways of knowing, viewing and being in the world.

### **The purpose of this research project**

Through the moving-feeling-grounding-thinking-conceptualizing-connecting process that I have described in the previous sections I reached the final purpose of this research process, which I specify as follows:

*My comprehensive purpose with this research project is to explore the meaning-making processes in a dance improvisation project with differently bodied dancers, interpreted in a larger framework of body phenomenology and critical, transformative pedagogy.*

In order to reach this comprehensive aim, I add two more specific aims:

1. Through an exploration of the dancers' meaning-making processes I investigate what kind of knowledge dance generates and which possibilities for meaning perspective transformation this project holds. I seek to articulate the bodily processes in dance improvisation and how they connect to the meaning perspectives conceptualised.
2. I use the knowledge generated through the exploration to enter and broaden a pedagogical, societal and aesthetic discussion about dance in contemporary time. In this, I go into dialogue with existing dance pedagogy research and feed in the perspectives of differently bodied dancers into a broader field of dance and dance education.

I was quite unaware of the importance of language as I started the project and collected the empirical material, but through the research process an awareness of the connection between language and the bodily processes has grown in me.

Another aspect which I was surprisingly unaware of as I started this project was the pedagogical value which the knowledge generated in the project holds. My awareness about this increased hugely as I proceeded with the project.

An important aspect to underline right from the start is that the interpretation of the research material is by no means saved to the last chapter in this thesis. The first chapters are far from being merely descriptive. Instead, the interpretation of the totality of this research project starts

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41 Greene (2004, pp. 27–28)

42 Geertz (1983, p. 154)

right from the first sentence on the first page. The research process has happened through a phenomenological-hermeneutic spiralling (the description of which I will come back to soon) where I continuously have wandered – and danced – back and forth between the different modes of the research material. This movement again has affected the different chapters of this thesis. Theory and empirical material glide in and around each other throughout all the chapters.

## **1.2. The Dance Laboratory – a presentation**

### **Inspiration on the way and getting started**

From London, and that first workshop in Brighton, I moved to Stockholm in Sweden where I studied at Danshögskolan University College of Dance. In Stockholm, I got acquainted with Carl, who is a journalist and also a wheelchair-user. When I met him, he told me that he had always wanted to dance but never had had the possibility to do so. I asked if he wanted to give it a try, and invited him to come and improvise with me and some other students at Danshögskolan. From those improvisations I developed an idea about making a piece, and in the end this piece with Carl and some non-disabled dance students became my choreography project for the dance teacher qualification programme. The piece focused on the investigation of wheels in different contexts, and when the piece was made and shown, I knew I wanted to dig deeper into this area in the future.

In 1999 I settled down as a dance artist in Trondheim in Norway. My interest in creating space for different dancers to investigate dance together was now firmly established. The idea of creating possibilities for disabled and non-disabled people to investigate dance together was quite unknown in Trondheim, and in Norway. Still today in 2009 I have not heard about any Norwegian projects other than the one under study that have invited disabled and non-disabled people to meet of their own accord to improvise, choreograph and perform together. Of course, there might be projects which I have not heard of. Still, it is accurate to say that this was, and still in 2009 is, a rather unexplored field of dance in Norway.

In 2000 the Inclusive Dance Company<sup>43</sup> was established in Trondheim by myself and another dancer. Anna, who has a fictive name, is part of the collected material for this study as she also participated in the Dance Laboratory. In April 2001 the first piece på Føtter, på Hjul<sup>44</sup> (on Feet, on Wheels) with the Inclusive Dance Company was ready. This piece was a continuation and deeper investigation of the theme from the choreography project at Danshögskolan. Carl, who participated in the first piece at Danshögskolan, came to Trondheim as a guest dancer and stayed for two months to produce a larger piece.

The project brought with it a very intense time of choreographing and performing. When the project was finished, I was left with the feeling that although it had been a great experience,

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43 For up-to-date information about Inclusive Dance Company, see [www.dance-company.no](http://www.dance-company.no) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

44 på Føtter, på Hjul. Inclusive Dance Company (2001).



the *finding out* part had still been diminished in favour of choreographing and producing the full evening piece. Carl was tired and so was I, having gone straight to the professional stage with quite little time for improvisation and investigation. Reflecting on the project, I knew that I wanted to take a few steps backwards and create a meeting place for differently bodied dancers and wait for a while before another large production. I needed to learn more and listen thoroughly to the voices of different dancers.

In the autumn term of 2001 the Inclusive Dance Company eventually started a contact improvisation based class, led by me. The class was promoted as a mixed ability class – open to both disabled and non-disabled dancers. This first group was given the name Mixed Ability Group, and it was offered with the support from the municipality of Trondheim<sup>45</sup>. The Mixed Ability Group was promoted in this way in 2001:

The Inclusive Dance Company is developing the project Mixed Ability Group in cooperation with the municipality of Trondheim, Culture & Leisure in Strinda district. Adult dancers with and without disabilities are welcome to attend the Mixed Ability Group. The work in the group is based on contact improvisation. This is a contemporary dance technique based on physical contact between the dancers. Individual expression is also emphasised. The project has the intention to create a performance each semester. The Mixed Ability Group is open for a maximum of 8 participants and the project seeks to establish itself as a stable group.<sup>46</sup>

The Mixed Ability Group had its first class in August 2001. Anna and another female non-disabled professional dancer from the Inclusive Dance Company were attending. In addition, three participants, all women, signed on to attend the Mixed Ability Group. They were one non-disabled amateur dancer and two disabled amateur dancers. Both of the disabled dancers were wheelchair users. The assistant of one of the disabled dancers also was interested in dance, and soon she also decided to participate in the group. She was a non-disabled amateur dancer. So in the end, the Mixed Ability Group started up with six female dancers, disabled and non-disabled, professional and non-professional. It was a small group, but it seemed a good start for an improvisation space to develop. The group mainly worked with improvisation that autumn, but somewhere in the process some shaping of choreographic material started to take place. This was developed into a short piece with a work-in-progress character. The piece was performed at a school one evening that autumn – with only eight people in the audience! The interest for dance with differently bodied dancers was small.

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45 Karin Amble at the culture unit in the municipality of Trondheim has been a keen supporter and important critic of my work with differently bodied dancers ever since we first met. It is thanks to her belief in the project that the Dance Laboratory came to be and develop as a stable group. She encouraged and financially supported the set up of the Mixed Ability group in 2001, and then the Dance Laboratory in 2003. From 2005, Terje Johnsen continued as the leader of the culture unit working for equal opportunities, and he has continued supporting the Dance Laboratory. From January 2006 a 50 % stable position as a dance development worker and dance teacher was established for me within the culture unit of the municipality in Trondheim, with the Dance Laboratory as one of my main areas of work.

46 Promotion text written on posters, autumn 2001, my translation from Norwegian to English.

During this first autumn of teaching the Mixed Ability Group my wondering about dance improvisation in a context of diversity grew. The summing of questions in the background of my awareness developed into clear and curious questions. What did the participants experience? What did they learn? What can dance be? Who is dance for? How should I teach? How could all this be brought into a broader aesthetic, societal and pedagogic context in order to generate knowledge?

I had the feeling that all the participants, including myself as the teacher, both professional and non-professional, disabled and non-disabled dancers were being challenged “in a special way”. A quite clumsy wording I had first was that the dance did not seem to be about “just dance”. Instead, layers of meaning seemed to open up, interfering with one another and the context of the dance project, spreading into different aspects of what it is to be human – and what it means to be dancing. A better way of saying it is maybe that a rich meaning potential of the concept *dance* seemed to be able to flourish in this dance project based on improvisation with differently bodied dancers.

I wanted to know more than I had picked up through the teaching and the discussions we had in class during the project, so I finished the autumn with an evaluation. I asked the participants to write about their experiences, thoughts and questions during the process we had gone through during the autumn. One of the women using a wheelchair wrote this:

I am in a very good mood after each class. I feel that I have been able to show who I am. I also feel that I have been accepted as I am. It feels very good to be able show who I am in a new way, in the dance. It is good that people get to know me through the dance. I have learnt to dance in a completely new way. I have attended mixed dance groups before, called wheelchair dance, so this was not new for me. The new thing was *the way* we have danced. This was completely new to me. The performance also meant a lot to me. It was especially exciting because I knew it would be new for the audience.<sup>47</sup> quote evaluation sheet

This woman is Vera, who later continued in the Dance Laboratory. Another, non-disabled amateur dancer wrote this:

I am often in a good mood after class. One reason is that I often have discovered new ways of moving. Another reason is that this is a very comfortable and exciting way of using my body. Also I discover more and more that dance can be so much! I think that meeting with different dancers has been very exciting and full of learning, especially because I have discovered so many opportunities that I have never thought of before. The most important aspect is maybe that I have developed a conscious relationship to the fact that you don't need to be able-bodied to dance, not even to perform dance. I believe that the performance showed the audience that dance embraces a lot and that there are actually very few limits. In addition, I think that the performance expressed something about relationships between human beings. I think that most people in the audience were left with a “good feeling”.<sup>48</sup> quote evaluation sheet

The feedback which I received from the group was what finally prompted me to go on with

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<sup>47</sup> Quote from evaluation sheet by Vera.

<sup>48</sup> Quote by young non-disabled amateur dancer who took part in the Mixed Ability Group. This woman moved away from Trondheim the next year and started a professional study in dance to become a dancer. She is now an independent dance artist in Oslo.

the work and find out more. In the answers, I read about meaning-making processes that embrace different dimensions (or different spaces in dance, which I will come back to later). For example, I understood the quote “I feel that I have been able to show who I am” as a passage which describes an empowering experience. In my interpretation the quotes “I have developed a conscious relationship to the fact that you don’t need to be able bodied to dance, not even to perform dance” and “I believe that the performance showed the audience that dance embraces a lot and that there actually are very few limits” pointed towards an experience that had had influence on the dancer’s view on dance as an art form.

I turned to the Theatre Academy in Helsinki, Finland, to create a research plan. The result is this study. In the autumn of 2003, the group was re-created, now under the name the Dance Laboratory, with the function of being both an artistic project and the field work for this study.

### **The Dance Laboratory, both an artistic and a research project**

When the project started up again in September 2003, now with the new name the Dance Laboratory<sup>49</sup>, it was released altogether from the Inclusive Dance Company. The project was fully financed by the culture unit of the municipality in Trondheim. When the Dance Laboratory started up this autumn, only two participants attended the project. They were Vera and Anna, who both had taken place in the Mixed Ability Group. In October that autumn, the dancer and musician Paul moved from Argentina to Trondheim. He soon joined the project. So then there were three, very different, participants.

I want to stay with the fact that in the beginning, both in 2001 and 2003, it was difficult to gain interest in the project. It was not easy to find participants, and it was below the minimum number to start the Dance Laboratory in 2003 with only two participants. This tells something about the landscape where I tried to operate and create this project. The idea of inviting disabled and non-disabled dancers to improvise together seemed strange to most people. It was difficult both to recruit disabled and non-disabled dancers. I tried to promote the project to a lot of people, running around in cafes and other places to tell about the project.

Regarding people with disabilities or people new to dance who I tried to invite into the project, it seemed like the strange aspect was *this kind* of dance. Improvisation? Contact improvisation? What is that? I discovered that it is very difficult to explain what contact improvisation is to somebody who has never seen or been exposed to that dance form and actually not to dance at all. The whole idea of dance as expression and communication seemed new. As those I talked to had no embodied experience of dance and movement other than maybe copying movement patterns, or as a means to train and improve the body, it was difficult to explain what improvising through touch is. I many times felt how poor words about dance are, if they are not grounded in one’s own, lived experience of dance and movement. I tried to say to the people I talked to that if you come and try, you will understand more about what it is like. But I had little luck: it was difficult to gain interest in the project from people with

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49 See Appendix.

disabilities and beginner dancers.

But then, it seemed even more difficult to recruit non-disabled, more advanced dancers to the Dance Laboratory. The great barrier seemed to be the fact that the project was for both non-disabled and disabled dancers. When I presented the project to non-disabled, more advanced dancers, it seemed like in the very moment I mentioned the word “disabled dancer”, they lost interest in the project. Having uttered that word, it seemed near impossible to explain anything more about the group. Whatever I said, the people I talked to seemed to assume that this was some kind of special needs activity for the disabled, being of no interest to them personally. The thought that this was intended as an artistic project where disabled and non-disabled dancers can meet to create dance together, seemed out of reach.

Hoping that this situation would change, I then started the Dance Laboratory in September 2003 with only Vera and Anna as participants, soon joined by Paul. For aesthetic reasons it was quite difficult to work with two or three dancers only, and also for the purpose of the research material, I wished for more participants. I started to collect the research material during that autumn, but the main part of it was gathered during the spring of 2004, as there was a sudden increase in interest in the project. In January, before the Dance Laboratory was about to start again, there were phone calls from people who had heard about the project. Consequently, five new dancers joined the Dance Laboratory in spring term 2004. During this term, I collected the main part of the research material for this study, consisting of interviews and video material. The interpretation of the video and interview material in Chapter 4 in this thesis relies on material gathered during that term.

From autumn term 2003 until autumn term 2004, the Dance Laboratory worked only with improvisation, not towards choreography. It was a one and a half year long process of exploring, investigating, questioning, looking for possibilities, simply just finding out about each other and how to move and create together. For me, this period was a time of finding out how to teach in this context. In the spring term of 2005, I reckoned that there had been enough of “just” improvising and that the group now needed to create choreography and go out to show its work. We had created some sort of knowledge and it became important to communicate this to an audience in the public and receive feedback from the outside. That spring we created our first choreographic work, a short piece called *The Photographer’s moment*<sup>50</sup>. Next year the longer piece *Wanted:love*<sup>51</sup> was created. This performance toured in the municipality and surroundings. By now, the group was firmly established, consisting of a stable core of dancers. In the year 2006–07, the performance *Code name dance*<sup>52</sup> was created. In the season 2007–08 the Dance Laboratory was led by the choreographer Susanne Rasmussen, creating a piece called *Body bending*<sup>53</sup>. In 2009, the Dance Laboratory created the dance film *Café Burlesque*<sup>54</sup> as part

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50 *The Photographer’s moment* (2005), see [www.danselaboratoriet.no](http://www.danselaboratoriet.no) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

51 *Wanted:love* (2006), see [www.danselaboratoriet.no](http://www.danselaboratoriet.no) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

52 *Code name dance* (2007), see [www.danselaboratoriet.no](http://www.danselaboratoriet.no) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009). See Appendix.

53 *Body Bending* (2008), see [www.danselaboratoriet.no](http://www.danselaboratoriet.no) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

54 *Café Burlesque* (2009), see [www.danselaboratoriet.no](http://www.danselaboratoriet.no) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

of the performance *Kropp a'long*<sup>55</sup>.

Another aspect connected to the work with the Dance Laboratory has been the establishment of MultiPlié Dance Festival<sup>56</sup>. The intention with this festival has been to develop and enrich the position of contemporary dance in Trondheim and to create a performance setting which the Dance Laboratory can be part of. Further, the aim with the festival is to challenge aesthetic conventions about dance and create a debate about what dance can be and whom dance is for. The festival was arranged in 2004<sup>57</sup> and in 2006<sup>58</sup>, both years also with international guest performances. In 2004 the festival hosted the companies *BewegGrund*<sup>59</sup> from Switzerland and *StopGAP*<sup>60</sup> from the U.K., both companies with disabled and non-disabled dancers. The process leading to their visits in Trondheim led to quite a lot of exchange of experience and knowledge, which was important for me and the Dance Laboratory. In 2006, the festival hosted the Swedish choreographer *Efva Lilja*<sup>61</sup> with a piece created for two senior citizen dancers. In 2008<sup>62</sup> the festival was arranged for the third time. The Dance Laboratory was among the performing groups.

To conclude, the work with setting up the Dance Laboratory has included a mix of artistic, educational, choreographic and research engagement. The work has had the character of dance development work. An important part of this development work has been to encourage a debate about what dance is, who the stage is for and to direct attention to cultural narratives about the body (and disability as part of the body). The creation of MultiPlié festival has been one way of allowing the Dance Laboratory into a broader performance context, where its work can be seen, debated and written about. In this way, the work of differently bodied dancers little by little makes itself heard in Trondheim, thereby creating more knowledge and interest.

#### **The dancers, video artist and teacher during spring term 2004**

The eight dancers during spring term 2004 are all given fictive names and the video artist is just called "the video artist". Still, it is not really a secret who they are and it is also easy to find out their real names. This is due to the fact that the Dance Laboratory is not only a research project, but also a performing group. The Dance Laboratory has been written about several times in different newspapers and magazines; there is public information on its web pages and a couple of documentary films have been made about the project. The reason why I still chose to give everybody a fictive name is to create a distance from them for myself, to help to achieve

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55 *Kropp a'long* (2009), see [www.danselaboratoriet.no](http://www.danselaboratoriet.no) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009). "Kropp" means body, and the title of the performance is a Norwegian-English play with words. The sub title of the performance was "A body show with different dancers". See Appendix.

56 MultiPlié Dance Festival, [www.dansit.no](http://www.dansit.no) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

57 In 2004 the festival was arranged with the name Trondheim Community Dance Festival. See Appendix.

58 In 2006 the festival was arranged with the name MultiPlié – Trondheim Dance & Diversity Festival. See Appendix.

59 *BewegGrund*, Switzerland. [www.beweggrund.org](http://www.beweggrund.org) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

60 *StopGAP*, U.K. [www.stopgap.uk.com](http://www.stopgap.uk.com) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

61 [www.efvalilja.se](http://www.efvalilja.se) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

62 In 2008 the festival was arranged simply with the name MultiPlié Dance Festival, see [www.dansit.no](http://www.dansit.no) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009). See Appendix.

a more critical gaze when interpreting the material. I also sense that the fictive names still give them some protection and less vulnerability. Having said this, everybody involved has given their written permission that the video material may be shown in public and that their name is known. Since this shows a great trust in me, I am also highly aware of the ethical responsibility I have, both as a dance teacher and as a researcher.

The presentation of the dancers which follows reveals that many of them were connected to other participants or to me in different ways. Still, the only one I knew really well in advance was Anna, and also the video artist.

All of the eight dancers had chosen to attend the Dance Laboratory by themselves, out of interest. That is also a general prerequisite to joining the Dance Laboratory: all dancers must want to take part, no one can be directed to the project by, for example, a special needs unit.

**Paul** is a non-disabled professional dancer and musician from Buenos Aires. In 2004 he was 33 years old. He had his professional training in dance in Argentina. When he started the Dance Laboratory in the autumn of 2003, he spoke very little Norwegian. He also did not speak English, and we had difficulties communicating properly to begin with.

**Karen** is a blind amateur dancer. In 2004 she was 36 years old. Karen is also a professional pianist. She had no previous experience of dance improvisation when she started the Dance Laboratory in the spring 2004.

**Mona** is a non-disabled amateur dancer. In 2004 she was 31 years old. She is trained as and works as a social worker. She had taken beginner's contemporary dance technique classes one evening per week with me as teacher for one year before she started in the Dance Laboratory.

**Heidi** is a non-disabled full time dance student. In 2004 she was 21 years old. She took a one-year full-time preparation course for higher education programmes in dance studies. Anna was her main teacher in contemporary technique at that course.

**Anna** is a non-disabled professional dancer. In 2004 she was 26 years old. She had her professional training in dance in Sweden. She was a co-founder of and dancer in the Inclusive Dance Company, and in 2004 also the main teacher in contemporary technique at a one-year full-time preparation course for higher education programmes in dance studies which then existed in Trondheim.

**Teresa** is a non-disabled full time dance student. In 2004 she was 20 years old. She was also a full-time student at the one-year full-time course where Anna taught contemporary technique that year.

**Vera** is an amateur dancer with cerebral palsy, using a wheel chair. In 2004 she was 24 years old. She had previous dance improvisation experience from the Mixed Ability Group in 2001. She studied at senior high school in 2004. Vera uses verbal language but it can be difficult to understand her.

**Ida** is a non-disabled full time dance student. In 2004 she was 21 years old. She was also a full-time student at the one-year full-time course where Anna taught contemporary technique that year.

**The video artist** is a non-disabled man. In 2004 he was 32 years old. He runs an independent video design business, and I knew him from previous dance projects.

I – **Tone** – the dance teacher and researcher, am a non-disabled woman. In 2004 I was 33

years old.

These are the eight dancers, in addition to the video artist and the teacher, who chose to stay in the Dance Laboratory in spring term 2004. They are all part of the collected empirical material for this study. As the presentation reveals, when the project started in 2004, there already was a net of relationships and roles within the group. I had a relation to Anna and the video artist as colleague and friend. I had been the dance teacher of Vera and Mona in other groups. Anna was the main contemporary dance teacher of Teresa, Ida and Heidi in another context. Teresa, Ida and Mona were fellow students at the same dance school. Paul was new in Norway, having immigrated to this country just a couple of months earlier. These pre-existing relations were part of the context which the Dance Laboratory evolved in, they played a part in the processes within the group and they developed and changed as the project went along. All these dancers, including the web of relationships between them, were part of the project and they are part of the research material.

That spring, and over the years, there have also been some dancers who have quit the project. In the following, I will pay attention to these.

### **Those who did not continue**

The interviews and different written evaluations collected for this research project contain mostly experiences which can be described as positive. There are some negative experiences like fear of improvisation and some criticism towards the methodology used. This lack of clearly negative experiences in the material might, of course, seem a bit odd because surely there must be negative experiences and criticism towards the project and me as the teacher. The interpretation I have submitted in this thesis includes all of the interview and evaluation material. I have not – of course – removed any parts with criticism. Instead, when interviewing and receiving evaluations from the different dancers I have explicitly told them to be honest and not try to protect me from criticism, because that is what I will learn the most from. I do not deny that probably it was more difficult to express negative experiences to me as a researcher, since I was also the dance teacher in the group. It probably would have been easier for the dancers to express criticism towards the project had the interviews been conducted by somebody other than me.

Still, as it is now, it is true that most of the collected material reveals positive experiences. The dancers are also generally willing to reflect on their experiences. The reason for this is, I suggest, that this material has been collected from *those who stayed* in the Dance Laboratory. Over the years, there have also been some who dropped out. They have surely done so because of dissatisfaction with the project, but this is difficult to tell, because I have not managed to get them to tell me why they gave up.

It is important to underline that the Dance Laboratory has always been a voluntarily activity, taking place in the evenings. It has never been part of a compulsory programme at a school or within an institution. That means that the participants have found their way to the project through advertisements and flyers about it. I am quite sure that had they not enjoyed it, they

would simply have stopped coming to the classes. Therefore, the material collected for this thesis shows dialogue with those who really wanted to participate in the project. I suggest this is the explanation why the experiences the dancers tell about are mainly positive, and the reason why they are generally willing to tell about and reflect on their experiences.

I want to direct some attention to the participants who did not *want to* be part of the project. One explanation why they quit can be that they simply found the dance improvisation boring or uninteresting. But often, I think there are more complex explanations. I will tell about some occasions when people quit, and how that has made me reflect upon the project.

In the spring term of 2004, yet another dancer to those eight who are part of the collected research material started in the Dance Laboratory. She was a young woman with autism. She attended the first two classes, with her personal assistant sitting on the sidelines while she was dancing. I had the feeling that it worked well, the young woman took part actively and looked happy. The personal assistant also looked pleased. The third time, the young woman turned up with her mother. Right from the start, before the class started, the mother seemed suspicious and asked me critical questions. The first task I started with did not work very well and the young woman remained on the outside, but I soon went on with other things which seemed to work very well. Afterwards, the mother came to me and talked about the first task and the fact that the daughter had remained on the outside. I said that I was aware of that, and that this also was a learning process for me. The mother said that she wanted to call me to talk more, and then they left. She never called me and also did not answer my calls, and the young woman never came back. I experienced this as a loss and I learnt that when you have somebody there who feels suspicious about the project, the tasks actually need to work well right from the beginning of the class. There is no space for a “mistake” right then. At the same time, it is also important to be met with an understanding of the fact that improvisation does not always work. Sometimes improvisation is boring, unsuccessful or the dancers fail to connect to each other. I have learnt to talk about this in class; that this is the way improvisation is. Sometimes it works very well, and sometimes it just does not work at all. Those times when it does not work offer a valuable opportunity to discuss and find out why.

In the autumn of 2005 there were many new participants who showed up to check out the Dance Laboratory. Some of them did not continue. One of them was a man using an electric wheelchair, with whom I had quite a striking incident. I tell about this episode in detail in Chapter 2. But in the same autumn there were another two participants who attended the project for a while, but then suddenly quit. One of them was a young female non-disabled amateur dancer. Professionally, she was a music therapist, and when she first contacted me she emphasised that it interested her as a therapist to come into contact with people with disabilities. I welcomed her to the project, but emphasised that this was an artistic, not therapeutic, group. When she had been in the Dance Laboratory about a month I received an e-mail from her, where she wrote that she had decided to quit and that this was not the right thing for her to do right now. I wrote back to her and asked her to tell me why she wanted to quit, because that would be valuable for me, but I never heard from her again. I have learnt to settle expectations about what the Dance Laboratory is right from the start. To enter the group with the attitude that you are there to help dancers with disabilities simply will not work. Any dancer who joins the Dance Laboratory must



be willing to both take and give impulses, challenges and support and communicate on equal terms with the all the others in the group.

That same autumn, a woman in her 40s, who told me that she had a hyperactivity and concentration disorder, joined the project with great enthusiasm. She was a wonderful member of the group, sometimes so full of energy that the whole space just bubbled. She could suddenly stand up and run from one wall to the other and jump on the walls for a while, running back and forth, and then return to whatever task she was doing, in balance again. At other times, when we were doing slow improvisations, she could fall asleep. At one point during that autumn, the Dance Laboratory was going to give a workshop demonstration for an audience. Before that workshop, this woman got the idea that some members in the group were much “better” dancers than the others, and that the audience only would look at them. Especially she had a great admiration for Paul. She said that he was just fantastic and that everybody was going to look at him. She did not turn up for the workshop demonstration and she never came back afterwards. I never heard from her or got hold of her either. For some reason, she failed to see, and I failed to show her, that the interesting aspect with the Dance Laboratory is the whole picture and how everybody finds their place within that picture. Learning from this, I became more aware of trying to point to how different individuals are important in making up a collective whole, instead of seeing individuals competing with each other.

I believe that there is always learning potential for a teacher in finding out why some participants quit. In a voluntarily activity like the Dance Laboratory, it is not so easy to find out why some people quit, because they just quit. This happens early in the semesters before I have had time to create a real relationship with them and therefore they do not feel responsible for telling me why they quit. Therefore, the material collected for this research study does not contain much information about those who quit. Instead, it gives voice to those who chose to stay in the Dance Laboratory.

### **1.3. Methods and procedures**

#### **1.3.1. The collected research material**

The main research material for this study consists of video material, interviews and field notes from the spring term of 2004.

The video artist filmed four classes with the Dance Laboratory in spring 2004. A description of the procedures and methodology connected to the video material and the role of the video artist will be presented in Section 1.3.4. Video as research material in this study.

Each of the eight participants was interviewed three times during spring term 2004. The video artist was interviewed once. A closer description of the procedures and methodology connected to the interviews will be presented in Section 1.3.5. Interviews as research material in this study.

The material collected during the spring term of 2004 makes up the main research material studied and interpreted in Chapter 4. Meaning on the move. Formulating the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory.

Since the Dance Laboratory has a longer history than this, there is also additional material which is used for this study. First of all, I am not a researcher from the outside. Instead, I am a researcher in addition to being the teacher-choreographer of the group. That means that my experience of the Dance Laboratory is deeply lived. The wondering which led me to this research has a bodily character: the questions buzz in my muscles as well as in my mind. Also, I have a time perspective which exceeds the actual period of the spring term 2004 when the main research material was collected. This time perspective, still continuing, is part of the research material.

I also have gathered evaluation sheets from all the terms with its different dancers, exceeding the eight dancers of spring term 2004. I have evaluation sheets from all these participants, and I use quotes from them in this study. These dancers, who were not participants during the spring term of 2004, are not given fictive names. Instead, they are described as for example “a 22-year old non-disabled female dancer”.

Throughout the thesis, I will use different kinds of quotes which are taken out of the empirical material of this study. The different kinds of quotes created are marked throughout with the following names:

*a) quote interview*

These interviews were carried out with the eight participants during the spring term of 2004.

*b) quote video material*

The video material was collected during spring term 2004, and the quotes are taken from the transcribed video material.

*c) quote evaluation sheet*

The evaluation sheets cover the whole period during which I have led the Mixed Ability group and the Dance Laboratory, starting in 2001.

*d) quote field notes*

The field notes were written in a structured way after each class only during the spring term of 2004, but I also have written comments as field notes occasionally during other periods. Everything written by me as reflections about the classes are called field notes, and they cover the whole period with the Mixed Ability group and Dance Laboratory, starting in 2001. Also the lesson plans are seen as part of the field notes.

*e) quote press clip*

Quotes from press clips are categorised as “quote from press clip” only when a member in the Dance Laboratory is quoted in the press, not when other persons outside of the group are quoted.

*f) quote mail correspondence*

Quotes from mail correspondence include correspondence mainly through e-mails between me and different persons or institutions.

g) *line from performance*

Lines from performances are written and performed material developed in the Dance Laboratory. They are documented in scripts and on film.

In addition to these quotes from the collected material, memories of own lived situations are frequently embedded in the text. I am not marking these memories in any special way, as they are part of my reflective process. They are part of my lived experience. Based on these memories, I think and conceptualize when I am in the process of describing and understanding.

To sum up, the empirical research material for this study consists of:

1. Four video-filmed classes, evenly spread out over the spring term of 2004.
2. In total, 25 interviews: three interviews with each of the eight participants in 2004 and one with the video artist. The interviews were carried out mainly in the period February – August 2004. Four of the interviews were carried out in the autumn term of 2003.
3. Field notes covering each class during the spring term of 2004, and occasional classes during the period 2001–2008. Lesson plans for all classes during the whole period are part of these field notes.
4. Evaluation sheets from the end of each term with all the different dancers who participated in the Mixed Ability group and the Dance Laboratory during the period 2001–2008.
5. Lived experience and memories from the teaching and improvisation situations.

The interviews and different written evaluations exist in their original language, which is Norwegian. I have translated all the quotes from the interviews and evaluations sheets from Norwegian to English. All the translations have been done by me. I reflect more on the theme of translation in Section 1.3.5. Interviews as research material in this study.

In the next section I will describe the methodological frame for this project.

### 1.3.2. The methodological frame

This study belongs to the comprehensive domain of human science; more specifically, to the domains of dance and dance educational research. This is not a plain and simple terrain to walk (or dance) in, and the same goes for the meaning-making processes of human beings. The philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey<sup>63</sup> argued that human phenomena require interpretation and understanding rather than explanation, and Dilthey sought to develop a methodological basis in hermeneutics for the human sciences. Very shortly, according to van Manen<sup>64</sup> human science can be defined as the study of meaning. Human science and qualitative research is commonly concerned with the meaning-making processes human beings go through, how they act in their environments through meaning relations and how they understand themselves and their surrounding world.

In the following sections I will account for the approaches, methods and procedures that I

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63 Dilthey (1976, pp. 170–176).

64 Van Manen, (1997, p. 181)

have used to fulfil the aims of this study. I have approached the design of the study from the perspective of my problem formulation. That has led me to a comprehensive hermeneutic-phenomenological approach within an abductive research logic, and further to a positioning within a more specific dance educational research context. The following sections describe this methodological and dance pedagogical framing of the study. This includes the comprehensive methodological frame but also the methods I have developed to use video material and interviews as research material in this study.

### **A comprehensive hermeneutic-phenomenological mode of wondering**

*Wonder* has been an important parameter not only for this piece of research, but for my work as a dance artist in general. Wonder has shaped the path I have taken as a developing dance artist and researcher.

Taking *wonder* as a starting point to build the methodological frame for this research, the concept brings me to a French male philosopher of the last century, and to a Finnish contemporary female dancer and dance researcher. Phenomenology is firstly a philosophical and secondly a psychological field of inquiry. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's<sup>65</sup> phenomenological project has intrigued me for years, and it still does. This is true both regarding his view on the body as a body-subject, and his mode of philosophizing. This research in a comprehensive way relies on his view on phenomenology; it discusses it and in many ways confirms it. In her PhD thesis<sup>66</sup>, the Finnish contemporary dancer and dance researcher Leena Rouhiainen has brought Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology into dialogue with Finnish freelance dance artists. Her research as such is an example of a hermeneutic-phenomenological mode of wondering. I have found her work both inspirational and clarifying. Most of all, I have recognized my own research process in her, being led by a state of wondering. Rouhiainen writes that:

This research project was the result of a state of astonishment. My preconceptions were not sufficient to make me feel totally comfortable while living and performing as a freelance dance artist. I felt a need to re-think this questionable stance, which in the end led me to this research.<sup>67</sup>

In a similar way, my own research is a result of a need to re-think questions about what dance is, who dance is for and how dance can be taught and choreographed. In order to find some answers to my questions, for a long time I just dwelled in the wondering. In a way, I placed myself in situations where I could keep wondering. In this way, the wondering slowly took the shape of clear questions. Later, when interpreting the research material, I have in a similar way placed myself in the material without knowing beforehand how the material could open up and make meaning for me. Slowly, without me clearly noticing how, a sense of how the

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65 For example, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1994)

66 Rouhiainen (2003)

67 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 98)

material had significance started to emerge. Rouhiainen<sup>68</sup> describes a similar process when she was interpreting her research material. She describes how she placed herself into the issues explored without gaining any clear understanding of how they related to each other. While she did so, however, an intuitive sense of the significance they had in relation to each other started to emerge. Merleau-Ponty writes about the same experience when describing the writing of a new book:

The book ... constitutes for me an open situation ... I struggle blindly on until, miraculously, thoughts and words become organized by themselves.<sup>69</sup>

It can feel like a miracle when a large, complex piece of research material starts to “organize itself” and fall into place, but of course the material does not actually organize itself. Instead, this is a description of a hermeneutic-phenomenological mode of wondering, or philosophizing. For me, a hermeneutic-phenomenological spiralling means positioning myself in the midst of my questions and research material and letting it open up to me. I would like to describe this as an awareness of the presence of the research questions and material in my experience. This is a bodily process in the sense that I actively try to let the research questions dwell in me, embracing them with all my experience. When I start to see connections and formulate answers this happens through, as Rouhiainen<sup>70</sup> writes, an *intuitive sense*. I locate intuition in the body; things that I pre-reflectively have understood in a bodily way become conscious thought for me, and I call it intuition. In this way, an intuitive sense can be described as listening to the body. Through this listening to my body, in the interpretative process of this study I understand and generate knowledge, being aware that I am a body-subject.

One aspect of Merleau-Ponty’s mode of philosophizing which has been important for me is his urge to see beyond ordinary and established knowledge and categories. To me, this is one of the core attempts in his work: to re-view facts, conceptions and conditions that are taken for granted. Rouhiainen<sup>71</sup> writes that in Merleau-Ponty’s case, the conditions taken for granted were previous philosophical and scientific positions. In my case, the conditions taken for granted have to do with the aesthetics of dance and with the cultural narratives of the body. My meetings with differently bodied dancers in improvisation have given me the opportunity to question existing conditions and categories in the dance heritage I am part of. Rouhiainen refers to Merleau-Ponty when she writes that:

... the facts, conceptions, and conditions (that) we take for granted in our lives may at some moment seem paradoxical, contradictory, in a word questionable. When this moment arrives, one has the chance of re-perceiving and remembering them in a manner ... to grasp a significance or style that had gone unnoticed before.<sup>72</sup>

The process leading to my research is a number of meetings with differently bodied dancers in

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68 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 98)

69 Merleau-Ponty (1962/1995, p. 369)

70 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 98)

71 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 96)

72 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 96)

the dance studio. These moments have offered a chance to re-perceive and re-discover what dance can be and how dance can be taught, and I have reached out for new significances in dance.

As the teacher-choreographer in the Dance Laboratory, the first dancer with a disability who I found myself meeting with was Vera. Face to face – or, more precisely, *body to body* – with her, much of what I had learnt to build my teaching on teetered. She could not walk. So then we could not work with steps. She could not use her legs. So then we could not create patterns standing up. Transition on wheels is different than on foot. All of this influences the use of time and rhythm. She could not move controlled, in a precise manner or in unison with other dancers. Suddenly, the things I knew about space, time and body seemed disintegrated and splintered (a discovery which also Benjamin<sup>73</sup> writes about). So I tripped, not just a little, I really tripped over splintered parts of my dance knowledge. And I fell. Still, while falling, I was fascinated by the woman in the wheelchair in front of me. She had presence and looked me straight in my eyes. I approached her, to lessen the distance between us. As I reached out to touch her, she touched me right back. When I released my weight into her, she pressed back firmly. The wheelchair swayed around its own axis and I had to follow or I would fall (again). The contact point between us rolled from arms and shoulders to the head. Her skull was hard and offered support as I leaned towards her, off-balance, and ran around the wheelchair to avoid falling. The sound of our hair crunching mixed with the squeaking sound of the wheel when Vera put the brakes on. The force of momentum as the chair stopped sent my running body further, right out of contact with her, and I finally fell, ending up on my bottom.

In that meeting, I realised that the elements of space, time and dynamics were still there, just in a different way than I was used to. Vera had focus, strength, presence, and she dealt with the use of time, space, weight and dynamics in our duet. This lived situation, together with many other dance situations, made me think and question. Do you have to take so many steps in order to call it dance? Do you have to move symmetrically and be precise and fast? Not that I have ever thought that dance must be fast, precise and have focus on taking steps, but still the meeting with Vera really challenged me to look for and create new possibilities in dance. It seemed completely meaningless to try to fit her into forms in dance that I already knew. Instead, I needed to be willing to engage in a discovery of what dance could be in her body and in her meeting with me.

Led by this wondering and questioning I find it accurate to say that the comprehensive approach of this research is hermeneutic-phenomenological. I want to underline that in this study this is an approach, not a method. Rouhiainen<sup>74</sup> uses Merleau-Ponty's mode of philosophizing as a method when she interprets the interviews which her research material consists of.

The research material of this study is different. It is made up of the totality of the process with creating, teaching in and researching the Dance Laboratory. The research process has been lived by me. I *was there* as the teacher-choreographer and researcher in the project and I lived through the experiences with the dancers. In my own body I feel the resonance of the dancers'

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73 Benjamin (2002, p. 25)

74 Rouhiainen (2003)

imprints, footprints and moving bodies. I can hear the sounds of their bodies when they spiral and twirl around each other; their feet and wheels when they run and roll across the floor; when they laugh and shout; when there is complete silence and focus on one dancing couple in the studio; when their bodies relax and they give each other a soft massage of the skull; when the wheelchair falls over with a dancer in it, and the feeling when my skin softened and opened up to give and take impulses from everybody in the dance space. As a researcher I am not an outside person, but take part in the research process from the inside. As a researcher I actively use my own body to understand and generate knowledge. The role of the dance teacher and researcher are deeply connected. It was the mode of wondering and questioning I had while teaching and choreographing which turned me into a researcher. I wanted to find out.

Through this hermeneutic-phenomenological mode of wondering, I have interpreted the research material in a complex spiralling of going back and forth between the different parts of the material. This movement around in the research material all the time makes me discover new layers of significance. The going to and fro in a spiralling movement is a very suitable description of how this thesis has been written. It does not follow a process-oriented, linear process of writing, where I start in the beginning and end up on the last page. Instead, the understanding of one aspect has given me a new understanding, which again has affected all parts of the thesis. The conclusions of the study are by no means saved to the last chapter. Instead, they start right from the first sentence. The thesis *as a whole* is the result of this study, and its different parts stand in a dynamic relationship to each other.

I have constantly, throughout this research process, been moving, teaching, choreographing and writing. This implies a movement in itself between moving, and writing about moving. When entering the interpretative work, the first thing I did was to transcribe the interviews. I read them several times, but then did not do anything with them for a long time. The same is true for the video material. I watched it and then left it just to “be with me”, while continuing doing other things. The first chapter I wrote was Chapter 2. Negotiating about space with differently bodied dancers. The body as a lived and constructed phenomenon. Again, I started with that chapter because of a feeling. I had the feeling that I needed to do a thorough reading of the body and its cultural narratives in order to understand my collected material as fully as possible. This reading of the body gave me a base to start creating the interpretative tool which I kept developing throughout this study. With the help of the different perspectives on space in dance, I was ready to start interpreting the video material in Chapter 4. Meaning on the move. Formulating the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory. The next thing I did was to interpret the interview material. Parallel with this process, I was writing and re-writing the section on methods and procedures. I had a long period of spiralling in and out of Chapter 4. and 1.3. Methods and procedures. Then, later, I started writing Chapter 3. Improvisation as a spacious discourse filtered through the Dance Laboratory. The work with that chapter made me re-work all of the other chapters rather extensively. The new significances I discovered affected my understanding of all other aspects. Finally, I wrote the last chapter and the introduction simultaneously. I turned the start and the end of this study towards each other, implying that they constitute a spiral instead of a linear line going from A to Z. The beginning of the study lies beneath the rest of the study, which spirals on top of it, ending up on top of the beginning,

just many layers of significance above. The beginning, the end and everything between in this study stays in dynamic contact with each other.

To conclude this section about my hermeneutic-phenomenological mode of wondering, I want to point to the fact that, as such, the totality of my work as a dance artist and researcher is in dialogue with Rouhiainen's<sup>75</sup> study. When reading her thesis, I have realised that my whole research process actually serves as an example of what Rouhiainen investigates: the lifeworlds of (Finnish) contemporary freelance dance artists. As a dance artist and researcher I confirm what she concludes: that the life of a freelance dance artist basically is concerned with a questioning and transformative mode of existence. Rouhiainen in her doctoral thesis concludes that:

Freelance dance artists scrutinize the heritage of contemporary dance, the manner in which their local field of dance operates, the roles of the dance teacher, the dancer and the choreographer, the dancing body and themselves, while pursuing themselves their artistic goals in an idiosyncratic fashion.<sup>76</sup>

My life as a freelance artist – which led me to this research – is confirmative of the aspects that Rouhiainen points to. Through the way I work, and with this research, I scrutinize the heritage of contemporary dance which I am a part of. As I go into a discussion about the aesthetics of dance, I also criticise and debate the dance heritage. I enter the discussion about what dance can be through this research, but I also do that through teaching and choreographing. I investigate and debate the role of the dance teacher, the dancing body and my local field of dance. In that way, my wish to enter this research process is grounded in the fact that it has resonance in my lived body and life as a dance artist and teacher.

### **Making leaps – abduction as a type of research logic**

Traditionally, the research logics of deduction and induction are the most known and referred to. Abduction is a third type of inference discussed within the theory of science. This research is positioned at the border between inductive and abductive research logic. I will spend some time investigating the concept of abduction as a type of inference, since it is not one of the most commonly mentioned types of inference.

The concept of *abduction* today is rather young<sup>77</sup> and can be traced back to the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce<sup>78</sup>. The prefix *ab-* is Latin and means “away” or “away from”. Abductive logic as a type of inference has to do with letting thoughts “take away” or maybe

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<sup>75</sup> Rouhiainen (2003)

<sup>76</sup> Rouhiainen (2003, cover)

<sup>77</sup> Actually already Aristotle listed three types of inferences, according to Russel Hanson (1958, p. 85). In addition to deduction and induction, Aristotle mentioned a type of inference which he called “reduction”. Peirce (1903/1998, pp. 227–241) again translated this as “abduction” or “retroduction”. I have also found numerous other words used for abduction, for example, the inference to the best *explanation*, used by Harman (1965).

<sup>78</sup> Peirce (1903/1998).



more correctly “take off” from established thoughts, allowing scientific creativity. It sounds like the bodily act of making a leap, and I think of a reference made by Benjamin<sup>79</sup>. He refers to how Helen Keller, while partaking in a chance meeting with Merce Cunningham, reiterated the belief that a leap is the mind’s way of moving forward into new order and insight. Peirce<sup>80</sup> writes that abduction is “an act of insight”. Ria Heilä-Ylikallio<sup>81</sup> suggests that in order to create new knowledge one can not only depend on known concepts, but also use new concepts added to the research through abduction or scientific creativity.<sup>82</sup>

Abduction simply suggests that something *may be*. Russel Hanson describes the different research logics in this way:

Deduction proves that something *must be*. Induction shows that something *actually is operative*. Abduction merely suggests that something *may be*.<sup>83</sup>

The process of abductive inference consists of going back and forth between empirical facts and theory, constantly developing the ways empirical facts are applied, but also constantly readjusting the theory. This movement of abduction or making leaps is a good description of how this study is made, embracing a hermeneutic-phenomenological spiralling. Russel Hanson<sup>84</sup> refers to Peirce in saying that new insights cannot come from purely deductive or inductive thinking – the thoughts must be allowed to wander back and forth between theory and empirical observations, and somewhere make a leap into new insights. In this way, research actually always must contain a stage of abduction. All research – and all researchers – must make leaps.

One aspect which is taken into account within abductive logic is *pre-understanding*. Within abductive logic the assumption is that the reason why we choose the explanation we do is because we base it on a certain pre-understanding. When this pre-knowledge is used consciously to analyse a material abductively, the concept of a *guiding principle* is often used<sup>85</sup>. A guiding principle can start off as a quite intuitive, undefined feeling, but then becomes a clearly formulated thought to be used in the interpretation of a material. Led by the guiding principle, the researcher can concentrate on some aspects of the material, which are believed to bring new ideas or thoughts on the phenomenon. But because the guiding principle is chosen by the researcher herself, she can also choose to leave it behind in favour of a new guiding principle in the middle of the process if the empirical facts point in that direction – to allow for new discoveries to be found.

I tried to start this research process with the formulation of a guiding principle, but after a while gave it up. I could not find any formulation of a guiding principle which I was satisfied with. They all seemed to narrow down and determine too much what I would look for. Of course, this does not mean that I work without pre-understanding. I have a lot of pre-understanding, both

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79 Benjamin (2002, p. 30)

80 Peirce (1903/1998, p. 227)

81 Heilä-Ylikallio (1997, p. 53–54)

82 See also Anttila (1996, p. 139, 438–441)

83 Russel Hanson (1958, p. 85)

84 Russel Hanson (1958, p. 85)

85 For example Heilä-Ylikallio (1997, p. 53) uses this concept.

reflective and pre-reflective. As a matter of fact, my pre-understanding makes me the person I am. But instead of actively turning my pre-understanding into one guiding principle, I try to use it in a more bodily way. This means that I try to allow the research questions to dwell in me in the way Rouhiainen<sup>86</sup> calls intuitive. I try to open up for, to dwell in, the processes of meaning-making in this project, allowing my whole body to work on the process of understanding. This process includes making a lot of leaps, working abductively.

Therefore, perhaps meaning-making could be called my guiding principle, as the aim to understand the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory guides this study and shapes the design of it. As I investigate the Dance Laboratory, I also go through a researcher's meaning-making process myself.

### **Connecting to a pedagogical and dance educational research field**

When I started the Dance Laboratory and this research project I had given the project quite little pedagogical thought. To frame the Dance Laboratory and this research project within a pedagogical context has been important for my understanding of the research material and for the relevance of the knowledge generated through this project. This framing has happened through a back-tracking of my own pedagogical base rather than through a pedagogical awareness which was there right from the start. The pedagogical framing of this project and the feeding back into a dance educational discussion is part of the findings of this study. The study offers insight into the teaching of dance improvisation in general and in particular of differently bodied dancers.

The influence of scholars like John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Michail Bakhtin, Paulo Freire and Jack Mezirow is present in the pedagogical context of the Dance Laboratory. Dewey<sup>87</sup> focuses on the importance of learning through experience. Vygotsky<sup>88</sup> introduces a social-cultural perspective on learning, and he sees learning as both a social and individual process. Based on Vygotsky, Bruner<sup>89</sup> developed the notion of scaffolding, which I will come back to later in this chapter. Bakhtin<sup>90</sup> emphasises *dialogue* in order to develop knowledge. An authentic dialogue includes not knowing the answers in advance and an appreciation of the voice and perspective of *the other*<sup>91</sup>. Bakhtin's<sup>92</sup> notion of laughter and carnival – a turning up-side down of perspectives – relates to the idea of dis-orientation commonly used in improvisation. Freire's<sup>93</sup> pedagogy of hope gives a strong emancipatory perspective. Mezirow's<sup>94</sup> transformative learning theory explains how adults change through new meaning perspectives. I will come back to his transformative theory more extensively later. Here, I will focus more specifically on the

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86 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 98)

87 Dewey (1934/1980)

88 Vygotsky (1978)

89 Bruner (1986)

90 Bakhtin (1991)

91 Bakhtin (1991, p. 12–13)

92 Bakhtin (1991, for example p. 182)

93 Freire (1970)

94 Mezirow (1991)

field of dance education research.

Green<sup>95</sup> distinguishes between three rather fluid main areas of research activity in dance education. These include somatic dance research, critical pedagogy research in dance and post-positivist research and cultural studies. In the following, I will describe each of these main areas and also how this research relates to all of them.

Both as a teaching and research activity, the Dance Laboratory leans on all these three areas. They overlap and co-exist. Methodologically, the teaching in the Dance Laboratory is rather influenced by somatic pedagogy. Many improvisation tasks focus on listening to and creating awareness about one's own body, often with the help of sensuous touching in partner work. As a dance teacher, my interest in somatic practices is rather high, and many improvisation tasks allow for somatic learning.

Green<sup>96</sup> describes somatics as a field of study which generally views the body from a first-person perspective. Tomas Hanna<sup>97</sup> says that somatics is a way of looking at oneself from the inside out, rather than looking objectively from the outside in. According to Rouhiainen<sup>98</sup>, the perception of the body as it feels internally means tapping into the sensuous, proprioceptive (a term used to describe the internal sense of movements, posture and balance)<sup>99</sup> or kinaesthetic body, as well as the emotional and affective information it offers. Somatics has a focus on the micro perspective, but as Green<sup>100</sup> points out, there is also a general shift within somatics towards a social somatic theory which moves outward from self to society. Our bodies are not only "individually" ours, as they are shaped by the cultures which we live in.

Rouhianen<sup>101</sup> argues that there is a connection between bodily awareness of the self and embodied ethical relationships with others. In this, there is huge value in somatic approaches to dance education. I agree with Rouhiainen<sup>102</sup> that the somatic dimension of dance contains a vast amount of potential both for the field of dance and for the wider context of education. Rouhiainen argues that working with the body through a socially informed somatic approach improves students' self-understanding and capacity to relate to others in an ethical and integral manner.

As I entered the project *as a researcher*, my focus on somatics and the kind of knowledge this focus offers was quite low level, despite the fact that my teaching style includes a focus on somatics. As a research project the study and its findings can more readily be positioned within the areas of critical pedagogy research and post-positivist and culture studies. Actually, I propose that the results of this study partly fails to bring forward somatic knowledge because my awareness as a researcher about somatic experiences and somatic pedagogy was too low as I collected the empirical material. As a researcher I was not aware enough of directing focus on the somatic aspects of the improvisation. Actually, an analysis of myself as an interviewer shows

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95 Green (2007, pp. 1119–1132)

96 Green (2007, p. 1120)

97 Hanna (1988, p. 20)

98 Rouhiainen (2008, p. 244)

99 Rouhianen (2008, footnote 6 on p. 252)

100 Green (2007, p. 1122)

101 Rouhiainen (2008, p. 241)

102 Rouhiainen (2008, p. 251)

that I am not attentive when the dancers bring up bodily, somatic experiences for discussion. During the interviews I show a tendency towards discourse dominance, which leads away from actual somatic, bodily experiences towards topics influenced more by macro-perspectives. In this, the value of the improvisation as lived, bodily experience tends to slip away. I will return to this in other parts of this thesis.

Still, I would argue that socially informed somatic practice which can improve students' self-understanding and capacity to relate to others in an ethical and integral manner is demonstrated through the study of the Dance Laboratory. The findings of the study show that what I call the community meaning perspective among the dancers changes in a fundamental way through the project. The lived experiences of moving, sensing, relating and communicating in the Dance Laboratory affected the relationships between the different dancers and created a more integral community among them.

Through research within critical dance pedagogy, a number of scholars have investigated dance education in connection to issues such as body image, teacher and student power relationships, pressure to meet aesthetic and bodily ideals and the marginalization of specific dance bodies in relationship to class, gender, race, ability and so on.<sup>103</sup> Unaware of this as I started the Dance Laboratory, I backtracked my pedagogical agenda, pointing to what Green and Stinson<sup>104</sup> call an emancipatory teacher and researcher with a social advocacy project. I had political compassion in supporting mixed-ability dance practice and made a tacit attempt to change participants and inform and influence the dance field and wider society with the voices of the different dancers in the project.

Both the work of the Finnish dance researchers Anttila<sup>105</sup> and Hämäläinen<sup>106</sup>, who I am inspired by in this study, can be positioned within critical theory in dance pedagogy. Through autoethnography, Anttila employs Freiran framework to discuss dialogue in dance education. Hämäläinen draws on Foucault's idea that the body is culturally constructed, through, among others, the technology of power, and she aims to scrutinize and illuminate the forms of power which are connected to teaching dance technique. Shapiro<sup>107</sup> also scrutinizes the power of the dance teacher and uses the concept of transformative teacher as an alternative to the traditional dance teacher, who uncritically hands over conventional ideas about body and dance to new generations. The pedagogical aspect which I was the most aware of from the beginning of this study was the power of the dance teacher. This again confirms the fact that this research has a basis within transformative, emancipatory and critical pedagogy. As a dance artist and teacher I questioned the field of contemporary dance that prioritizes the white, young, non-ill, highly skilful, even machine-like body. These are questions that are raised within critical pedagogy in dance research. I had a specific interest in unwrapping prevailing cultural narratives of the body and identity. Also the findings of this study first of all can be positioned within critical theory in dance pedagogy. As a result of the project, I argue for an approach that allows for differently

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103 Green (2007, p. 1122)

104 Green and Stinson (1999, 104)

105 Anttila (2003)

106 Hämäläinen (2004; 2006)

107 Shapiro (1998, p. 7)

bodied subjects to enter the field of dance, to learn in the process of dancing and to influence the condition of the dance that they take part in.

However, this research project also has a firm base within what Green<sup>108</sup> calls post-positivist research and cultural studies. She also calls this postmodern research, and describes how this moves to a more fluid positioning and fuller questioning of all paradigmatic stances. Postmodern research recognises multiple and juxtaposed ideas and deconstructs the “truth” of any meaning system. Green further describes how post-positivist inquiry emphasises the multiple perspectives of those involved in a particular research setting in order to articulate the instability of implementing one interpretation of the truth. Green<sup>109</sup>, Hämäläinen<sup>110</sup> and Cooper Albright<sup>111</sup> can be mentioned as researchers who address postmodern research issues in dance, at least partially. As Green<sup>112</sup> writes, many dance researchers stand with one “foot” in critical pedagogy and one in postmodern research.

Marques<sup>113</sup> is a Brazilian dance education researcher, who, among other things, criticises the modernist tradition. She points to how this tradition sought universal positions and concrete answers. She discusses how modernism leads to a devaluation of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As an alternative she concludes that context-based education connects the dance body of knowledge with contemporary society. In context-based dance education, Marques<sup>114</sup> explains, there is no serial curriculum to be followed, but the teacher is autonomous in connecting her dance knowledge with the multiple voices, bodies and cultures present in the classroom. The educational standpoint is less about listening to and respecting students’ voices and bodies, and more about working with multiplicity as a value and not as something to be overcome, tolerated or ignored.

The context-based dance education Marques describes, explains well the pedagogical and methodological context created and explored in the Dance Laboratory. Multiplicity is seen as a value in the dance studio, a central starting point for aesthetic exploration. In addition, the connection to culture studies in this study is visible in the way I define people with disabilities as an oppressed minority group. I assume that the eight dancers, the video artist and myself as the teacher-researcher all come into the project with different perspectives. The different dancers, some disabled, some non-disabled, some professionals, some beginners, most of them Scandinavians, but one South-American dancer, operate within socio-cultural constructions which differ from one another. This might be so regarding, for example, aspects like self-image, personal definition of what dance is and understanding of social realms.

I also have an understanding of the fact that I, as the researcher, belong to a specific cultural ethnicity. Consequently, I will understand the research material from my body, which inhabits cultural values in a pre-reflective way. Thus, when writing this thesis, I will in a way

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108 Green (2007, pp. 1125-1128)

109 Green (1999; 2002-2003; 2007)

110 Hämäläinen (2004; 2006)

111 Cooper Albright (1997; 2004)

112 Green (2007, p. 1125)

113 Marques (1998, p. 171)

114 Marques (1998, p. 181)

simultaneously write a story of my own research body. One implication of this is that throughout the study I will attempt reflexivity. To be a reflexive researcher means that I always try to take into consideration the relation between the “what” and the “how”<sup>115</sup>: *what* knowledge is being generated in this study and *how* this knowledge is produced. The knowledge I create about the body, dance, improvisation and all themes that this study might produce, is created *from* my research body and my position as a female non-disabled Scandinavian dance researcher in this specific historical, cultural and political context. Therefore, it is important to show and report the procedures, steps and actions which I take to reach the aims set for the research. In this way the “what” is connected to the “how”, since these aspects never can be separated.

In general, qualitative research regards *thick descriptions* of the social world as a valuable means of accessing and understanding the social and cultural concerns of everyday life situations.<sup>116</sup> The concept “thick description” is connected to Clifford Geertz<sup>117</sup>, who mainly uses an interpretative anthropology approach. According to Geertz, “thick” is the meaning behind the description and its symbolic importance in society or between communicators. The intention with this research is to provide a rich understanding of the Dance Laboratory, based on a thick description of the project. This thick description carries my research body with it, intertwined in the stories I tell.

To sum up, this study includes a minor awareness of somatic pedagogy, and mainly leans on a critical, postmodern and cultural dance research framework. As the collection of the empirical material was conducted with a rather low awareness of the value of somatic experiences, so the findings are somewhat scarce within the field of somatics. I suggest that more connecting between somatic experience and conscious thought could have taken place, had my attention as a researcher been more directed towards this area. Instead, as a researcher I was more focused on socio-cultural macro-perspectives in the material. However, what seems clear is that the project offers valuable pedagogical insights, both generally for the teaching of dance improvisation, and especially for the teaching of improvisation in groups with differently bodied dancers. It tells about what kind of knowledge dance improvisation can hold, generate and develop, and what impact dance improvisation can have on dancers’ lives.

### **Turning to story-telling and narrative inquiry**

The interest in story-telling, or narration, is also one characteristic of this study. The study invites to *telling stories*, in many different ways.

From my perspective as a dancer, both dance improvisation and verbal stories are situations where people tell about themselves, create themselves and where meaning-making takes place. In addition, the Dance Laboratory is a situation where different dancers bring their own embodied life stories with them into the dance studio as a meeting place. Also, as a researcher, I create a specific story about the Dance Laboratory, and into this creation I bring my own

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115 Johansson (2005, p. 28)

116 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 21–25)

117 Geertz (1973, p. 26)

embodied life story and understanding. As a result, this study can be understood as a weave of smaller stories, making up the whole, which the outcome of this study is. But the outcome of this project is no grand, generalised narrative, and it does not tell about one *Meaning*<sup>118</sup>. Instead, it offers a rich, lived, context-specific and embodied story about dance, improvisation and meetings between differently bodied dancers. It tells about how dance *may be*.

Thus, I have a very wide definition of the concepts story and story-telling. When I use the concepts narration, narrative space (which I will come back to in Chapter 3) and narrative inquiry, though, I mean the verbal conceptualisations, the conscious thoughts, that the dancers share with me in discussions and interviews. This requires some clarification about how I view the relation between body, movement and meaning and people's stories *about* body, movement and meaning.

Based in a phenomenological understanding of the dancing body, I view improvisation as being in the act of meaning-making. Improvisation consists of living moments and as Shotter<sup>119</sup> writes, living moments can move us ontologically. Things of importance happen in such living moments, before any reflection or conceptualisation about them has taken place. Shotter writes that:

Living moments often make the kind of difference in our lives that matters to us.<sup>120</sup>

It should be clear that I do not understand the meaning of these living moments of improvisation and dance to become "real meaning" only when they are narrated and conceptualised. As a dancer I experience movement as meaningful in the moment it happens. Movement is meaningful in a way that matters in an embodied way. I carry the meaning of the dance with me in my body as I walk out of the dance studio. Conscious thought and narrative can never cover the whole lived experience. There is an experience, a sense of ownership<sup>121</sup> to and meaning with my own experiences before I tell about them. As Rouhiainen<sup>122</sup> says, we can never become totally transparent to ourselves. She further states that "I can never thematize even a single movement in its entirety". The world of movement is so incredibly rich and complex, and so much meaning is embedded in the lived body itself. Acts like moving, touching, sensing, timing, listening, connecting, sharing and relating have meanings and values as *embodied, lived and communicated in bodies' ways*. Thus I agree with Zahavi's<sup>123</sup> claim that there are limits to the kind of understanding of self, others, and – I add – meaning that narratives can provide.

My interest in verbal conceptualisations in this study, then, takes these limitations of narrative inquiry into account. Still, I believe unreservedly in the value of narrating and discussing one's

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118 See also Johansson (2005, p. 27)

119 Shotter (1999a, p. 5)

120 Shotter (1999a, p. 5)

121 Zahavi (2007, pp. 179–201) claims that in order to tell stories about one's own experiences and actions, one must already be in possession of a first-person perspective. He further criticizes narrative discursive practices by saying that to claim that an experience is only appropriated as my own the moment I tell a story about it is simply wrong. I agree with this criticism. A movement is lived and experienced as my own before I tell about it.

122 Rouhiainen (2008, p. 247)

123 Zahavi (2007, p. 179)

own experience. That brings additional and articulated meaning to already meaningful, living moments. Even though I understand meaning as bodily lived and felt in the streams of experience of a person, meaning is also constructed through the stories people tell about their experience. In this way, meaning-making also has a narrative character. When the different dancers tell about their experience in the Dance Laboratory, they are in the process of meaning-making. When I tell about my dance experience and knowledge, I turn my experience and knowledge into a storied form, which can be shared and discussed with others. Different aspects of dance can be told, discussed, reflected upon and debated. When doing so, meaning is not only *articulated* through stories; meaning is also *created* through the storytelling itself.<sup>124</sup> Storytelling about improvisation is an additional layer of meaning-making, in addition to the meaningful movement itself. As I will argue throughout this study, discussing improvisation is important for the dancers and the dance teacher in order to understand what they do as improvisers. The dance class is usually quite silent and traditionally gives little space for questions and even less for discussion. This study foregrounds a narrative space in dance as important for the learning processes that can take place in the dance class.

The narrative character of knowledge has received appreciation over the last decades. Johansson<sup>125</sup> writes about how the cross-disciplinary research field called narrative studies has grown since the middle of the 1980s. The story has been accepted as a scientific representation. Johansson argues that this intensive interest in storytelling has to do with the comprehensive “linguistic turn” which has happened within the human and social sciences, and which can be related to postmodernism and post-structuralism. Over the last decades, researchers, to a high degree, have accepted an understanding of social reality as linguistically or discursively constructed. Language is seen as part of creating the world we experience.

This study enters the field of narrative inquiry and thereby takes part in developing it from the perspective of dance research. Within art educational research, there is an on-going debate about the development of research methods which can stay true to the complexity and richness of experience. Many researchers point to narrative methods as a meaningful alternative.<sup>126</sup> Reflection through narration can also be viewed as a central tool for change. In terms of the dance world, I suggest that one prerequisite for its development, in addition to movement experience, dance and choreography itself, is storytelling, reflection and dialogue about what dance is and can be. Stories both create culture, and are created within a culture.<sup>127</sup> In that way, stories about dance experience are created within a dance culture, but they also create dance culture. In other words, when talking, telling and writing about dance, I have the possibility to influence the development of that very dance. I understand, tell and write from within the dance culture I am part of, but at the same time, as I am writing, I have the possibility to influence that culture.

Cooper Albright<sup>128</sup> describes the textual practice of improvisation as slippery, and her writing corresponds with the thought that stories both create culture and are being created

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124 Ryghaug (2002, p. 316)

125 Johansson (2005, p. 17–18)

126 See, for example, Holstein and Gubrium (1995), Johansson (2005) and Østern (2006)

127 See, for example, Østern (2006) or Bøge, Markhus, Moe and Ødegaard (2003)

128 Cooper Albright (2003, p. 260)



within a culture. She writes:

I have found it difficult to find the right frame, the right tone with which to theorize about improvisation. Clearly it takes a leap of faith to articulate the nuances of physical and metaphysical flux. It is delicate work, and there is the omnipresent fear of bruising the form of improvisation, pinning it down to static meanings, dissecting it for the sake of epistemological stability. But the alternatives are equally deadly; by keeping improvisational work out of current intellectual discussions we limit its influence. Sure, my experience of improvisation will change as I write about it, but then again, my experience of writing and thinking will also change as I engage my embodied knowledge from an intellectual perspective.<sup>129</sup>

This is the double gift of narration as it seems to me: the possibility which storytelling gives to stay true to the richness, complexity and presence in artistic and human experience and at the same time to influence, inform and communicate with others about what dance is or could be like. With this study, I try to find that “right frame, the right tone, with which to theorize about improvisation”. As Cooper Albright<sup>130</sup>, I also find it difficult. I often trip and disconnect from my embodied experience. Still, I keep trying, because this is an important task for dance researchers: to verbalize and find a language for how dance contains information and how dance leads to the specific sense of meaning, self, body and community that dancers tell – and dance – about.

When searching for that way of writing, for the right words and the right perspective on the moving world of improvisation that I am part of, I have found Shotter’s<sup>131</sup> insight about “witness-writing” instead of “aboutness-writing” useful. Leaning on Bakhtin, he calls this a dialogical-prospective-relational writing: a writing from within an ongoing involvement with others. He claims that scholars cannot write simply in relation to fixed and constant theoretical interests. Instead, he continues, scholars must write in ways that respect their currently shared but changing conversational or dialogical relations to others or otherness. Dialogical-prospective-relation writing comes about dialogically, in a way where all are responsive in a living, embodied way to each other. This “witness-writing”, Shotter<sup>132</sup> argues, creates a practical theory which gives an account. He also calls this writing a form of social poetics, a kind of writing that can be achieved through:

... writing about concrete details, quoting actual voiced utterances, using metaphors, making comparisons, in short, writing in such a way that, in juxtaposing one’s words in unconventional ways, writers create occasions in which readers must creatively complete – dialogically, not cognitively – the process of understanding.<sup>133</sup>

The inspiration from, among others, Cooper Albright<sup>134</sup> and Shotter<sup>135</sup> is visible in my writing about the Dance Laboratory. I reach for a language that writes “with” and where I frequently

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129 Cooper Albright (2003, p. 260–261)

130 Cooper Albright (2003)

131 Shotter (1999a, download pp. 1–12)

132 Shotter (1999a, download p. 10)

133 Shotter (1999a, download p. 9)

134 Cooper Albright (2003)

135 Shotter (1999a)

write about concrete details, quote voiced utterances and invent my own, sometimes maybe unconventional ways of writing “with” the dancers (and the teacher) in the Dance Laboratory. In this way I am responsible to those I write “with”, and I write prospectively (based in abductive research logic)– about what *might be*.

### **About meaning-making**

I view meaning-making in this project as a bodily, mobile and transformative process. The meaning-making that takes place in this project depends on the participants’ bodily experiences of dance improvisation in relation with the other dancers.

This tells about which *meaning offers* this project gave to the different dancers. There are certain meaning offers which a certain context gives rise to – certain possibilities to make meaning. The understanding of the meaning-making processes that I am constructing based on the research material tells about the meaning offers that the Dance Laboratory gave to the dancers at this time.

Sava<sup>136</sup> writes that through a transformation phenomenon a person creates a part of a new inner reality. Also Benjamin<sup>137</sup> talks about transformation when he says that dance with differently bodied dancers is not only about stretching your muscles, but also stretching your mind. To take in something new means to allow oneself to actually be “stretched” and changed by the meeting with the unknown. So when I am looking for meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory, I look for movement experiences, change, new ideas or new perspectives. I look for muscles and minds that have been stretched.

One example of transformative learning in improvisation might be when a female dancer in her 40s, who participated in the Mixed Ability Group in 2001, discovered that she was able to roll on the floor. This woman was a wheelchair user. I asked the participants to get down on the floor. I asked the dancers to start rolling across the floor and gradually start rolling over each other as they met somebody. The female dancer in her 40s then said *I have never rolled before, but I’ll try*. She got down on the floor – and rolled like she had never done anything else in her life. She was perfectly able to roll and seemed to love the sensation of rolling – once she had started she did not want to stop. I sat down and just watched her and the others roll for a long time. Then I went on to the floor to start rolling together with the others. Soon I bumped into the female dancer and we passed each other. I could sense her body spiralling the opposite way to my own as we rolled in different directions. Our clothes wrinkled around us in the roll with a low rustling. I had a glimpse of her face as we passed and she looked very focused. There was no smile on her face, just focus. Through the meeting between us in this rolling exercise, my body deeply shared the excitement of her discovery of rolling. I could hardly stop rolling myself, rediscovering the joy of it.

This female dancer using a wheelchair had never been presented with the idea of rolling before. The idea that she could roll did not exist in her mind, as the movement did not exist in her body. This can serve as an example of transformative learning in dance improvisation – the

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136 Sava (1994, p. 37)

137 Benjamin (2002, pp.4–18)

dancer discovered something new in movement, but she also stretched her mind.

This study is based on the assumption that meaning-making in dance improvisation is *multi-modal*. Meaning-making in dance improvisation uses different modes. In order to understand the different modes which meaning-making is created and expressed through, both interviews and video observations are used as research material in this study.

Meaning-making in dance improvisation has a *bodily mode*. In order to observe the bodily mode of the meaning-making processes in the project, video is used in this study. The making of meaning happens very immediately in the body. For example, when dancers improvise and respond to a task, this response is the making of meaning. The danced response to impulses is meaningful in the body's way.

In addition, meaning-making in dance improvisation also has a *narrative mode*. The dancers in this study are invited to reflect about their experiences through discussions and interviews. The interview situation is a space for meaning-making: as the dancers tell, they are in the process of making meaning. Further on, discussion is an important element in the dance improvisation class.

The value of *empty spaces* or *not knowing beforehand* is often referred to by dance improvisation writers. The thought of empty spaces has inspired me when reflecting about how and when meaning-making takes place in improvisation. An example of a moment in improvisation which brought up an empty space – something unexpected and unknown – is described in the following quote, where a female dancer writes about an improvisation she did with me as her partner:

One moment I remember especially well is when the teacher and I improvised together in front of the others. Suddenly she stole a part of my wheelchair! It was hysterically funny, but my spontaneous reaction was: "But no! She just can't do that!" That reaction brought honesty into the dance. In addition, as I already said, it was great fun! The trick by the teacher and my reaction created a connection between us which we could build a lot on.<sup>138</sup>

quote evaluation sheet

When I read her quote, I remember our duet very well. Especially I remember the moment when I stole the part of her wheelchair. I remember my position in space, my direction towards her, the points of contact between us. I came sweeping over her body, supported by her shoulder, neck, upper arm before I slide down the surfaces of her body and the hard parts of the wheelchair onto the floor. I spiralled around as I landed, face down, face up, around on my back and onto one lower leg and foot. With me on the floor in front of her, she pushed her weight to the opposite side, stretched for my hand and then went into a complete side tilt, leaving one wheel to spin in the air in front of me. As she laid down on the side, halfway out of the wheelchair, it became too tempting to steal the wheel spinning freely right in front of me. I reached forwards and clicked it out of the chair – I can still hear the sound of the click – and there the wheel was in my hands. We looked at each other through the metal grating of the wheel and through that grating I could sense the energy rising. She looked surprised and a big smile burst out in her face. She sat down on the floor, hesitated a moment and then leaned forwards to remove another part of her wheelchair. I heard another click. From there, our duet continued.

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<sup>138</sup> A young woman with a back injury writes an evaluation about her experiences in the Dance Laboratory, autumn 2006.

In this way, new meaning possibilities or perspectives can be created through staying in the spot where you are when you do not know where you are. Veteran contact improviser, founder and co-editor of *Contact Quarterly*<sup>139</sup> dance journal, Nancy Stark Smith<sup>140</sup> writes about *the gap* as a place where new meaning can be made in one of her Editor's Notes:

Where you are when you don't know where you are is one of the most precious spots offered by improvisation. It is a place from which more directions are possible than anywhere else. I call this place the Gap. The more I improvise, the more I'm convinced that it is through the medium of these gaps – this momentary suspension of reference point – that comes the unexpected and much sought after "original" material. Being in a gap is like being in a fall before you touch bottom. You're suspended – in time as well as space – and you don't really know how long it'll take to get "back".<sup>141</sup>

In his transformative learning theory, Mezirow<sup>142</sup> similarly describes how transformative learning has a progress which starts from a disorienting dilemma, which then uses the experience of imbalance as an opportunity for considering new perspectives. Training in dis-orientation is also one of the aspects which I include in a definition of the kind of dance improvisation which is being explored in this project. Cooper Albright<sup>143</sup> describes how training in dis-orientation includes aspects of falling, being up-side-down, letting go of control, to move with momentum and to move through fear into new territory.

In his teaching and writing, Benjamin<sup>144</sup> brings forward problem-solving as a key concept within improvisation. A problem arises when you meet something you are not familiar with. Improvisation should be taught within, and at the same time develop, a problem-solving ethos. Improvisation is going to confront you with problems and paradoxes, and this is an important and even necessary part of improvisation. Benjamin writes that:

It is not uncommon in the midst of an improvisation to feel suddenly and inconsolably stuck ... to find oneself wishing to be anywhere but where you are at that particular moment in time ... Dancers who are able to stay present at these moments and resist the urge to flee, find themselves ... at the threshold of what separates the known from the unknown self.<sup>145</sup>

Bruner<sup>146</sup> created the concept *scaffold* based on his reading of Vygotsky's<sup>147</sup> zone of proximal development<sup>148</sup>. The scaffold serves as support during a learning process. A scaffold consists

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139 *Contact Quarterly* is an American dance journal, [www.contactquarterly.com](http://www.contactquarterly.com). (accessed 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

140 Nancy Stark Smith is a veteran contact improviser, who has lived in the centre of the development of Contact Improvisation from the start of the new dance form. In addition to being a veteran contact improviser, Nancy Stark Smith also is a dedicated writer, most notably as an editor for the dance journal *Contact Quarterly*. See, for example, Novack (1990) and Kaltenbrunner (1998).

141 Stark-Smith (1987, p. 3).

142 Mezirow (1991)

143 Cooper Albright (2003, p. 260)

144 Benjamin (2002, p. 49–61)

145 Benjamin (2002, p. 59–60)

146 Bruner (1986)

147 Vygotsky (1978) and (1986/2000)

148 See, for, example, [http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingresources/english/literacy/concepts/2L3\\_ZPD.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingresources/english/literacy/concepts/2L3_ZPD.htm) (accessed 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2009) on how Bruner developed the concept of scaffold based on his reading of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development.

of “hooks” which new knowledge can “hook on to” and build on.

Through the interpretative process of opening up the interview and video material in this study, I collect concepts which I view as “knowledge hooks”, which the teaching of dance improvisation can be spun around. These knowledge hooks are concepts which open up improvisation as a spacious and artistic learning context. The naming of these concepts as “knowledge hooks” is inspired by Bruner’s idea of scaffolding. It is important, however, to underline that I am *inspired* by the thought of scaffolding, but I definitely use it differently. Bruner’s scaffold is a support which can be removed when the learner has learnt something new. The scaffold is also connected to the individual learner. What I am suggesting with the knowledge hooks I am collecting are instead concepts of focus for teaching and choreographing dance improvisation. They are methodological concepts.

Finally, before closing this section, I want to point out that the knowledge produced about a phenomenon through qualitative research remains partial. The study at hand adds to the field of dance research with a thick description and interpretation of how dance *may be*. But, as Rouhiainen<sup>149</sup> points out, there is always more to find out about a phenomenon than one piece of research can show. The findings are limited by the range and nature of the research, as formed by the researcher. It is important to emphasise that the meaning-making processes which I define and write about in this project are not “just there”. As a researcher I actively create these. I am aware that I am involved in this research project not as an objective eye, but as a subjective body. My choices as the teacher in the Dance Laboratory form the prerequisites for the dancers’ experiences during the project. Further on, my choices as a researcher are important factors which contribute to the findings. The interpretation of the meaning-making processes in this project can thus never be completely separated from me as a teacher-choreographer and researcher. Rather, the whole picture of all procedures and the interpretative activity undertaken makes the knowledge claims of this research defensible, and, I hope, inspirational and valuable for others.

Ultimately, the understanding of the research is limited by the views of its readers.

### **1.3.3. The relevance and validity of this research**

#### **Relevance**

The arts create opportunities for self construction, dialogue and communication with self, others, the art form and society. To be part of an artistic dialogue, which is often individual, relational and societal at the same time, *is* to be in the process of meaning-making.

The societal aspect of this large dialogue which art is needs an extra examination. Art has the function of being a system through which a society debates and develops its experiences and visions. That is one reason why access to art is crucial – to everybody. Exclusion from the dominant culture and exclusion from power seem to go hand in hand. The situation of disabled

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<sup>149</sup> Rouhiainen (2003, p. 25)

people is a case at point. Francois Matarosso<sup>150</sup> argues that the artistic exclusion of people with disabilities is a cornerstone of their social exclusion because it makes it so difficult for them to share their experiences and dreams of another future with the rest of society.

In this context, I want to remind about the fact that especially in the beginning it was difficult to recruit dancers to the Dance Laboratory. The thought of the Dance Laboratory as an arena where differently bodied dancers could meet as equals to experiment and communicate with each other seemed out of reach. In fact, I discovered that there seem to be few artistic meeting places where disabled and non-disabled people can meet and mingle, exist and contribute as equals. Based on this, I suggest that the Dance Laboratory, and this study about it, has a societal relevance. The Dance Laboratory is a place where differently bodied people can come together. This study discusses the meaning offers and also implications connected to this aesthetic meeting and learning space.

The study also has aesthetic relevance. Dance as an art form is, and needs to be, in constant change, finding its place in contemporary time. The Dance Laboratory is part of the Western contemporary dance world, a world which has a long heritage. This is an artistic and aesthetic heritage to debate and develop. I find it legitimate to say that the Western theatre dance field in many ways has been a narrow sector for years, allowing only “special people” on stage – in other words, white non-disabled people. According to Banes<sup>151</sup>, also the avant-garde dance improvisers in the US in the 1960s and 70s were predominantly white. It was not until the 1980s that many more people of colour appeared in avant-garde venues, being able to really influence the dance. Today it seems obvious that dancers are multi-coloured, and that the ability to dance has nothing to do with the colour of your skin. It is not as obvious that the dance world is open to dancers with disabilities, even if they started to make an entrance on the Western dance stage already in the 70s. There is still a strong definition of dance as being tied to a highly skilled and vigorous body.

From that perspective a project like the Dance Laboratory is also a negotiation about aesthetic space. This space is linked up to a broader cultural and political space. The study contributes to an aesthetic, cultural and political discussion about what dance is, who dance is for and how dance culture reflects and influences the broader culture and society it is part of. What – and who – do we consider beautiful, interesting and worthwhile in dance? How do the aesthetics shaped in dance connect to cultural narratives about different bodies? The contribution to this discussion that this study gives brings relevance to the research.

Finally, and importantly, this study has dance pedagogical relevance. It feeds into a dance educational discussion about the different spaces dance improvisation creates, exists in and changes; how dance improvisation can be taught in a time sensitive to different voices (different bodies) and how dance teachers can function as agents of change. It is in the hands of dance teachers to act as transformative, instead of conservative, dance teachers. I suggest that when dance teachers work to make dance available for differently bodied dancers, they simultaneously make dance as an art relevant to the world as the world is today: multi-voiced, differently bodied

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150 Matarosso (1994, p. 5)

151 Banes (2003, p. 82)

and heterogeneous. This pedagogical perspective gives relevance to this study.

## Validity

Validity has to do with the truth-value of the findings of a study. Validity also has to do with the relevance of the study. I have argued that this research has societal, aesthetic and pedagogical relevance. This relevance gives validity to the research. But validity also concerns what knowledge claims the study puts forward and in what ways the study has been carried out. My point of departure for this study is that meaning is not something which *is there* in this project, but something which *is made* in a dialogue between the participants, myself as the teacher-researcher and the empirical material interpreted within a larger theoretical framework. This meaning-making dialogue takes place in a specific cultural-historical moment and context. This means that I do not attempt to uncover a pre-existing and objective reality. With the findings of this study I also do not make knowledge claims about accurate representations of the real. This research project can not be repeated by somebody else and turn up with exactly the same findings. Instead, this research project is an example of what dance *may be* like, reported and interpreted as thoroughly as possible.

Referring to Rouhiainen<sup>152</sup>, my responsibility as a researcher is to choose between and argue for possible interpretations, shift from observation to conversation and interaction with the research material and assure careful and thorough communication of all steps, procedures and findings of the study. In that way the research validation of this study is about making what Steinar Kvale<sup>153</sup> calls defensible knowledge claims. He argues that qualitative research validation becomes a concept related to reflexive, communicative and pragmatic practices. One way of bringing validity to this research is to discuss the findings of the research in relation to existing relevant theory. I will attempt to do so throughout this study.

In this study I am both the teacher for the project and the researcher who is studying the project. First of all, that means that I deeply *live* this research process. Also, it means that to a high degree I am intertwined in all aspects of the project. Rouhiainen<sup>154</sup> points out that there are both positive and negative aspects to researching one's own field of practice. She writes that the positive aspect is that the researcher has access to comprehending the significance of the phenomenon under study truly, from the inside. The negative aspect is that inside information can skew the researcher's perspective, leading her to understand it in a one-sided way and to overlook other perspectives. With respect to this study, I suggest it is more positive than negative, and perhaps even necessary to have high involvement in the project as the researcher. To see under the surface of this project demands a willingness to define dance in a new way, breaking away from tradition and known ways of teaching dance. When going into this project I had that willingness, and as a teacher and choreographer I put myself in that gap which Nancy Stark-Smith<sup>155</sup> talks about *where you are when you don't know where you are*. Stark-Smith then goes on to

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152 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 29)

153 Kvale (1989, p. 77).

154 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 30)

155 Stark-Smith (1987, p. 3).

say that this is “one of the most precious places to be”, which I find true, but it should be added that it is also painful and even frightening as a teacher to be “where you are when you don’t know where you are”. I recall Benjamin<sup>156</sup> saying to me once that, as a teacher in a mixed-ability dance project, you need to be willing to let your own learning process take place right there, in front of the dancers. The fact that you are facing dancers that are sometimes different from yourself and from each other, forces you to constantly develop your teaching methods.

This was also true for me during this project. I had the necessary teacher and researcher interest to set off the project, enough knowledge about the dance tradition I am part of and many years of teaching experience from other contexts. But, nevertheless, when I set up the Dance Laboratory, I was a novice in teaching dance improvisation classes for disabled and non-disabled dancers. I had to make my way as a teacher as I went along. I therefore argue that I had enough knowledge to enter this project as a teacher, the necessary involvement as a researcher, but also enough gaps of knowledge in order not to know everything in advance (which also, of course, is not possible). On the contrary, I initiated the Dance Laboratory and this research project because I had the feeling that there is something new to find out and learn from dance projects based on improvisation with differently bodied dancers. This position between enough knowledge and involvement on the one hand, and enough gaps in knowledge on the other, puts me in an appropriate position as the teacher and researcher of this study. This gives validity to the research project.

At the same time, this position also places heightened ethical and practical demands on me as a researcher. Rouhiainen<sup>157</sup> points out that a researcher of hermeneutic or phenomenological qualitative research becomes a research instrument. This notion underlines that a researcher’s values, conceptions, morals and aesthetic preferences are an important part of the research process. Since the subjectivity of the researcher cannot be avoided, Rouhiainen suggests that qualitative researchers should be sensitive towards their respondents and record findings as accurately as possible. They should also offer direct evidence of their empirical material. I will, throughout the interpretation of the studied issues, follow such research procedures through a thorough reporting of the different procedures in the study. I will also show the hermeneutic dialogue between me as the researcher and the researched phenomenon in many ways and as fully as I can.

In this way, I consider this research project to have validity and relevance as a piece of dance and dance educational research conducted within the domain of qualitative research.

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<sup>156</sup> Informal discussion with Adam Benjamin at his workshop at Åbo Academy University in Vasa, Finland, January 2004.

<sup>157</sup> Rouhiainen (2003, p. 29–30)



### 1.3.4. Video as research material in this study

#### Video as a dance research tool

One important part of the collected research material for this project consists of video filmed dance improvisation classes. During the spring of 2004 four 90 minute classes with the Dance Laboratory, evenly spread out over the semester, were filmed by a video artist.

All classes were filmed in the same studio where the Dance Laboratory worked during the spring term 2004. This was a large, bright dance studio with good filming conditions. Two of the four walls were covered with mirrors. The mirrors were not used for the teaching, but they allow for the filmed sequences to be seen from several angles. This gives depth to the video material. In addition, because of the mirrors the video artist himself is also sometimes seen on the film. The other two walls in the studio mainly consisted of windows, thereby allowing for a lot of daylight in the studio.

When I started the field work in 2003 I was not quite sure how I wanted to use the video material, but in a somewhat intuitive way I knew that I wanted video material in addition to the interviews. Without knowing exactly what the video material would give me, I was sure it would give something of importance.

The filmed material of the Dance Laboratory which I was handed by the video artist was very rich. It seemed to drip with complexity, as the video material was filmed in a messy, complex, aesthetic and moving situation. I asked myself: What can this filmed dance material inform me about? As I did not know exactly what to look for when entering the process of interpreting the video material, I had to get inspiration by reading how others had used video in art research. I also had to create some kind of tool to look with, which I did through an investigation of the body in Chapter 2.

For my MA<sup>158</sup> in special education in 1995, I used video documentation as a research tool. Then I studied how a group of special needs teachers led by Kari Vole Dahl in Oslo, Norway, used dance play with grown up adults with autism. That gave me a base for using video as a research means in this project, but as I wanted to broaden that base I looked around for other examples.

One inspirational voice which I found is the Swedish choreographer and researcher Eva Lilja<sup>159</sup>, who has used film and video extensively in both her artistic and – always overlapping – conceptual work. I have taken part in her work (performances, seminars, lectures, dance classes) on many occasions and find it interesting how she uses video material to help her in developing a language which is poetic and reflective. Another inspiration from the dance field is Gun Román<sup>160</sup> and her art educational development work about teaching contemporary dance technique, which she has done at Danshögskolan College University in Stockholm. With the help of video documentation she has studied how contemporary dance is learned. The

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158 Østern (1999). Report based on MA in special education (1995).

159 Lilja, see [www.efvalilja.se](http://www.efvalilja.se) (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009), is a Swedish choreographer.

160 Román (2005) (video reference)

result of the study is presented in a visual way on a dvd<sup>161</sup>. From the field of drama education, Julie Dunn<sup>162</sup> from Australia is one example of a researcher who has used video as a tool. She has studied and fulfilled a narrative analysis of the dramatic play of teenage girls with the help of video documentation. Also the Finnish research Heli Aaltonen<sup>163</sup> comes from the field of drama education. In her PhD study about youth theatre she filmed workshop processes and performances and then analysed the video material from several different perspectives. Another interesting use of video in a research context is that done by Gabrielle Faith Guss<sup>164</sup> in her PhD study in drama and theatre in Norway. She has studied the spontaneous play of children at nurseries by filming their play with a handheld camera. Based on this, she has performed both a cultural and dramaturgical analysis, mirrored in performance theory.

These and other researchers are important contributors in building theory about the use of video as research material in the kind of lived and complex situations which art educational settings are. However, it has not been possible for me to adapt somebody else's way of using video directly as this project has its own frames and intentions. One aspect which differs from the examples I have read or seen (except partly Dunn<sup>165</sup>) is that in this project the researcher herself – i.e. myself – is not filming but instead is being filmed together with the others. That creates a situation which demands more thought on at least two aspects. One is that a person other than the researcher – the video artist – is the one who makes the choices about what to film and focus on. Another aspect is that when interpreting the video material I, as the teacher on the film, am part of what I am interpreting as a researcher.

Therefore, when interpreting the video material in this project I have created my way as I have gone along, including quite a bit of improvisation. I view this process as a truly hermeneutic one, where I have been able to see more and more aspects of the video material in a somewhat spiralling movement. This movement has spiralled between studying the video material, thinking and reflecting, reading relevant literature, getting into dialogue with the video artist who filmed the classes and going back to study the video material again. Throughout Chapter 4.1. Opening up and interpreting the video material, I keep developing the interpretative tool which is a result of, and an aid in this study. This tool shows how I am approaching and structuring the research material in order to generate knowledge based on the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory.

### **The role of the video artist**

The video material for this research project was filmed by a video artist based in Trondheim. He runs an independent video design company and has worked in dance and theatre projects several times. He had also worked with me earlier in a dance and video performance.

The Dance Laboratory had 14 classes in the spring of 2004. Each class lasted 90 minutes.

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161 Román (2005) (video reference)

162 Dunn (2000)

163 Aaltonen (2006)

164 Faith Guss (2000)

165 Dunn (2000)

The video artist filmed four classes during the spring semester 2004: on 17<sup>th</sup> of February, 16<sup>th</sup> of March, 4<sup>th</sup> of April and 11<sup>th</sup> of May. The intention was that all four classes should be filmed from beginning to end. As the tapes reveal, this was not always the case.

I had a meeting with the video artist before he started where I told him about the Dance Laboratory and the research project. We agreed that he would film four full classes with a handheld, moving camera. We agreed he would zoom and move around actively while filming, and switch between whole pictures of everybody in the studio and close ups of certain improvisations. He would try to catch material where it seemed that the improvisations both “worked” and “didn’t work”. I was aware and talked with the video artist about the fact that since he chose what to focus on during the lessons, he would also influence what I would focus on in the interpretation. I felt safe that he would be in the classes with an active and interested attention, since I knew him and the way he worked from earlier projects. I also believed that the instructions for him which we had agreed on would provide sufficient video material for the research project. These instructions were:

1. Arrive on time to get started as the class started.
2. Do the shooting with a handheld, moving camera.
3. Switch between full picture and close ups.
4. Use zoom and movement to catch material which seemed to “work” or “not work”.
5. Film the four lessons from beginning to end.

We agreed about these instructions verbally and did not write them down. I have written them down afterwards. Today I know that it was a mistake on my part not to formalise the rules more before we started; to write them down, hand them to the video artist and regularly remind him of them. As it was now, the video artist had not understood that I wanted him to film for the purpose of a *research* project. This made him film more like an artist, which had some consequences for the research material.

Having agreed verbally about these rules, the video artist worked independently during the classes without any form of inference or comments from me or any of the dancers in the studio. I was busy teaching and did not have time to think about the video artist during the lessons. In that way, he was free to choose what to focus on during the classes. He gave me the filmed tapes right after each class, and did not carry out any kind of editorial work on them. I did not give him any new instructions between the filmed classes. I also did not watch the films thoroughly between each class, but usually I had a quick glance at them after each video filming. I lived in a busy and intense every day situation and I had my focus on teaching and developing methodology. As a consequence, I did not notice then that the video artist actually did not film the classes from beginning to end, but that he made cuts here and there. This is something which I noticed much later when I started to really study the video material.

Later, when I started to *really* watch and interpret the video material, I soon realised that in the material I met the video artist as much as I met the actual material. His choices were everywhere.

The tapes reveal that the video artist followed some of the instructions we had agreed on. He did the shooting with a handheld camera, moved around in space and actively zoomed in and out

and used different angles to catch material. The result is dynamic and, in a way, *dancing* video material. The video material convinced me that the video artist had stayed actively observing during the classes. He filmed the classes not with a “flat gaze”, but with an artistic eye: he moved, circled and changed angle in a way that “goes with the dance”. An example of this can be that if the dancers formed themselves into a circle, he often let the camera circle around the dancers, thereby emphasising the space as circular. He often moved side by side by a moving dancer, thereby catching the feeling of speed and tempo on the film. He also often tilted the camera to go with the different tilts and shapes of the dancers, looking at the dance from the side, the top, the bottom or any other possible angle. Often, the video artist was lying down or crawling around in the studio. In other words, he filmed the dance in an artistic and almost choreographic way and it would be fully possible to use the material to create a documentary or dance film, which has actually also been done.<sup>166</sup>

Another example of the fact that the video artist was an actively involved subject is that he every now and then comments on what happens in the studio, which can easily be heard on the tapes. These comments consist of something he says, of laughter or similar sounds. An example of this is an episode filmed on 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2004. The Dance Laboratory was involved in an energetic improvisation and there was a lot of laughter and an intense atmosphere. The dancers were organised in couples, and one of them was running or wheeling towards the other who stood still and then jumped away at the last second. Eventually they also started screaming while running or wheeling, and the studio “went bananas”. There were running, jumping and screaming dancers everywhere. The video artist moved to a position where he could film Vera from the front as she came wheeling and screaming towards him. He also helped in catching her, as she was given a push over the floor by me towards Teresa, who was working with Vera. I gave her a good push to make her wheel all over the studio. Vera actually almost crashed into the wall just next to the video artist and the following dialogue can be seen and heard on the video tape:

– O help, was that ok? The video artist asks

Vera laughs and says yes. The video artist laughs too. I come walking towards them.

– Not that hard, Tone, the video artist says, don’t push that hard.

– No? I ask and continue: – Are you ok, Vera? (We are both laughing)

– Yes, I am fine, she says.

I look at the video artist and say:

– I think she is fine.

– Yeah, all right, but I can’t handle it. I am the one who gets scared, the video artist says, and laughs.<sup>167</sup> quote video material

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166 In 2004 the video artist edited a 20 minute long documentary of the Dance Laboratory. This documentary was first screened at the Trondheim Community Dance Festival in November 2004. In 2007 parts of the documentary were included as part of an internet based teaching material for dance students at A-level in Norway. See [www.scenetreff.no](http://www.scenetreff.no) (accessed 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

167 Transcribed dialogue from video material filmed on 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2004.

During other episodes which can be seen on the video material, the video artist shows that he is involved during the classes by answering questions which the teacher asks the dancers, giving a helping hand when needed, commenting or suggesting. He usually comments in a rather low voice and actually I cannot remember that I ever heard them during class, but I hear them clearly on the video tapes. This reveals that the video artist has been involved in the classes as an engaged body-subject. Already during the project, and even more so in the process of opening up the video material, it became clear to me that the video artist cannot be considered an “objective eye”. Instead, he must be looked upon as an actively participating subject, who moves, feels and thinks himself through the improvisation class, thereby making subjective choices. Actually, whether he or I wanted it or not, he became my co-researcher through the choices he made about what to focus on. At a certain point during that spring semester of 2004 I decided that I wanted to make an interview with the video artist. Bringing awareness to his thoughts on what he saw and felt is a way of making him into a co-researcher, or at least a side-commentator.

I interviewed the video artist after class on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, 2004. I did this interview with him spontaneously, with no preparation. This is what I asked him and what he answered:

Tone: – You have filmed the classes. So you haven’t taken part yourself, but you have observed everything. So I just wonder if you can tell about what you saw. I want you to tell about what you saw, what you thought or what you felt. Something you have thought about yourself, or about the dancers, or anything actually.

Video artist: – Well, what strikes me ... have I been here three times now?

Tone: – Yes.

Video artist: – Yes. Well, normally in my job, you know, I film a bit and take some pictures and it is not always that I get so engaged in what I do, but then ... then I come here and then ... it is so cool because ... it is a threefold investigation. It is an investigation of movement and space, very close to the body, and an investigation of the small, short distances between people. And it is so cool to watch that. And ... to watch what happens from class to class ... that you start to understand more of each other and how you do things together. And that goes for everybody. For example Teresa, she moves much more freely now than the first time ... and I believe that she maybe was a bit uncertain about what actually was going on here. And that goes for all of you actually. So it’s like really cool. Just to do those improvisation things, things that just sound completely odd, very, very strange for a cynical culture abuser like myself ... like when you say “now we are going to move like amoebae<sup>168</sup> and some of you can move like that and the others like that”. And then I think “O my goodness!” And then it is just so great and cool when you get started. And then I think it is really fun, personally. And it is so cool to look at those girls, Vera and Karen, because you do such different things here. They are just so cool. There is such an exchange. You make them cool and they make you guys cool. They all the time create new forms and things and it just gets cooler and cooler. So when I leave and ride my bike home through town I smile all the time because I think it is so cool. It’s just great. So that is what I spontaneously think.

Tone says: – That’s great. Thank you.<sup>169 quote interview</sup>

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168 The amoeba task is borrowed from Benjamin. This task is focused on finding the relation between the individual and belonging to the group; between cooperation and individuality. See Benjamin (2002, p. 170– 171)

169 Transcription of full interview with the video artist, conducted by me on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2004.

Through his story, the video artist tells me that he is actively engaged in the lived space which he is part of. I view this active involvement by the video artist as valuable and important.

But at a certain point I also became aware that video artist's choices actually had something more to tell me. Looking through the video material over and over again, I started paying attention to the fact that he did not film the classes from beginning to end, and that he sometimes cut the film and paused in the middle of classes. Actually, he never filmed 90 minutes of any of the four classes. I also had the feeling that there were more parts of the classes filmed that seemed to "work" than parts which seemed "not to work". This, of course, could give me the flattering feeling as a teacher that everything I did in class worked well. As I knew from my own experience of that same teaching that this was not the case, there must be another explanation. Looking closely at what he filmed and how he cut, I made two conclusions:

1. When he cuts the film in the middle of class, it is a sign that he is bored, which again is a sign that what he sees and films is not interesting. Those are the parts that "don't work". That means that, as a whole, this research material contains more video material which shows when the improvisation "works" than material of improvisation sequences which "don't work".
2. The video artist did not film the classes from beginning to end, because we always started the classes with a gathering and a chat in a circle. In the beginning of class everybody was given the chance to talk about how they were today, and in the end everybody was given the opportunity to give feedback about the class. The reason why he does not film this is because in his opinion the class did not start before we started to move, and the class was finished when we stopped moving. The video artist did not have an understanding of dance as a space for discussing and reflecting.

It is a pity that sequences that "don't work" and many discussions were not filmed. I especially would have wanted to have had the discussions at the end of the class filmed, but sadly, most of them are missing. But even if I do not have the discussions there to study, I find it almost equally interesting that the video artist's choice reflects something which I think is true for most people's understanding of dance: that dancing is about moving, and not about talking. He filmed all the discussions which arose in the middle of classes, directly after different tasks, so there is still quite a lot of spoken and reflective material to study. Although I quickly looked through the video material between sessions in the spring of 2004, I then did not notice the cuts he had made and the fact that he seldom filmed the starting and finishing talk. If I had done so, I could have given him feedback about this, but now as it was, I didn't. I simply did not notice it then. This discloses that I was more in a state of teaching than in a state of researching at that time. This tells that the focus I have also determines what I see.

Having given this quite a lot of consideration, I became curious in hearing the video artist's own explanations of what he had thought while filming, and I contacted him again. We had a dialogue by e-mail in November 2007, three years after the actual filming was done. First, I contacted him and shortly told him that I was interpreting the video material. Then I sent him

the five instructions on how he would film which I had written down by then. I asked him if I had remembered them correctly. I soon got an answer from him that the rules looked as he remembered them. Then I wrote him another e-mail, where I explained that I had discovered that he had not stuck to the rule that he should film the classes from beginning to end, and that I was curious about hearing why. I soon got a new answer, which I translate from Norwegian to English in its full length here, since I think it is an interesting and informative answer. After some introductory small talk in the e-mail, the video artist wrote:

What I think when filming short sequences and making pauses is the following:

I would like to film movement in space when it is something like dancing. Movement along three axes, dynamic, speed, DANGER, friction, resistance, limits. I can't do that with my eye glued to the screen all the time, I think it is a good plan to turn the camera off and lay down on the floor, then walk around a bit, and try to see the angles and the movements like a participant (almost), try to get a feeling of the movements which I don't get through the viewfinder on the camera.

I like to have the camera in my hand, and not look, only film in one direction, and try to "see" the actual experience even if I stand at a distance.

If you film a wheelchair wheeling at full speed from a distance, then maybe it does not look so dramatic. But if you sit on the other side of the room and get the chair hitting you right in the face, then this maybe shows more of the experience of crossing limits, which this probably was for the participant.

And I try to cut in the same second that I lose interest in a scene, and try to trust my feeling there and then that my experience is right, and thereby force myself to live with those decisions afterwards. Cut right to the bones, to be more aware in the present moment, be more a part of the filming instead of just documenting. In addition, when I turn the record button off every now and then, then I need to pay much more attention to turning it on again when something happens, rather than just sitting and pointing the camera and hoping that something exciting will happen within that angle.<sup>170</sup>

This explanation of how he thinks and works confirms my conclusion that he turns the camera off when it gets boring. He listens into the dynamics and energy in space and wants to film in a way that gives the observer the *feeling of movement* which the dancers have. What he shows me, actually, is that when filming the Dance Laboratory he worked as an artist, not as a researcher. I had not explained well enough why I wanted every minute of the classes filmed, and that as a researcher I was, in fact, interested in "the boring stuff". This can probably also be explained by the fact that the video artist knew me as an artist and not as a researcher. When we had worked together previously, we worked as artists, looking for dance and film that is dynamic and exciting, and not as researchers, looking for all kinds of processes.

As a consequence, the video material is interesting and it seems to be "true to the dance". The video material is less true to the research intentions of filming improvisation both when it "works" and when it "doesn't work". My aim was also to film the discussions at the beginning and end of the classes. In my definition of dance there is also space to reflect and discuss. For the

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170 Answer from the video artist via e-mail, November 2007, translated from Norwegian to English by me.

video artist, dancing is movement only: moving along three axes. That is why he starts filming only when the movement starts. I did not look carefully through the video tapes between classes. If I had, I could have given him feedback.

In other words, things did not work exactly according to the plan. I think that this reflects the complex, messy and artistic context the video material was collected in. It also reflects my main focus at that time, which was to be a teacher-choreographer. The researcher focus fell into the background. Still, despite these difficulties, I have a rich video material which includes lots of episodes that “work”, some sequences that “don’t work” and enough discussions to study.

## Body-poetical stories

The thing I needed to do when starting to study the video material, having looked through it a couple of times, was to dive deep into it and understand it qualitatively. I did this with the help of the different perspectives on space in dance which I created in Chapter 2. This helped me in seeing the complexity of the video material.

The process I went through started with a zooming in on chosen parts of the video material and creating *body-poetical stories*. In the body-poetical stories I focus on shorter sequences of the video material and give a detailed account of my involvement with what is going on in the sequence. In doing this I try to write “with”, as Shotter<sup>171</sup> describes it, through writing about concrete details, quoting actual voiced utterances, using metaphors and thereby creating a sort of social body poetics.

This language does not try to be “objectively descriptive” (which also is not possible). Instead, I try to take into account how body-space-time-dynamics-relations deeply influence each other. Dance improvisation as a phenomenon seems to transform the experience of the concrete-real room into a bodily-lived space where a heightened phenomenological awareness can occur. The space opens up and is made alive through movement and a focus on relating. There is place for both individual and shared experiences and the dancers take part in investigations which move them. Through many statements the different dancers have expressed that their participation in the Dance Laboratory is a bodily, poetic and multilayered experience for them, I quote:

– It is like being in a play room; what happens, happens.<sup>172</sup>quote evaluation sheet

– I feel that I can show who I am in the dance.<sup>173</sup> quote evaluation sheet

– The feeling which is created in the Dance Laboratory is important for the rest of life, and I bring that feeling with me out in everyday situations.<sup>174</sup>quote interview

– I soon discovered that this has much more to give than “just” improvisation.<sup>175</sup> quote interview

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171 Shotter (1999a, download p. 10)

172 23 year old female non-disabled amateur dancer, 2005

173 Vera, 2001

174 Mona, 2004

175 Ida, 2004



- We cross limits.<sup>176</sup> quote interview
- After each and every time I get such a great feeling.<sup>177</sup> quote interview
- I really feel inside that I manage to do this.<sup>178</sup> quote interview
- Dance is a completely different language and it contains much more information.<sup>179</sup> quote interview
- I experience a special flow in my movements.<sup>180</sup> quote evaluation sheet
- I feel joy of living flowing through my body.<sup>181</sup> quote evaluation sheet
- I become more concentrated than usual on what I do, not stressed and concentrated, but engaged.<sup>182</sup> quote evaluation sheet

These statements tell me that the experience of dance improvisation is not a linear and “flat” experience for the different dancers, but rather a bodily, spacious and poetic one. The body-poetical stories are created with the intention to bring forward the special space which is created between people who meet in dance improvisation.

The body-poetical stories tell about the dance improvisation in the Dance Laboratory, seen through my eyes (and felt through my body). These stories serve as material for my interpretation of the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory. An interpretation of different dimensions I have distinguished in each sequence follows after each story. Based on this interpretation, I construct and collect different knowledge hooks from each story.

When I create body-poetical stories based on the video material, these are obviously my subjective interpretations. Still, it is important to emphasise that I create the stories based on my entire experience in and with the Dance Laboratory. I am grounded both in my own experience of the practical work with the group, in the collected interview material, video observations, my own field notes, different written notes and evaluations from the participants, theoretical references as well as informal discussions with the participants in the Dance Laboratory. With this as base, I argue that I have enough knowledge, experience and understanding of the Dance Laboratory to create stories of the video material. These stories can serve as a basis from which to generate new knowledge, and I argue that the value of this knowledge is, as Kvale<sup>183</sup> writes, defensible.

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176 Ida, 2004

177 Heidi, 2004

178 Vera, 2004

179 Paul, 2004

180 30 year old male non-disabled dancer, 2005

181 23 year old female non-disabled amateur dancer, 2005

182 Karen, 2005

183 Kvale (1989, p 77–79)

## **Studying myself as part of the video material**

I use the third person form for everybody, including myself as the teacher, in the body-poetical stories. This is a choice which I need to give some consideration to, as it is an important one. I tried writing the body-poetical stories in both the I-form and she-form for the teacher. It is clear that the stories changed drastically depending on which form I chose. An I-story is something different from a she-story. In this project, I am both the teacher-choreographer and the researcher. I both take part in the video material and am the one who interprets it. Regarding the video material, I have found that I need that distance to myself which is created when I turn myself into a “she”. In that way, as I transform the video material into written stories, I become a “she” similar to the other “she’s” and “he’s” in the stories. That makes it easier for me to be able to look with a critical eye at myself and my role as teacher.

At the same time, I also feel that I am losing something in not writing the stories in the I-form. The classes are deeply lived for me as a teacher and I am very much there as a subject. What I lose is the vulnerability I have as a continuously problem-solving dance improvisation teacher in a context of diversity. Therefore, I have decided to write about one of the sequences on the video material differently. I write about this sequence in the form of a memory. This memory describes a situation which I experienced as a failure. I made a bad teaching decision and ended up with an improvisation situation which did not work at all. As a teacher, I experience situations like these as painful – a very bodily feeling.

## **Focus on the teacher’s strategies**

In a section of its own, I pay attention to the teacher and the teaching strategies. Based on the video material and my field notes, I distinguish the main teaching strategies I use. I also discuss the teacher as a subject, the dramaturgy of teaching dance improvisation and I collect knowledge hooks regarding how to teach dance improvisation. I come back to the teacher and the teaching of dance improvisation in Chapter 5.

## **Making choices**

There is one question left to be answered before closing this section about video as research material in this study. That is why I chose to focus on those parts I did when creating the body-poetical stories. Altogether, the video material for this research consists of roughly 4 hours: a very rich and complex section of material. This made it necessary to make some choices, as I could not possibly turn the whole material into written stories.

I did not choose any parts of the video material before I had done my reading of the body as a lived and constructed phenomenon in Chapter 2. This reading broadened and focused my thinking on how to look at the video material, as it gave me the theoretical lenses consisting of the different perspectives on space in dance. All the three sequences which I chose for the

body-poetical stories caught my attention because they seemed to operate from within many perspectives. In short, the sequences I chose seemed to contain a lot of information and they gave me many and different impulses to generate knowledge. I found them interesting both in terms of the movement material explored, the relations developed or not developed and the pedagogical and power aspects which I observed. These three sequences were also quite different from each other, representing different moments during a class and different stages of the whole term. I also found the knowledge generated from these sequences representative of the whole material, and that the other parts confirm and stabilise the knowledge created. Even so, I do not deny that I probably would have generated more knowledge if I had also focused on other sequences. Still, the creation of these three body-poetical stories gave me enough material to build my description and interpretation on.

### 1.3.5. Interviews as research material in this study

In addition to the video material, the interviews with the participants in the Dance Laboratory make up the most important part of the collected empirical material for this study. With the interviews, I wanted to listen to the participants' reflections about their experiences. In a prolongation of that, I wanted to give voice to different dancers and use their voices to feed into a dance aesthetic and educational discussion.

I suggest that the very fact that the dancers were interviewed three times during the semester served as a meaning perspective transformation opportunity for the dancers. During the interviews the dancers had an opportunity to create awareness about their own experience. In other words, the interview situations, in addition to the actual improvisation, were a space for active meaning-making. Mona reflected about this when she was interviewed by a journalist in May 2004. She said:

The fact that the teacher has gathered material for research has been exciting, because it has forced me to reflect more consciously about my experiences in the dance project. <sup>184</sup> quote  
interview

In the process of understanding the interview material I have been inspired by several researchers, both within and outside of the field of dance. For my MA<sup>185</sup> in special education about dance play with students with autism, I used in-depth interviews with teachers. That process forms a base for my experience with interviews as research material.

For this study, I have been especially inspired by Mezirow<sup>186</sup> when developing procedures for interpreting the interview material. I will come back to him and other inspirational sources later in this section.

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184 Quote from Mona being interviewed by a journalist after interview three with the researcher. The researcher and Mona were interviewed together by the journalist. The result of the interview was an article printed in the magazine *Arabesk. Kunstpedagogisk tidsskrift for musikk og dans*, 2-04. Haugan (2004, p. 44-46)

185 Østern (1999), Report based on MA in special education (1995)

186 Mezirow (1991)

## **The interview guide and model**

Before starting the Dance Laboratory in autumn 2003, I developed an interview guide for a series of three interviews with each participant. I used this interview guide with everybody. In that way, the interviews have been fulfilled in a similar and structured way with all of the eight dancers. Still, there are clearly many different interview situations to describe and comment on. The interviews were conducted in different surroundings and at different times. The different participants had different relationships with me and I met several different story-telling languages among the participants. In the following I will describe and reflect about this.

I interviewed the dancers three times, with some months between each interview, because I wanted to learn about possible meaning perspective transformation. This gives me a total amount of 24 interviews with the dancers. In addition I have one interview with the video artist.

All the interviews were conducted individually. At this point in the Dance Laboratory I suggest it was more informative to conduct individual interviews than group interviews with the dancers. As the interpretation of the empirical material shows, several different story-telling languages are to be found among the dancers in the study. For some dancers in the group, verbal language is easier than for others (I will describe this more closely later in this section). In addition, the interpretation of the video material also shows that there are different degrees of dominance by different dancers when it comes to aspects like taking the word and making choices. This situation could easily skew a group discussion situation. And it would have further demanded a high degree of awareness by the interviewer. As it was now, in the individual interviews everybody was assured of the possibility to talk and tell, which I appreciate for the sake of this study. It is also possible to study group discussions during classes on the video material.

When planning the interview questions, I wanted to be careful not to impose my own themes and thoughts on the dancers. I wanted to work with an open interview guide as a base and ask as few questions as possible. I thought that this would allow for the participants to bring up whichever themes they wanted, also new and unexpected ones for me. In the end, the interview guide that served as the base for the interviews looked like this:

### **Interview one** – *conducted before the first lesson:*

- What is your background in dance?
- Tell me about your relation to dance. What does dance mean to you?
- Tell me why you want to take part in this dance project.

### **Interview two** – *conducted in the middle of the term.*

- Tell me about your experiences in the Dance Laboratory.

I had planned to ask only this, but this question was followed by a surprised silence by nearly everybody. They did not know what to tell about. Because of that I always added to the question:

– You can tell me about experiences, special moments you remember, sequences, exercises, feelings, thoughts, questions, people in the group or any other aspect of the Dance Laboratory you might think of.

### **Interview three** – *conducted after the term was finished*

This was a semi-structured interview. First I read the dancer a summary of what she had talked about in her first two interviews. Then I asked the dancer if I had understood her correctly, if she could agree with the summary and if she wanted to add something. A discussion-like interview started from here. I then asked the different dancers different additional questions, depending on which themes they had brought up in interviews 1 and 2. I also asked everybody to define their relation to dance again. Finally, my intention was to show everybody one or two excerpts from the video material where they participated themselves, and ask them to tell me what they saw. In the end I did this with five of the eight dancers.

Interviews one and two are short with everybody, in transcribed form only 1–2 pages. I was surprised how short the answers were. I suggest that this is due to the fact that I did not ask any following-up questions. All the time, I kept in mind that I did not want to impose my thoughts on the interviewees. Having asked a question, I let the interviewees talk freely until they were finished and then I went on to the next question.

Reflecting on the way I conducted interviews one and two, it seems that I tried to stay within a research interview model which Margery Franklin<sup>187</sup> calls an *information extract model*. This interview model is based on the belief that the interview situation is one where the interviewer extracts ideas, feelings and knowledge from the interviewee. The fact that all interviews one and two were short makes me think there is something missing in this interview model. I suggest that if I had commented or asked more, the interviewees also would have talked more. This points to the interview situation as a shared construction rather than an information extract situation. My conclusion is that if I as an interviewer do not comment and ask follow-up questions as is usually done in a conversation, the interviewee easily stops talking. The interviewee needs what Johansson<sup>188</sup> compares to acting directions: supporting questions or sounds like “hmm”, “yes” or similar. These are directions which encourage the interviewee to go on. This is so because telling about something is not only “emptying oneself” and expressing thoughts, but also building content in dialogue. Since I did not enter that dialogue with new questions or comments, the dancers did not continue talking either. They told about what they thought of first, but I suggest that they would have told even more had I asked more. But then, even if the interviews are short, and even if I find the interview model used for interviews 1 and 2 problematic, the dancers still brought up a rich variety of themes.

Interview three was different and functioned much more like a conversation between myself and the interviewee. In interview three, I actively followed up the things the interviewees talked about with further questions. This interview can be positioned within what Margery Franklin<sup>189</sup> refers to as the *shared understanding model* and also the *discourse model*. In the

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187 Franklin (1997, p. 99–106)

188 Johansson (2005, p. 252)

189 Franklin (1997, p. 99–106)

shared understanding interview model, the interviewer tries to understand how the interviewee experiences her life and the world from her perspective. The discourse interview model sees an interview as constructed in an interpersonal situation, and emphasises that the interview is a meaning-making process in itself. Not surprisingly, interview three in many cases is much longer than interviews one and two. Still, not all of them are. Instead, the length of interview 3 varies greatly with the different dancers, ranging from only 7 minutes with Teresa to 39 minutes with Ida. So in this case more questions and follow up directions did not automatically result in longer stories, but they opened up for it.

For interview three, I had prepared a list of meaning themes which the dancer had talked about in the two previous interviews. I read the dancers the meaning themes and asked if I had understood them correctly. I then used these meaning themes, confirmed by the dancers, to construct the different meaning perspectives which they talk within. Having asked them if the meaning themes were correct, I asked the dancers if they wanted to alter or add something. All of the dancers positively confirmed the list of meaning themes I read them. They all answered through saying something like “Yes, that is very right” or “Yes, I recognize myself very well”. None of them wanted to change anything and none of them gave any corrections to the themes. When I asked them if they wanted to add something, some of them did in a way that led us over to the following-up questions. The additional comments by the dancers were of a kind that deepened the meaning theme. One example can be when I asked Karen if she wanted to add something, and she said:

– Yes, eeh ..., what I mean with saying that it [the Dance Laboratory] has influenced my everyday life is that ... it adds on to everything else I do in my everyday life and not least, as I said, it is a relaxation from the usual. So it is true that it influences me and also I have more belief in myself, and more self-knowledge. <sup>190</sup> quote interview 3

In this way Karen deepens and explains in detail what she meant when saying that the dance influences her everyday life.

I went on with asking the dancers follow-up questions based on the themes that they had talked about in their previous interviews. I did not bring up any meaning themes other than the ones they had talked about before. If they had not, for example, touched upon a methodological meaning perspective, neither did I with my following-up questions. Instead, I asked them to describe more in detail the themes they already had brought up. Examples of follow-up questions are these, which I asked Heidi:

– You say that you think the dance is good also for the head. Can you describe in which way?

– You say that it is a nice experience to have become less careful towards Vera and Karen. Why is that a nice experience?

– You say that you can feel that you expose yourself in improvisation. Can you remember any specific situation when you have felt that way?<sup>191</sup>

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190 Quote from interview three with Karen.

191 Examples of follow-up questions asked to Heidi in interview 3, May 2004.

Interview three with Vera and Anna has a different character, and for different reasons I have a more active role in the construction of their meaning perspectives. I will come back to this shortly.

Finally, in interview three I showed the dancers a couple of sequences of the video material which I had chosen. I asked them to comment about what they saw. What did they remember? To Ida I showed the sequence described in the body-poetical story 2 and to Vera the sequence described in story 3. None of the dancers were shown the sequence described in story 1. Teresa and Heidi were not shown any sequences at all because of a lack of technical equipment, and when Anna looked at a sequence, the camera stopped filming. In that, her comments are lost. Mona, Karen and Paul were shown other sequences.

### Situating the interviews

The first interview was conducted at the beginning of September 2003, the last one in the middle of August 2004. That means that the interviews cover a time span of nearly one year. The largest part (20 of 24 interviews) of the interviews were done between February and August 2004. The interviews were performed in very different surroundings, which reflect the fact that the Dance Laboratory was first of all an artistic project, and only secondly a research project. We had a space for the dance, but not for the interviews. There were simply not always any practical possibilities to find the time and space for conducting the interviews in a peaceful and separate spot.

I worked quite hard to arrange three interviews with each dancer. They were all more than willing to participate and curious about taking part in the interviews, but both they and I were busy and we struggled to find time for the interview sessions. I had to arrange the interviews in connection to the classes, to avoid much additional travelling, as the participants all came downtown from different other parts of the city to take part in the classes. On two occasions we failed to find time for an interview, and the dancers instead wrote the interview to me. This is true for the first interview with Mona, and the second interview with Ida. The different interviews were all conducted by me, as follows:

Table 1 (Østern). Locations and dates for the different interviews.

Dancer	Interview one (where, when)	Interview two (where, when)	Interview three (where, when)
Mona	as a written letter 2nd Feb 2004	outside the dance studio 23rd March 2004	in the dance studio 25th of May 2004
Ida	outside the dance studio 3rd Feb 2004	As a written letter 22nd April 2004	in the dance studio 25th of May 2004
Karen	in a café 27th of Jan 2004	outside the dance studio 23rd March 2004	in the dance studio 25th of May 2004
Heidi	outside the dance studio 3rd Feb 2004	outside the dance studio 20th April 2004	outdoors in a park 30th May 2004
Teresa	outside the dance studio 3rd Feb 2004	outside the dance studio 20th April 2004	outdoors in a park 30th May 2004

<i>Vera</i>	in the dance studio 2nd Sept 2003	in the dance studio 21st Oct 2003	in Vera's home 15th June 2004
<i>Paul</i>	outside the dance studio 3rd Feb 2004	outside the dance studio 23rd March 2004	in Paul's home 22nd August 2004
<i>Anna</i>	in the dance studio 2nd Sept 2003	in the dance studio 21st Oct 2003	in Anna's home 22nd August 2004

The surroundings where the interviews were conducted vary from inside the dance studio, to outdoors or even the homes of the participants. I considered the most suitable place for the interviews to be inside the dance studio, but we did not have access to it very often in addition to the actual class. We had to step outside of the dance studio when another class was about to start. The dance studio which the Dance Laboratory used was located in a lively fitness centre. Outside the dance studio there were benches where the interviews could be conducted, but usually it was quite noisy with loud music from the aerobic and kick boxing classes in other studios. All this noise can be heard on the tapes from these interviews. To conduct the interviews outdoors or in the dancers' homes worked well and they were peaceful surroundings, but they did not have the same dance attention to them.

Interviews one and two with Vera and Anna were conducted already in September and October 2003, when the Dance Laboratory started. In November, Paul joined the group, and at the beginning of 2004, another five dancers joined: Ida, Karen, Mona, Teresa and Heidi. Then I decided that the time was right to collect the empirical material for the study. I then started conducting interviews with everybody.

In retrospect, I think it was a mistake not to conduct interview two with Vera and Anna again in the middle of spring term 2004. Since I did not, in interview two they are actually talking about another and quite different process from the others. I will come back to this fact both in this chapter and during the interpretation of the interview material in Chapter 4.

### **Interpreting the interviews**

All the interviews were transcribed by me. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian and I transcribed them in Norwegian. I wrote down everything, word by word, also including pauses and different supporting sounds like "Mmmm". As this thesis is written in English, I have then translated the interview material into English. This was also done by me. I have not translated the full interview material to English, but only those parts that I use and quote. I have tried to let the English translations stay as close to the Norwegian original as possible, but obviously one language can never be translated to another in an exact manner. In this way, the material slightly changes as I translate it from Norwegian to English. The informants in this study are quoted in English, but in reality they think, feel, tell and conceptualize in Norwegian<sup>192</sup>.

Having transcribed the interviews, I then repeatedly and thoroughly read them. I read them, put them away, and read them again, several times, over a period of years. I did not enter an

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192 Except Paul, whose native language is Spanish, but he still communicated in Norwegian with me.



actual phase of organizing and interpreting the interviews before I had created the researcher's perspectives on space in dance in Chapter 2. I also started with the interpretation of the video material before I turned to the interviews, which seemed important. I needed to observe the dance, relations and teaching in class on the video material before I could turn to the reflections expressed and discussed in the interviews.

For a long time I concentrated on the first set of interviews only. Already in the first interview, there was a lot of information, but I struggled in organising it. First, I tried to categorize the material in accordance with traditional groups like *disabled* and *non-disabled* or *professional* and *amateurs*. In retrospect, I find it strange that I even tried to do that, since my experience tells me that this is precisely what cannot be done without simplification. When I look at how, for example, Karen and Vera, the two disabled dancers in this project, position themselves in the first interview, they bring up quite different meaning themes. The same is true for Anna and Paul, the two professional dancers in the project. Putting these dancers together regarding how dance makes meaning for them means forcing them into traditional categories, which clearly would demand simplification of the interview material.

Nevertheless, I wanted to find some way of positioning the dancers based on the first interview to be able to follow them through their meaning-making processes – and transformations – which were there in the interview material. In the end, I made the following conclusion in order to organize and understand the material.

Outer, traditional categories like disabled or non-disabled work badly because the dancers within such a category do not position themselves similarly through the meaning themes they bring up. Instead, the dancers walk as individuals, not as categories, through the project. In the end, it is possible to talk about both individual and shared meaning making processes, as many dancers bring up the same meaning themes, but they bring up these themes across traditional categories. Again, there is not one *Meaning* in this project, but a myriad of meaning making possibilities.

In the end, I used the first interview to create what I call *meaning themes* and *meaning perspectives*, which the dancers talk from within. In doing this, I lean on Mezirow's<sup>193</sup> transformative learning theory, to which I will give further consideration shortly. In addition, my procedures for interpreting the interviews are inspired by Amadeo Giorgi's<sup>194</sup> approach to meaning condensations.

### *The construction of meaning themes and meaning perspectives*

For the actual organizing of the complex interview material into a structure that I could handle and generate knowledge from, I found it valuable to use – and modify – Mezirow's<sup>195</sup> transformative learning theory. This is a theory of how adults learn. Mezirow does not come from the field of dance, and his theory is not grounded in bodily experiences but stays in the realm of cognition

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193 Mezirow (1978) and (1991)

194 Giorgi (1985)

195 Mezirow (1991)

and psychology. Since I suppose that meaning-making in this project happens through movement and bodily experiences, I do not adapt Mezirow's theory as such, but I am inspired by it and go into dialogue with it. Mezirow introduces the concepts *meaning perspectives* and *meaning schemes*, and these are concepts which I use – and alter – in my interpretation of the empirical material of this study.

Mezirow<sup>196</sup> describes a meaning perspective as a person's frame of reference that serves as a tacit belief system or as a personal paradigm<sup>197</sup> which all meaning is constructed through for that person. Mezirow<sup>198</sup> explains how meaning perspectives or *habits of mind* include sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, religious, psychological and aesthetic aspects as well as learning styles. A person learns through the meaning perspectives she inhabits. I would like to add that this tacit belief system is embodied.

A meaning perspective is made up of meaning schemes, which are the more specific aspects of one's personal frame of reference. The concept "scheme" is often used within cognitive psychology as a mental scheme which a person understands her world through. I am not satisfied with this connection to cognition, because I suggest that these "schemes" also have a bodily aspect. They are not only thought; they are also felt and lived. Also Mezirow admits that:

It is not enough to understand intellectually the need to change the way one acts; one requires emotional strength and an act of will in order to move forward.<sup>199</sup>

In this study, the dancers' meaning-making processes happen in bodily meetings, which are crucial for their meaning perspective transformations. Instead of using the concept "scheme" I will use the concept "theme" when I interpret the interview material in Chapter 4, as I find the concept "theme" more open and it has less of a link to cognition.

The experiences that take place in the Dance Laboratory are told about by the dancers in the interviews and further constructed into different meaning themes and meaning perspectives by me. The different meaning themes are distinguished with the help of the different perspectives on space in dance constructed in Chapter 2.

### *Meaning perspective and lifeworld*

I understand the concept meaning perspective as connected to the concept lifeworld<sup>200</sup> within phenomenological philosophy. Edmund Husserl<sup>201</sup> describes lifeworld as the world of immediate experience. At the same time he also describes this world as a cultural world, laden with linguistic tradition. According to Max van Manen<sup>202</sup> on the one hand, lifeworld is already there; on the other

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196 Mezirow (1991, p. 34)

197 Kuhn (1962) refers to a paradigm as a collection of ways of seeing that influence scientific inquiry.

198 Mezirow (2006/2008, p. 27)

199 Mezirow (1991, p. 171)

200 *Lifeworld* is a concept originating in the phenomenology of Husserl (1970)

201 Husserl (1970, pp. XI–xli)

202 van Manen (1997, p. xi)

hand, we take part in shaping and creating it. The world is given to us and actively constituted by us at the same time. Jürgen Habermas<sup>203</sup> developed the concept lifeworld in his social theory. Mezirow<sup>204</sup> again is influenced by Habermas when developing his transformative learning theory.

The difference between meaning perspective and lifeworld, as I understand it, is that the former, and especially meaning perspective *transformation*, is a conscious act. Lifeworld is not unconscious, but rather pre-reflective; it lies within the realm of the body's own kind of reflexivity. Lifeworld gives us a sense of who we are.

### *Meaning perspective transformation in connection to lifeworld*

Learning happens through change, transformation. In his transformative learning theory Mezirow<sup>205</sup> presents four types of adult learning:

1. Learning through meaning schemes. That is learning to further differentiate the previously acquired meaning schemes that we take for granted.
2. Learning new meaning schemes. This involves creating new meaning that is consistent with existing meaning perspectives. The existing meaning perspective does not change fundamentally, even though it is extended.
3. Learning through transformation of meaning schemes. This learning involves reflection on assumptions and a sense of dissatisfaction with old ways of understanding meaning.
4. Learning through meaning perspective transformation. This means becoming aware, through reflection, of an incomplete meaning perspective and then transforming that perspective through a reorganization of meaning. This type of learning begins with experiences that fail to fit a learner's expectations and thereby lack meaning. This is the most significant kind of emancipatory learning.

Mezirow<sup>206</sup> underlines that problem solving is central to all form of learning described in his transformation theory.

Meaning perspective transformation is the most distinct domain of adult learning. This involves what Habermas<sup>207</sup> called emancipatory action.<sup>208</sup> Mezirow<sup>209</sup> suggests that a meaning perspective transformation can take place only through assimilating the perspectives of others. This perspective-taking implies a conscious recognition of the difference between one's old perception and the new one. According to Mezirow, once individuals have moved on to a new

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203 Habermas (1984, 1987)

204 Mezirow (1991, pp. 64–98)

205 Mezirow (1991, pp. 93–94)

206 Mezirow (1991, p. 94)

207 Habermas (1984, 1987)

208 The work of Paulo Freire (1970) has also had an impact on Mezirow's work, for example in recognizing the importance of raising awareness of the learner's life situation and the role of the learners to make the necessary changes in the world around them.

209 In DI Biase (2000, download, p. 4)

meaning perspective they can never go back to the old one.<sup>210</sup>

In this study, I try to focus on the exchange between meaning perspective transformation and lifeworld. I want to underline that the meaning perspectives constructed in this study connect tightly to the dancers' lifeworlds. The deepened or transformed meaning perspectives of the dancers are embodied in a way that affects their lifeworlds.

I suggest meaning perspective transformation both affects and is affected by lifeworld. The bodily experiences which the dancers go through in dance improvisation affect the sense of self and meaning the different dancers in this project talk about, and which I construct into meaning perspectives. Conversely, the dancers' bodily world of immediate experience and the sense of who they are is affected by the meaning perspective transformation they go through. In other words: lifeworld and meaning perspective change together. When the dancers, for example, show aesthetic meaning perspective transformation, this will affect the way they experience dance through their lifeworld. Regarding the meaning perspective transformation that takes place in the Dance Laboratory, it is anchored in and happens through the dancer's lifeworld.

#### *Following the dancers through interviews one, two and three*

Going back to the actual structuring of the material in interview one and instead of dividing the dancers into traditional categories like "disabled" and "non-disabled", I turned to the interview questions asked.

When positioning the dancers according to their answers to the questions asked, the complexity of their answers and the fact that they go across traditional and well-known categories is shown. The positioning also allowed me to follow the different dancers in their meaning-making processes through interviews two and three. Of course, I did not only gather the different meaning themes and perspectives the dancers talk about. I also constructed and distinguished between them. The interviewees did not talk in separate "themes", but in a stream of thoughts and words.

When actually condensing the interview material into themes and perspectives, I am inspired by Giorgi<sup>211</sup>. He has developed a phenomenological method for meaning condensations of interview material. Kvale<sup>212</sup> describes how Giorgi relates to phenomenological philosophy in understanding the phenomenon investigated as an intentional meaningful activity in the life of the subject. Giorgi developed a method which involves a condensation of the expressed meanings into more and more essential meanings, starting with so called "natural meaning units" and then explicating their main themes.<sup>213</sup> I do not follow his method exactly, but I am inspired by it when condensing the meaning themes and constructing the meaning perspectives based on the interview material in this study.

I read the interview material repeatedly for a sense of the whole and I tried never to bracket the interviews down in such a way that I would lose sight of the whole, which was how the dancers

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210 In Di Biase (2000, download p. 6)

211 Giorgi (1985)

212 Kvale (1996, p. 196)

213 Kvale (1996, pp. 194–195)

made meaning during the project. Instead, I tried to find meaning units, which I call themes, that could describe different areas of focus. This process lasted a long time, and it took a lot of space. I printed all the interviews and glued them onto my wall. I stood for long periods of time in front of the wall, wandering back and forth between the different parts of the interviews and repeatedly reorganized the material. I tried to stay sensitive to the phenomenon under study – the dancers’ experiences. Slowly, the insight about the different meaning themes and perspectives started to emerge, through a deeply felt intuitive process. I started cutting the papers with the interviews into smaller pieces and glue them in clusters on the wall. Slowly, areas of focus emerged out of this process and I was able to name the meaning perspectives which the meaning themes told about. Once I had these essences, I started to try to describe them as precisely as possible.<sup>214</sup> This process lasted a long time – I had the interview material glued on my wall for around a year.

Based on their answers to the first question (*What is your background in dance?*), I positioned the dancers according to “low degree of earlier dance experience” and “high degree of earlier dance experience”. The other two questions asked in the first interview brought up content, which I viewed as different themes. These meaning themes again were organized under different meaning perspectives, through the procedure just described.

In Chapter 4 I create tables where these meaning themes and meaning perspectives are constructed and shown. These visualizations have importance as actual construction tools. They help me in avoiding using traditional categories as starting points and instead use the different meaning themes brought up to construct meaning perspectives and show how these spread out across traditional categories. These visualizations make me take a somewhat more quantitative hold on the interview material in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2. than in the rest of the study. I have found this helpful in order to look beyond my taken for granted assumptions and reach one of my more specific aims with this study: *to investigate what kind of knowledge dance generates and which possibilities for meaning perspective transformation this project holds.*

In interview one I create the meaning perspectives, in interview two I follow them to see if and how they deepen, fall away or transform. Interview three explodes the system with the tables as a construction tool, as these interviews are longer and bring up more issues. Instead, when interpreting interview three, I look at one meaning perspective created at a time and in that I take a more narrative position again.

#### *A word on interview three*

I have not found it easy to use the part of interview 3 where the dancers comment on video sequences. I was surprised at how little the dancers had to say about the video material. My overwhelming impression is that it was strange for the dancers to look at their improvisations. They became quite self-indulging and critical and focused on how they looked when improvising.

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<sup>214</sup> Giorgi (1985) is strictly concerned with describing instead of interpreting the experiences of the research participants. I acknowledge that in my study, I both describe and interpret the interview material.

In a way, it was as though looking at the video disturbed their lived experience of the improvisation. An example of the comments when looking at a video sequence is the following with Paul:

The video is started. Tone and Paul look in silence. There is a sequence with Paul and Ida doing a leading and-following task. Paul smiles when watching, but he says nothing.

Tone: – To me it looks like it works well.

Paul: – Works well?

Tone: – Yes, it looks like you are communicating well. But what do you remember?

Paul smiles  
and says – Difficult to remember.

Paul looks at the whole sequence in silence. He smiles all the time.

Tone: – What is it like to see it?

Paul: – It is fun but ... I can't remember what I felt ... but ... I remember it was a bit difficult ...

Paul is silent for a long time, thinking. He does not know what to say.

Paul: – It is a bit difficult when you are not the leader ...

Tone: – Leader? When you are the one closing your eyes?

Paul: – Yes. I think it is very difficult to hear what the leader wants. You must not think about yourself. You must just listen to the other person. And be open for it. But I don't remember exactly this.

Tone: – No, ok. Let's watch another sequence.<sup>215</sup>

In this way, Paul comments in a more generalised way, and not especially on this sequence. I have not found it valuable to use the dancers' comments on the video material in my interpretation of the material, but what the comments confirm is that the experience of dance improvisation is a lived experience for the dancers. It feels strange to see the improvisation from the outside. Ida's comments on the video sequences are an exception. She commented quite a lot and I found it valuable to use her comments when I interpreted one sequence of the video material (body-poetical story two).

The third interview was also video-filmed. That means that it is possible to study the interviewee's bodily engagement while talking. The camera stands still and films by itself (not by the video artist). The angle of the camera never shows both interviewer (me) and interviewee – only the interviewee is in sight. When transcribing the third interview, I include gestures and movements, and they add information to the "how" of the interview: when the interviewees were insecure, when they did not know, when they were amused, and so on. Anna Johansson<sup>216</sup> makes

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<sup>215</sup> Extract from transcription of interview three with Paul, conducted in August, 2004.

<sup>216</sup> Johansson (2005, p. 284–287)

a distinction between three different dimensions in the analysis of life stories: an analysis of the content, of the form and expression and of the interpersonal dimension. All these three belong together, but different dimensions can be emphasised. In this study, the main focus of the interpretation of the interview material is on the content. The connection between the “what” and the “how” is emphasised in the interpretation of the whole research material, by constantly reflecting on the interpersonal relation between myself as teacher/researcher and the dancers/interviewees. Even if interview 3 is filmed, I have not focused especially on form and movement, gestures and facial expressions in the interpretation of this interview. Instead, I have found it more interesting to focus on the dancing-moving bodies relating to each other in the interpretation of the video material of the actual improvisation classes.

Based on the interpretation of interviews 1, 2 and 3 I discuss meaning perspective transformation in the Dance Laboratory. Throughout the interpretative process I collect knowledge hooks which I bring with me into a discussion about dance pedagogy in the last chapter.

During the interpretation of the interview material, I have discovered some “how” aspects which are of importance for the “what” of the interviews. These are the researcher-dancer relation, different story-telling languages and discourse domination by the researcher. In the following sections, I will pay attention to these “hows”.

### **The researcher-dancer relation**

In her research among Nicaraguan women, Johansson<sup>217</sup> reflects about how the life stories of her interviewees are a product created in dialogue between the women and herself as researcher. She shows how the different women all had different relationships to her (seeing her as friend, a feminist, like a mother, and so on) and how that probably affected what kind of things they told her about. I realise that I also had different relationships to the dancers in the Dance Laboratory in spring 2004 and that this probably affected *what* they talked about, and *how* they talked.

When interpreting the collected interview material, it became clear to me that not all the dancers had the same relationship to me. First of all, I was not an outside researcher who now and then came to ask the dancers questions. Instead, I was their teacher in a dance project which they engaged in. They all chose to come into the group, and they all chose to stay throughout the semester. That means that they all found an interest in the project and also in me as the teacher. If they had not felt safe and comfortable with me as the teacher, they would not have come back. That also means that they all created a high degree of loyalty towards me. From this position in relation to me, they answered my questions and engaged in a dialogue with me as a researcher. For the dancers I clearly was more of a teacher than a researcher. They saw me more often in teaching situations, and for them the research came in addition to the teaching. It is possible to think that they would have answered differently if another researcher, who was not also their teacher, had interviewed them. That would have freed the interviewees from the relation of loyalty towards me as the teacher. But on the other hand, since I had both roles,

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217 Johansson (2005, p. 284–287)

they had the possibility to discuss processes which I had first hand experience of myself. I was there with them.

Regarding the different relationships towards me, I want to point to the relationship between myself and Anna as one which clearly differs from the others. She was a close colleague of mine. Anna had a deeper sense of nearness and loyalty towards me than the other participants in this project. I realise that especially in interview two she took more of a teacher perspective in identifying with me, and reflected more about how the methodology for this project could develop and not very much about her own experience in it. In interview three this had changed, and we also talked about the fact that she had taken a different perspective than the others. I would say that in interview three we created a meta-reflection about not only the dance improvisation and Anna's experiences in the project, but also about our relation within the project. At the same time as Anna showed support and loyalty towards me throughout the project, she is also the one who criticized and questioned the most.

The fact of being a colleague is the most important aspect for Anna when relating to me. The others relate to me as a teacher and they have a degree of loyalty and respect which follows a teacher-student relation. Anna, in turn, also had a teacher relation to three of the dancers. Before they started the project, she said that it was going to be rather odd to work with these three dancers not as a teacher, but as a participant just like them. None of the three dancers Heidi, Teresa and Ida ever mentioned this as something they reflected on or were affected by, but I am clear that this change of roles was a challenge for Anna. This was so especially in the beginning of the semester.

So when the semester started in February 2004, there were already invisible, but lived, relationships and roles affecting the situation in the Dance Laboratory. I have become aware of this only in retrospect. Slowly, I have understood the different ways the dancers related to me when I started teaching and collecting the material and how that actually affected the content of the material. As the project was a research project for me, I was genuinely interested in the experiences of everybody. I would have wanted Anna to talk to me as a participant, and not as a colleague, but not until interview three I realised that difference and had the possibility to talk about it. In that way, the relation which she adopted, and the loyalty she felt towards me, directed what she talked about in interview two. Also, as the video interpretation shows, without reflecting about it I used Anna more than the others to demonstrate different tasks with during the classes, thereby reinforcing her feeling of being a colleague. I related to all the dancers as subjects, being genuinely interested in their experiences, but the fact that I also had a relation to Anna as a colleague is visible in the classes. Anna's role as a teacher to some of the dancers in other settings is also visible in the way she functions in and reflects on the project.

Because of Anna's different relation towards me, the interviews with her were different. Her way of relating to me and defining her own role determined what she talked about. In interview three I had understood how the relationship influenced the interviews and we were able to talk about it. As a result, interview three with Anna to a greater extent than with the others (except Vera, to whom I will come back shortly) can be considered a joint construction between myself and her. In the following, I will give interview three with Anna thorough consideration.



### *Interview three with Anna*

The work in the Dance Laboratory in the spring term of 2004 was a very different experience for Anna than the first semester's work in the autumn of 2003. She has told me so, and I also had the clear experience that Anna did not find her place in the Dance Laboratory until during the spring term. She struggled to find meaning in it during the autumn term of 2003. The project changed a lot from being a group of only her and Vera in the autumn to a group of eight dancers in the spring, all keenly interested in the project. Anna's understanding of dance improvisation and the project as such, as a space to investigate dance, changed during this spring. Also her relation towards me changed – or more correctly – our relation and the definition of our roles changed. She became much more a participant in the group, instead of being or seeing herself as an extra teacher.

I interviewed Anna for the second time in October 2003. The third interview with her was conducted in August 2004. That means that nearly a year passed between the two interviews, and a lot of things had changed. The project had changed, I had changed as a teacher, Anna's perspectives had changed, and the relation between us had changed. When I came to Anna's house to interview her for the third time, I remember that she seemed quite tense. When I told her in advance that I was going to read her a list of what she said in the earlier interviews, I remember she said something like "I really wonder what I said in those interviews, it seems like so long ago". I think she was, in a way, worried about what she had said in the earlier interviews, because she felt that she had changed so much afterwards. Sensing her tension, I found it difficult to start the interview, and it became important for me to create a relaxed atmosphere and emphasise how important it had been that she was part of the Dance Laboratory. I suddenly realised that the interview situation made her feel vulnerable and that it was my responsibility to be careful. She had changed and found it uncomfortable to hear her thoughts from a year ago and my interpretations of them. For me, it became part of the interview to make sure we could have a discussion where she could feel comfortable.

In the end, this interview became different to the others. I presented some of my thoughts about her process, and she reflected around that. In this way, it is mainly I who introduce an interpretation of her process, and she develops that interpretation.

Therefore, when quoting her sentences in the interpretation done in Chapter 4, even if these are her own phrasings, I write both her and my name in parenthesis afterwards. By first offering my understanding of her process, I have actively influenced her in her own interpretation. An extract of interview three with Anna shows my role in her interpretation and how the discussion grows between us. First I talked about how important I think it is that she has been in the group and that she has contributed with an important energy and bodily knowledge, and that this has contributed to the others. Anna looked glad to hear that. Then the interview continued:

Tone: – I think it is quite clear that you take another perspective than the others when you reflect about the group. And there is nothing wrong with that, I must say that at once, but it is quite clear and I think it is interesting to reflect about why. And I have some theories about that which are connected to the fact that we are colleagues and that we both are dance teachers. When ... when I look at the material, then I notice that ... the others in the group, when I interview them and talk to them, then they talk in the I-form. They talk about themselves,

about what they experience, what they feel, what they learn. You talk a little bit about that, but mostly you talk in the you-form, about the others ... about what they do, how they can develop or how the whole project could be developed. And then the others talk in a now-perspective, they talk about what they experience now, while you are focused on the future, what this could become. The others talk mostly about things that are related to themselves; like feelings, or communication, of failing or succeeding, or things like that. You talk ... a bit about that ... but more about how the others could develop physically, or especially how Vera and Karen could develop physically, technically, how one could work with their bodies, in a way. Do you recognize this?

Anna: – Yes, I absolutely do. I really think so, yes ... but I think that I from the start I have entered this just with the thought that this should become choreography ... and that ... I guess I haven't gone into it just like me, here and now, there and then, and experience ... yes, I don't think that has been so clear for me.

Tone: – No, I don't think so either, and I just want to say that I don't think there is anything wrong with it, but I think it is quite interesting and I have thought that ... you know, I think in many ways that you take a teacher position ... that you more or less consciously enter it as a teacher.

Anna: – Yes, that might be.

Tone: – But I think that is strongly connected to the fact that we work so tightly together and I also asked if you wanted to join the project.

Anna: – Yes, I think so. But also I think it is a bit difficult for me not to be in it like a teacher ... because I think it can be a bit like that when I take yoga classes, too. I think I have to be very aware not to have that. Because I am so used to having that role in that situation, you know. And also a bit ... that there are students of mine that have been in the group. Or, I mean, another place, but quite a lot. That I have that role towards them.

Tone: – Yes

Anna: – But, yes. I maybe just think like a teacher.

Tone: – Mmm, yes. And then I have reflected a bit about which aspects that lay in the identity of being a professional.

Anna: – Mmm.

Tone: – Because I think ... I think that most dancers would have had that perspective, and I think that professionalism in dance, it is about being focused towards developing the physical aspects. I think that in a way.

Anna: – Yes, yes, yes. Because you are so drilled to develop a body which is as trained as possible. Which should function to that, and to this, and to that. Technically trained, in a way.

Tone: – Yes. Because I see that it is precisely that ... that your way of being so physical is so great in the group, it is important as it gives dynamics and energy and ... just that one senses the body knowledge, in a way. But it maybe also leads to the fact that you see other things.

Anna: – Yes, I think so. Or, you miss out on seeing some things, I think.<sup>218</sup>

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218 Transcription of parts of interview three with Anna, conducted by me in August 2004.

In this way, the third interview took place between me and Anna, where I more actively than with the other dancers in the group (except Vera), offered my interpretations and understanding as part of the discussion. In the rest of the interview, I talked less and Anna more. When sentences by her in interview three are quoted in Chapter 4, they are marked with both her name and mine in parenthesis.

### **Different story-telling languages among the interviewees**

The participants in the Dance Laboratory are not only differently bodied. They are also verbally different. When I interviewed them, I became aware that I was meeting different story-telling languages. This has made me more aware of the fact that as the interviewer I am an active part of the constructions of the stories being told.

When I interviewed Paul for the first time, he had only been in Norway for a couple of months. He could hardly speak Norwegian, very little English, and I spoke even less Spanish. We did have a problem talking at that point. During the first interview Paul clearly expressed that he was frustrated with not being able to talk about the things he would like to. He slowly and hesitatingly started sentences in Norwegian, English or Spanish and I tried to guess and complete the sentence. He nodded if I understood correctly. We managed to create his answers, but he sighed and shook his head and looked like being in pain because he could not express himself freely. He did not like the situation, being very dependent on me as a helper and translator. Still, the transcriptions of this interview reveal that I do not introduce any themes or concepts to him, but confirm the concepts he brings forward himself. His Norwegian improved greatly over the year. Already in interview two, it was much easier for him to talk, and in interview three he spoke almost without difficulty.

However, there is another dancer who I want to focus on because of her different language. This is Vera, who has cerebral palsy. Vera uses verbal language, but it can be difficult to understand her. It is often difficult for her to remember and find words for her experiences. Because of that, the result of interview three with Vera, to a greater extent than with the others (except Anna, for a quite different reason as already described), can be considered a joint construction between me and her. In the following, I shall pay attention to interview three with Vera.

#### *Interview three with Vera*

I interviewed Vera for the third time in her home in June 2004. This was about one month after the last class with the Dance Laboratory. I started with reading Vera the list of meaning themes she had talked about in the previous interviews, and asked her if they were correct. She confirmed one meaning theme at a time. I then tried to ask her some follow up questions, but she had difficulties remembering. I also looked at two video sequences with her, but she could not say any thing special about them. She looked pleased to see them, but she had nothing to say about them other than that it was fun. As a result, I had very few verbal reflections from

Vera. This is because she has difficulties remembering and conceptualising. However, I know that Vera has developed, experienced and learnt new things about dance. This is clear to me because of the way she acted with more and more confidence during the classes. I therefore decided to write a research diary about Vera. I looked at the meaning themes she had talked about during her two first interviews, and with them as a starting point, I created a story about her discoveries and experiences according to my understanding. I have included sentences from this research diary about Vera under the different meaning perspectives where they belong in the interpretation of interview three done in Chapter 4, but marking them with both her and my name in parenthesis afterwards. These words are not hers, but mine, based on my understanding of Vera's experiences and learning.

The complete interview three with Vera, until we started to look at video sequences, looks like this:

Tone: – As you maybe remember I have interviewed you twice before. And then I have written down the things you talked about, what you have told me about the dance. So now I thought I would read them to you, and you can just listen whether you think they are correct.

Vera  
smiles  
and says: – Yes

Tone: – So you have said before, that you like to dance very much.

Vera  
thinks  
for a while,  
smiles and  
says: – Yes. I do.

Tone: – And you like to move your body.

Vera: – Yes

Tone: – And then you have said that you like to find out what you can do with your body.

Vera  
smiles: – Yes. That is great fun.

Tone: – And you like to move with and without wheelchair.

Vera: – Yes.

Tone: – And you say that you like to move together with others.

Vera: – Yes.

Tone: – You become a bit tired after the classes, often.

Vera's smile disappears.  
She becomes quiet.

Tone  
repeats: – Do you?

Vera: – That depends of what we have done.

Tone: – Yes. Not always?

Vera: – No.

Tone: – And then you say that you manage to do the dance.

Vera nods: – Yes. Mmm.

Tone: – Do you feel that this is correct?

Vera: – Yes.

Tone: – Mmm. Is there anything else you think about, with the dance?

Vera becomes quiet,  
thinks for quite a while.

She says: – No, not right now.

Tone: – You have said pretty much earlier, then.

Vera: – Yes.

Tone: – Mmm. But if you think about the group that we have had this spring. Have you liked that group?

Vera: – Yes, I have. Very well.

Tone: – Is there somebody who you have danced with that you remember especially in the group? Or is it everybody?

Vera fidgets a bit, thinks, becomes quiet.

After a  
while  
she says: – I think it is difficult to remember names.

Tone: – Mmm. But with the whole group, you think it has been good?

Vera: – Yes, I think so.

Tone: – Shall we look at some video sequences then?

Vera: – Yes. <sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Transcription of interview three, full version, with Vera, until we started looking at video sequences. The interview is conducted by me in June 2004.

Even if Vera has difficulties conceptualising and remembering her experiences, that does not mean that she does not have a rich variety of experiences which has made her develop as a dancer. This interview was done in 2004. Vera is still (in 2009) a dancer in the Dance Laboratory and she has performed and toured locally in a new performance created by the group each year from 2005. When seeing her on stage, I realise that she is a charismatic dancer who receives attention on stage. Over the years, she has developed presence, focus, direction, and understanding of cooperation, relations, music and space; in other words, developed an understanding of important elements for dance. Memory though, to remember, is still difficult.

### *Discourse domination*

Johansson<sup>220</sup> writes about how she, when interpreting her interview material collected amongst Nicaraguan women, notices that she sometimes dominates the interviewees with her own discourses. When I started paying attention to the possibility of discourse domination, I realised that I have also done that. During the interviews and during the first readings of the transcriptions, some themes seemed to slip away from me. I did not see them simply because I did not look for them: they were not part of my own discourse of interest. This became clear for me especially in connection to Karen. In her interviews she talked a lot about somatic, bodily aspects; for example, that she had improved her balance during the project. I did not distinguish this as a meaning theme of its own until after a while.

As soon as I had constructed the *bodily-somatic meaning theme*, I found more content under that theme also among the other dancers, and at the same time the theme itself became more interesting for me. I simply had not distinguished bodily-somatic meaning themes because they – strangely – had not been part of my own dominating discourse of interest during this project. Because of that, I failed to see the importance of developing a language which could describe the actual bodily, somatic experiences. This has been an evolving insight for me as I have gone through the research process. I will come back to the question of discourse domination and lack of attention to bodily-somatic aspects in this study in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **1.3.6. Feeding back**

In Chapter 5, I connect all parts of the research material in this study and let them go into dialogue with each other in order to reach my goals of exploring the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory within a larger framework of body phenomenology and critical, transformative pedagogy. In doing this, I feed back the knowledge generated based on the meaning-making processes in this dance improvisation project with differently bodied dancers into a broader aesthetic, societal and educational discussion about dance.

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<sup>220</sup> Johansson (2005, p. 307)



*Photo 2.*

*The Dance Laboratory and PAS dance company creating  
the performance Code name dance, spring 2007.*

## 2. Negotiating about space with differently bodied dancers – the body as a lived and constructed phenomenon

I am always on this side of my body.<sup>221</sup>

*Maurice Merleau-Ponty*

It feels very good to be able to show who I am in a new way, in the dance.

It is good that people get to know me through the dance.<sup>222</sup>

*Vera, dancer in the Dance Laboratory*

With my experiences in the Dance Laboratory as a base, in this chapter I wish to illuminate cultural narratives of disability as part of a more comprehensive exploration of the body as a lived and constructed phenomenon. As a result of this investigation I construct different perspectives on space in dance in the end of this chapter. These perspectives form the first layer of an interpretative tool, which I use and develop throughout this thesis.

In 2005 the Dance Laboratory was choreographing its first longer piece *Wanted:love*.<sup>223</sup> At one rehearsal I was working on a sequence with three women. They were all young women in their early twenties, one of whom was Vera, and they all contributed to the form and content of the sequence in their unique ways. We spent a long time creating the sequence. We were all sweating; it was not easy. Being the teacher-choreographer, I had ideas, which I brought with me to the dancers. What about stretching the foot this way? Can we try circling around here? What if you two remain seated and the third of you walk forwards? All of my ideas had to be tested, tried, embodied, remembered, thrown away or developed. The sequence very slowly took form through a negotiation between me and the three different dancers. Finally, I stepped back to watch the sequence from the outside. Two empty chairs were standing on stage, one at the front, one at the back. When Vera rolled on stage in her wheelchair and positioned herself between them, the three different chairs created a diagonal line on stage. As the chairs were different, so were the dancers now seated in them. Some moments of the piece did not seem to work; it looked confusing, unfinished still. But then, some moments caught my attention and I felt my body responding. In those moments, the dancers' bodies connected to each other in space. Their arms stretched upwards, with their upper body leaning away from the chair, almost touching the floor. Their faces were turned towards their hand. With a pull towards the up-stretched hand, the dancers returned their torsos on top of their hips, only to use the momentum to make a full circle to the side, down to the floor and up on the other side again. While I was watching the three differently bodied women connecting to each other in their choreography, I realised that

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<sup>221</sup> Merleau-Ponty (1968/1987, p. 148)

<sup>222</sup> Quote by Vera, who is a wheelchair user, from evaluation sheet in the Mixed Ability Group (2001).

<sup>223</sup> *Wanted:love* with the Dance Laboratory (2005)



in some moments they actually had managed to re-negotiate space across their differences. I dried off some sweat from my forehead. The dance seemed like a discussion, not only about aesthetics, but also about body and the cultural meaning that different bodies hold.

Ivar Frønes<sup>224</sup> uses the expression *the stories of a culture*<sup>225</sup> to describe the rules and values that serve as a cultural basis in a given society. In this study I call these *cultural narratives*. According to Frønes these narratives have a central position in making up cultural discourses. Frønes<sup>226</sup> writes that the stories of a culture reach from past to future and that they form the basic patterns which societal and individual meaning-making processes happen in dialogue with. In this chapter, I will investigate cultural narratives about the body, identity and disability in dialogue with individual narratives I have encountered. As this investigation shows, there is often incoherence between cultural and individual narratives. Thereby, individual narratives in dialogue with cultural narratives hold the possibility for change.

As I look into existing literature about the body and disability and let it go into dialogue with my own experience, I discover that this takes me on a fascinating journey. This journey forces me to try to see beyond language, dualism and the Western urge for categorisation and stabilisation of knowledge.

## 2.1. Cultural narratives of disability

The available narratives of disability as they are found in both daily life and in representations in the West are often, as Sandahl and Auslander<sup>227</sup> put it, frustratingly limited, and deeply entrenched in cultural stereotypes. In my opinion also the dominating cultural narratives about body *in general* are frustratingly limited. In Western society there is a stream of stories telling about the body as an object to be trained, improved and manipulated. These stories are bombarded at me from advertisements, television, fitness centres, men's' and women's' magazines and in the informal talks and judgements people make about themselves and others. When I look around in society, turn on the TV and listen to people in my nearby surroundings I realize that the body definitely causes problems to a lot of people. As Engelsrud<sup>228</sup> points out, in the Western world the body has, in a way, become a large object of renovation. Understood as private property, the body becomes an object which an individual can invest in, in order to increase the value of herself.

The body often seems to be viewed more like a problem, slightly something else than *me*, my personality, instead of being viewed as synonymous to *who I am*. Many people try to solve their problems by controlling and manipulating their bodies in different ways. Sometimes I feel obliged to ask – and this is a very radical question – what shall we do with the body today all together? Why not just get rid of it? Of course, this is an unquestionable – and very sad – question, since we in fact *are* our bodies more than we have them. Still, the dominating

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224 Frønes (2001)

225 In Norwegian: kulturens fortellinger.

226 Frønes (2001, p. 89)

227 Sandahl & Auslander (2005, p. 3)

228 Engelsrud (2006, p. 9)

Western cultural view of the body today seems harsh. It creates a state where the body is never good enough. There are always indefinite ways of manipulating and altering the body into to an unreachable perfection.

I then ask myself: in a time which generally shows disdain, ambivalence and even fear towards the body, where do those with a so-called different body find their place? How can their personal stories about being a body-subject be heard without drowning in an ocean of negativity around the body? As Koppers<sup>229</sup> points out, it is interesting to compare the grand canon of difference as negativity (and its overcoming) with the position of female or black identity in Western history. Cooper Albright<sup>230</sup> writes about how women, people of colour, gay men, the disenfranchised, as well as people with disabilities historically have been tied to the material conditions of their bodies, structuring an identity that has repeatedly been constructed as oppressively and basely physical, as a lack of selfhood – a lack of moral, spiritual, social and – I add – artistic agency.

As the leader of the Dance Laboratory, where both disabled and non-disabled dancers meet and create together, I have learnt to read disability as a narrative and not as a given definition. With “a given definition” I mean that disability often and tacitly is understood as a static description, grounded in a medical view. The medical view is categorical and it takes the healthy, non-disabled body as the standard. All diseases and disabilities are described in comparison to the non-ill, non-disabled body. This might – perhaps – be a view that is useful in (some) medical situations, but in terms of both everyday and artistic situations I strongly doubt that this static definition of disability is a good starting point for the building of relations between different people.

Sandahl and Auslander<sup>231</sup> writes that the medical definition of disability dominates despite thirty years of activism that has fought to claim a minority identity for people with disabilities. Medicine and the social sciences have defined the disabled as a problem population, whose bodies are in need of corrective measures and cure. The medical model casts people with disabilities as patients. This is a role which is often infantilizing, pathologizing and disempowering. It is worrying when this medical model extends beyond individual medical practitioners’ relationships with disabled patients to include everyday meetings between disabled and non-disabled people.<sup>232</sup> That is the real problem for many people with disabilities, actually even bigger than the disability itself.

In a seminar in 2008<sup>233</sup> a dancer and wheelchair user in the Dance Laboratory said:

– In my every day life the disability I have is not my biggest problem. I view myself as an independent grown-up woman and I handle my everyday life in my way as everybody else. My biggest problem is that many people just see a wheelchair with a person in it, instead of me, the whole of me. They help me when I don’t need it and they say things like “O, how skilful you are with the wheelchair”. I know they mean well, but it is actually quite tiring to be praised for quite ordinary things that are completely normal in my life. It is as if somebody would credit you when you brush your teeth or something. It is very disempowering.<sup>234</sup> quote

field notes

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229 Koppers (2006, p. 25)

230 Cooper Albright (1997, p. 6–7)

231 Sandahl & Auslander (2005, p. 129)

232 Sandahl & Auslander (2005, p. 130)

233 I and two of the dancers in the Dance Laboratory were giving a presentation for health workers in November 2008 in Trondheim.

234 Quote by female dancer and wheelchair user in the Dance Laboratory.

In January 2004 Benjamin lead a dance workshop in Vasa in Finland, and I went together with Vera to participate in it. In an interview for Hufvudstadsbladet Benjamin comments on how cultural narratives show themselves in the meetings between individuals. Benjamin asks the journalist:

– Did you see how all the other dancers smile as soon as they approach the woman in wheelchair (Vera)? As though she is a child who needs to be treated extra carefully.<sup>235</sup>

Vera's mother talks about the struggle of being caught within a cultural narrative, and how the dance experience can release that struggle, in an interview with Adresseavisen at Trondheim Community Dance Festival<sup>236</sup> in 2004:

– When dancing, Vera does not have to think about being disabled. She participates equally with the others. Because her biggest problem in everyday life is that people don't see Vera. They see a disabled girl.<sup>237</sup>

All these quotes tell about disempowering experiences – and in Vera's case also how the dance context offers a more empowering situation where she is seen as Vera, not as a disabled girl.

I have many memories of disempowering situations which I have experienced with disabled dancers or friends. The following memory is one of my earliest that made me aware that one of the biggest problems people with disabilities meet is the cultural narratives connected to the disabled body.

In the spring of 1999 I became acquainted with Carl, who is a journalist and also a wheelchair-user. It turned out he had always wanted to dance and it did not last long before I asked him to come and improvise with me and some other dancers. At that time I was studying at Danshögskolan University College of Dance in Stockholm. Things worked out well and we got to know each other better through the improvisation. One day he asked me if I wanted to join him in the synagogue, as he is Jewish, and I did. We arrived at the synagogue and were, as everybody else, stopped by the guards and asked to show our ID. We both took our wallets out of our pockets. I took my ID out of the wallet and showed it. Carl, who was in the wheelchair, was about to take his ID out. He can only use one arm and it took him a bit longer to take the ID out of his wallet. Suddenly, without questioning, the guard leant forwards and took the wallet out of Carl's hands and started looking through the wallet by himself. Both I and Carl reacted with surprise and anger and asked the guard what he was doing. Carl told him to give him the wallet back and also told him a couple of other things. He was humiliated and angry. I remember that he told the guard something like “don't you dare treat me like a child. If I need help I will ask for it. I never gave you permission to look through my wallet.”

I still remember the anger and humiliation I felt for Carl as the guard took the wallet out of his hands. In a flash, I realised that the guard saw him as somebody different than I did. The guard just saw a man in a wheelchair, obviously failing to see a man in wheelchair as a capable

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235 Benjamin in interview by Söderlund for Hufvudstadsbladet (2004, p.9)

236 Trondheim Community Dance Festival has changed its name to MultiPlié Dance Festival, see [www.dansit.no](http://www.dansit.no) (accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

237 Quote by Vera's mother in interview by Wollamo for Adresseavisen (2004, p. 6)

man in charge of his own life. I instinctively knew that the guard could never have done the same thing to me. It would have been absolutely out of the question. As a non-disabled woman he showed me a different kind of respect for my integrity. The wheelchair and the different body of my friend seemed to stand in the way of the guard's possibility of connecting to him as an independent person. This clearly contrasted with my own experiences of Carl and the way I saw him. I had been improvising with him, which meant that I had touched him, been touched by him, connected to him, discussed with him and solved different movement tasks and problems with him. I saw him as a person quite similar to myself; a person with integrity, ideas and ability to make own decisions. Therefore, I deeply lived the humiliation he felt towards the guard.

I also have memories of different disempowering situations which have happened much later in connection to the Dance Laboratory. Some examples are those frequent occasions when a journalist looks at me when he actually is asking a question to a disabled dancer, or when a taxi-driver asks the address from me instead of from the disabled dancer who has hired the taxi. Another memory is from the summer of 2007 when I was sitting in a café with Anna and Karen. A man sitting next to us suddenly leaned forwards and said to me and Anna, as if Karen had not been present: "When I see her, I am so thankful that I am healthy myself."

Another example of disempowering attitudes towards people with disabilities is a memory I have from a performance situation with the Dance Laboratory in 2007. We had danced the performed lecture *A Poetic Skeleton*<sup>238</sup> for a large audience of culture workers and teachers and afterwards the audience had the opportunity to comment and discuss with us. It was an interested audience and they had many questions for us four dancers, who were sitting in a row on stage. In addition to myself, the dancers were Anna, Karen and a 25-year old non-disabled female amateur dancer. Both I and Karen had already received and answered many questions, when a woman (who was a guest from the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs) directed a question to Anna, who is a professional non-disabled dancer:

– Why? The woman asks

– Why? Anna repeats and looks confused. – Why what?

– Why do you want to dance in a project like this and take a blind person along? The woman asks

(Again this question comes as if Karen was not present.)

Anna looks even more confused and does not know what to say. Then she says:

– I don't know how to answer that because that is so integrated in me that we dance together. Actually, that is a very strange question to me.

Anna doesn't say anything more and I, who am sitting next to her, say:

– Can I say something? – We haven't taken a blind person along. Karen has chosen to be part of this project herself because she wants to.<sup>239</sup> quote field notes

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238 *A Poetic Skeleton* with the Dance Laboratory (2007)

239 Quote from the discussion between the Dance Laboratory and the audience as written down in my field notes, autumn 2007.

And then out of this grew a long discussion where all four of us and many in the audience were involved. We talked about body, disability, power and dominance and in the end we managed to create a narrative which signalled a more active view of Karen than that of “we took a blind person along”.

I have also experienced being handed a medical record for one of the disabled dancers in the Dance Laboratory. I was told to read about the dancer’s diagnosis as “it could be useful for me”. As I, rather hesitantly, read through the medical diagnosis of this woman, I was more and more confused. The doctor’s descriptions about all the pathologies of the dancer made absolutely no sense to me as a dance teacher-choreographer. I understood them, but they made no sense, they did not help me in any way to connect to that woman in dance. Quite the contrary, I needed to look beyond that diagnosis and find out myself how we could create dance together. In order to do that, I needed to open my body to relate to her, instead of reading about how her body had been defined in a medical context. I put the medical record away and realised, that in the Dance Laboratory, I had to start from a quite different position when looking at her and relating to her. This woman was Vera.

Cooper Albright<sup>240</sup> distinguishes between a somatic identity and a cultural one. With a somatic experience she means the experience of one’s own body, whereas the cultural identity tells about how one’s body renders meaning in society. For people with a disability there can be a strong discrepancy between these two identities. What seems clear to me is that the own embodied self-conception, or what Cooper Albright calls the somatic identity, of people with disabilities is one of wholeness. They experience themselves as a whole “I” and they handle their lives as the bodies they are. It is the cultural view from the outside, the cultural identity that people with disabilities is given, which only sees the “lack”, the “dis-“. This is similar to how Koppers<sup>241</sup> writes about a view from the outside, where disability is given secondary status to a central “normality”, and a view from the inside, where disability is the primary experience, the state of normality.

In the “outside view” the body is defined objectively from the outside, with the (male), white, young, non-ill, non-disabled body as the standard. This way of categorising and ranking different bodies objectively, from the outside, is deeply entrenched in the Western dualistic world-view, which again is the base for the dominating medical view. “Body” is split from “soul/mind/personality” and different bodies are split from each other and divided into different categories as if they were from different worlds. These categories are created from the outside, using outer aspects like ability, colour of skin and gender as measures for division. In this, the subjective voice of actually being these different bodies is lost.

This Western way of objectifying the body is not only categorical, but also hierarchical. Some bodies as seen as superior to others, and will more easily gain influence and power in society. Regarding disability, non-disabled bodies have been given superior power to define what being disabled is like and how they should be “treated”.

In my study of the Dance Laboratory, I am instead looking for the personal, subjective stories of both disabled and non-disabled dancers, as I believe they can inform me more fully of

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240 Cooper Albright (1997, p. xxiii)

241 Koppers (2006, p. 28)

what being-a-body is like. I have chosen to view disability as a narrative all together, and not as a set definition. In doing so, my intention is not to minimize disability, as I know that the experience of being disabled is very real and deeply lived. Instead, I want to refer to Sandahl and Auslander<sup>242</sup>, who say that to declare disability a narrative, or social construction, allows people with disabilities to take part in a meaning-making process of themselves by writing (or performing) their own, more truthful narratives. I have also realised that the Dance Laboratory in itself takes part in re-writing disability as narrative and that this happens as part of a larger cultural discussion about body and dance.

In the Dance Laboratory I have also realised that I am facing the issues of an oppressed minority population. In line with this, I see the situation in the Dance Laboratory as a space where an oppressed minority meets a dominating majority. In this situation, the dominating, non-disabled majority traditionally has had the power to define the identities and capabilities of the disabled minority. The Dance Laboratory tries to destabilize this situation. Thereby, the Dance Laboratory right from the start presents a delicate situation. In this situation, everyone, both the disabled and non-disabled dancers, is confronted with the narratives about body and disability which they embody and hold. This situation needs awareness, but it also creates a situation loaded with possibilities for the making of new meaning.

Sandahl and Auslander<sup>243</sup> point to how the consequences of a static definition grounded in the medical model have been devastating for disabled people throughout history, both actively, leading to denial of public education, institutionalization, segregation from the non-disabled mainstream, and passively, through lack of access to public and private spaces. The dance stage is such a public space to which disabled people to a high degree still, and definitely so in Norway and the Nordic countries, lack access. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder<sup>244</sup> point out how individual disabled characters on stage or in films often become metaphors, which signify social and individual collapse. They exemplify with typical disabled characters in performance contexts, for example *the sweet innocent*, who acts as a moral barometer for the non-disabled; *the comic misadventurer*, who initiates physical comedy or whose body becomes the target for comic violence; *the charity case*, who allows others to mark themselves as non-disabled by showing goodwill, or *the monster*, whose disfigurements give rise to fear and horror.

Kuppers<sup>245</sup> also describes traditional stereotypes connected to disability, and she emphasises the necessity of moving towards a destabilization of disability from all stereotypes, whether negative or positive. A unique space for this destabilization to happen is when traditional roles are challenged by the work of both disabled and non-disabled contemporary artists. These performers have the possibility to create work beyond traditional characters and challenge rigid aesthetic conventions.

The project under study shows that in the dance improvisation setting created in the Dance Laboratory, new narratives of dance, body and disability can be created. The tacit, static definition of disability as a “lack”, grounded in a dualistic, medical view seems to collapse immediately in

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242 Sandahl & Auslander (2005, p. 14)

243 Sandahl & Auslander (2005, p. 129)

244 Mitchell and Snyder (2000) here in Sandahl and Auslander (2005, p. 3)

245 Kuppers (2006, p. 25)

the dance improvisation. Instead, new narratives are written out of the meeting between different dancers. But even if a destabilization and re-writing seems to happen in local communities where disabled and non-disabled meet to create together, it must be stressed that these communities still have difficulties informing and transforming narratives in a wider community. As I already wrote at the beginning of this chapter, so-called alternative voices trying to foreground the subjectively lived body still fail to break through and make an impact which would really alter the dominating view. But still, Kuppers argues:

Disability dance can provide fascinating insights into meditations on embodiment and enculturation. In different ways, disability dance can make us curious anew about what it means to move embodied in space and culture.<sup>246</sup>

I have chosen to call this chapter *Negotiations about space with differently bodied dancers* because I propose that the question about who can take part in dance, develop as a dancer and gain access to the stage as a public place to say something about human experience is connected to space – from many different perspectives<sup>247</sup>. I will discuss the concept of space and present the different spaces which I distinguish in dance at the end of this chapter, as a result of my reading of how the body is a lived and constructed phenomenon.

At a certain point in the Dance Laboratory, influenced by Kuppers<sup>248</sup> and Sandahl and Auslander<sup>249</sup> I understood that it is possible to say that there is a special connection between disability and performance. Disability in daily life can already be described as performance. Disabled people are used to always being looked at by others. There is always a *gaze* at disabled people, the focus actually very similar to the attentive focus an actor receives on stage. Sandahl and Auslander<sup>250</sup> point to this when they write that, in daily life, disabled people can be considered performers, and passersby to the audience. As this happens without the distancing effect of a stage frame and the actor's distinctness from her character, disability becomes one of the most radical forms of performance, really invisible theatre at its extreme. Kuppers<sup>251</sup> calls this hypervisibility and instant categorisation, which I think is a very good description. Playwright and wheelchair user John Belluso expresses this hypervisibility in the following quote:

– Any time I get on a bus, I feel like it's a moment of theatre. I'm lifted, the stage is moving up and I enter, and people are along the lines, and they're turning and looking, and I make my entrance. It's theatre, and I have to perform. And I feel like we as disabled people are constantly onstage, and we're constantly performing.<sup>252</sup>

This quote shows the tension between invisibility and hypervisibility that disabled people often experience living with. This tension arises from the fact that the subjective voice, the *who I am*,

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246 Kuppers (2006, p 22)

247 See also Østern (2007), where I present perspectives on space in an article in Trine Svee (Ed.) *Dans og didaktikk*.

248 Kuppers (2001) and (2006)

249 Sandahl & Auslander (2005)

250 Sandahl & Auslander (2005, p. 2)

251 Kuppers (2001, p. 26)

252 John Belluso interviewed in Sandahl & Auslander (2005, p. 2)

the body-subject, is lost in tacit and static cultural assumptions about disability. The body-subject becomes invisible in favour of the hypervisibility of the body-as-object. This must be, I can imagine, extremely tiring. It must indeed be like being constantly on stage, which is a place that takes a lot of energy. Everybody surely needs a rest from the stage. Disabled performers might then be – whether they want to or not – highly trained in being “on stage”; in focus.

When disabled performers really are on stage, Koppers<sup>253</sup> points to how the cultural narratives of disability are so strong that they pre-empt anything else a disabled artist might try to communicate. The audience assumes that the disabled body is naturally about disability. I remember having comments referring to this after the performance på Føtter, på Hjul<sup>254</sup>, where Carl, who uses a wheelchair, performed together with three non-disabled dancers. A young man in the audience told me that:

– For the first 15 minutes, I just had to get used to seeing the disabled dancer. I could only look at him; it was so unusual for me to see a disabled person in a dance and stage setting. Then, eventually I also managed to focus on the performance as a whole.<sup>255</sup> quote field notes

When you perform, you not only perform a theme. You also always perform your body, which is imprinted with cultural values. The young man quoted here consciously had to work on “letting go” of his focus on the fact that one dancer was disabled, in order to see the performance as a whole. This does not only say something about the cultural narrative of disability. It also reveals cultural and tacit pre-assumptions of the concept of dance itself. The concept “dance” is not a neutral and obvious concept. Instead, the concept of dance is culturally shaped and loaded, and in different cultures it holds different pre-assumptions. In the West, dance belongs to the fit and able-bodied. The word *dancer* creates an expectation of an able body right from the start. In the clash between Western cultural narratives of dance on the one hand and of disability on the other, disabled performers are completely squeezed. In the moment they walk or roll on stage, an extreme tension between invisibility and hypervisibility is created, in addition to turmoil within the very definition of what dance is.

Dance improvisation classes with differently bodied dancers seem to be a space for letting go of existing cultural narratives about both disability and dance. Maybe it is a place to become neither invisible, nor hypervisible, but just visible? The interpretation of this research material shows that, over time, the cultural narratives about disability are under transformation through the meetings between disabled and non-disabled dancers. The dance improvisation creates a space where it is possible to experiment, play with identity, change perspectives and give place to different ways of narrating body, disability and dance. In this space cultural narratives change and new ones are written. Mona, one of the non-disabled participants in the Dance Laboratory, told me this in interview three:

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253 Koppers (2001, p. 26)

254 “på Føtter, på Hjul” (on Feet, on Wheels) by the Inclusive Dance Company (2001)

255 Quote from feedback given by an audience member after the performance “på Føtter, på Hjul” in 2001, written down in my field notes.



– I have this wish to tell other people about what I do every Tuesday afternoon [when she takes part in the Dance Laboratory]. I want to tell them, because I have become much happier, and it has meant so much to get dance into my life. But then I feel it is so difficult to explain. I say “well, we are eight persons who dance together ... and one is blind and one is a wheelchair user”. And when I say that, the disability thing immediately becomes the focus of our conversation. And to me, that actually is of no interest. Because in my opinion what works best is that we create something together. That’s what is so fascinating.<sup>256</sup> quote interview

In this, Mona expresses an experience of clash between her own narrative of the disabled participants as active and creative dancers and the cultural narratives of disability which she meets outside of the group. She reveals how, as soon as she comes to the word “disability”, that releases a whole set of associations from the people she talks with. It seems quite impossible to explain experiences which go beyond those associations. For many people the thought of disabled people as creative contributors in different situations is a long stretch.

The prevailing medical model view of disabled people as patients and receivers of help has diminished disabled people’s possibilities of receiving access to creative arenas like the stage. This is a pity, because the aesthetic distance<sup>257</sup> which is created on stage gives both performers and audiences an opportunity to explore disability as a narrative that can be re-written, rather than a fixed definition. This again could lead to a much needed public discussion about existing cultural narratives and prejudices about disability and the consequences this has for people who live with disabilities. In this, there is not only an aesthetic but also a cultural and political agenda in dance.

## 2.2. The body as an agenda for identity, pedagogy and change

The following story is based on a sequence in the Dance Laboratory, which took place and was filmed in February 2004:

Paul jumps up from sitting on the floor, and runs towards Mona, who is testing the wheelchair. The Dance Laboratory has borrowed Vera’s wheelchair, and everybody gets a go with the chair. The rest of the group watches, while one after one improvises in the chair. The cd-player pumps out a funky beat. The improvisers are *on the dance floor*. Paul runs towards Mona, who is in the chair, takes hold of the chair and spins it around. Mona lets the spin fling her out of the chair, and she runs away and sits down. The chair is empty. It is inviting. Paul pulls the chair towards himself and sits down in it. He tries a couple of careful rolls forwards. In the chair, Paul changes and becomes somebody else. He doesn’t actually change, but the way I see him in the chair turns him into somebody else. Paul rolling in a wheelchair is somebody other than Paul running across the floor. There are different expectations connected to the wheelchair, and I notice that a man in a wheelchair awakens different associations in me than a man who runs across the floor. This experience gives me something to think about. Now Paul tries to wheel as fast as he can across the floor, but it doesn’t move as fast as he is used to running on foot. He gets a funny smile in his face, he looks open, a bit vulnerable, a bit embarrassed, not exactly sure of what he is doing. Everybody looks intensely at him. Then he spins, yells, “shows off”, points one leg forwards and makes a dramatic pose with his arms. The funky beat from the cd-player is still there. Anna looks closely, smiles, and laughs. The sight of him in the wheelchair is so unusual to

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<sup>256</sup> Quote from the third interview with Mona, May 2004.

<sup>257</sup> See also Sandahl and Auslander (2005, p. 14)

her. Teresa smiles, Heidi smiles, Vera observes him very closely. She seems fascinated to see somebody else in her chair. Paul tries to tilt the chair to the side, but he doesn't succeed. The risk of falling is too big. When Heidi rises and runs towards him to change roles with him, he rapidly gets out of the chair, and runs off the floor on foot. He becomes himself as I am used to seeing him. Still an image of Paul in the wheelchair, becoming slightly somebody else, remains in my mind.<sup>258</sup> story based on video material

The funny smile on Paul's face, the way he is open, vulnerable and a bit embarrassed tells me that he lives and feels this situation. He is in the midst of a disorientating experience. To position himself in a wheelchair also collides with his own, and others' constructed narrative of him as a walker/dancer on foot. When Paul sits down in the wheelchair, he changes, and in my eyes becomes somebody else. Of course he doesn't actually change, but the situation he is in creates another story about who he is. I catch myself in seeing him as more passive than before when he sits down in the wheelchair. That gives me the opportunity to ask myself: do I have a prejudice that wheelchair users are more passive than others? When I look again, he is not passive in the wheelchair at all, just differently active. This gives me the opportunity to think about the consequences of such cultural narratives, which I obviously hold.

Established narratives are challenged when individuals are faced with the unknown, put in new situations or when roles are being switched. The learning opportunity in this can be to let non-disabled dancers (as in this task) try out and experiment with the wheelchair of their fellow dancer, and thereby trying to see the dance – and the world – from another perspective. Reminiscent of Mezirow<sup>259</sup>, he suggests that a meaning perspective transformation can take place precisely through assimilating the perspectives of others. In borrowing another dancer's wheelchair and trying to improvise from there, this change of perspective happens in a very concrete and bodily way. This situation also includes an element of disorientation, of trying something new, which is important both for individual and relational learning, and also for the possibilities of change. Rouhiainen<sup>260</sup> writes that in an ethical relation with another we are firstly drawn away from our familiar ways of understanding. She refers to Merleau-Ponty in claiming that, at a certain stage:

I must be surprised, disoriented. If we are to meet not just through what we have in common but in what is different between us – which presupposes a transformation of myself and the other as well – then our differences must become meaning.<sup>261</sup>

There is also a learning potential in seeing the wheelchair as not belonging tightly together with its owner: the wheelchair is not a body part. Anybody can use a wheelchair, but few non-disabled people have ever tried this. The task is also about not only using the wheelchair as an instrument for transition, but to see how the chair can be used in an artistic investigation of moving in different ways. From this perspective, this story about Paul improvising in Vera's wheelchair tells about a task full of meaning offers: a space for learning.

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<sup>258</sup> Story based on video material filmed on 17<sup>th</sup> of February 2004.

<sup>259</sup> In Di Biase (2000, download, p. 4)

<sup>260</sup> Rouhiainen (2008, p. 249)

<sup>261</sup> Merleau-Ponty (1973/1976, p. 142)

Engelsrud<sup>262</sup> suggests that the way we understand the body, and the ways we use and express ourselves with the body will influence what the body can become. In line with this, the body is *in becoming* in the Dance Laboratory, as an aesthetic learning space where differently bodied dancers meet to create and investigate dance together. This space has lived and aesthetic aspects connected to it, but also cultural and political ones. In the Dance Laboratory, an important pedagogical and choreographic opportunity to explore the slippage between the lived body and its cultural representation, between the somatic and cultural identity, is at hand<sup>263</sup>. This opens up new possibilities to discuss cultural narratives about the body and disability, what consequences these have and how dance can make a change.

The body is individual and limited, but the values of a given society are inscribed onto the individual bodies. Engelsrud<sup>264</sup> argues that these values receive meaning which by far exceeds what individuals can influence. She is probably right, but I do think that dance education and choreography are *systems*, which can influence and effect change. Teachers and choreographers have the opportunity to teach or choreograph differently and offer new perspectives. In this way, dance teachers and choreographers can act as agents of change. Dance teachers and choreographers have this opportunity because body, identity and dance can never be separated. Historically, culturally and situationally created narratives prevail in bodies and can be expressed or challenged in dance. Therefore, the dance class with its moving bodies becomes an arena where narratives about body and identity can be stabilized, or challenged, deconstructed and changed. The same is true for the concept of dance: the aesthetics of dance can be either stabilised, or challenged, developed and changed. The dance improvisation class is of special interest in this context as it is, or should be, taught within a problem-solving ethos, allowing for change.

A young woman and wheelchair-user joined the Dance Laboratory in 2005. When I met her in the Dance Laboratory one evening that year and asked her how she was, she said “Well, I’m not great”. Then she told me that she had started a work practice at a day care centre for elderly people. She was upset about how she was being treated by her new colleagues. They helped her with everything before she had the chance to do things herself, they talked over her head and she felt very frustrated about not being seen as a capable work mate. Then she said:

– I wish they could see me dance. You should come with me, and we could show something to them. So they could see that it is possible, that I can contribute. <sup>265</sup> quote field notes

This young woman expresses a wish to be able to show who she is *as she knows herself*, and she reaches for dance as a space which can replace the narrative that her colleagues lock her inside. She says that *I wish they could see me dance*. In dance, she has experienced creating and showing a richer narrative of who she is. This is close to her lived identity, whereas the treatment she receives from her colleagues tells her that they hold a narrative of her as being passive and not able to contribute. This experience is frustrating and steals energy from her. Again, this tells about how disabled people experience meeting a “special” gaze, where their bodies become

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262 Engelsrud (2006, p. 147)

263 See Cooper Albright (1997, p. xxiii)

264 Engelsrud (2006, p. 15)

265 Quote from my field notes, autumn 2005.

hypervisible and other people's tacitly inherited narratives of disability disturb the development of a more equal relationship.

Sometimes I have also experienced that people with disabilities themselves take on and develop a negative gaze towards other people with disabilities. In an extension of that, they also develop a distance to themselves. Sandra Horton Fraleigh<sup>266</sup> comments about this, when saying that "my body is made other to me when I take account of its appearance to others". Thus I become other to me, or my body seems other to me, which easily leads to alienation as an aspect of my identity.

The following episode based on my field notes from 2005 was quite striking and made me reflect about the complexity around how identity is constructed. It made me understand how strong the tension between invisibility and hypervisibility can be, and how my body can be other to me.

In August 2005 the Dance Laboratory was about to start again for a new year. There had been an advertisement in the newspaper and around eight new people were coming to class to try it out, in addition to the dancers already participating in the project.

About half an hour before the class was due to start one of the newcomers, a man who used an electric wheelchair, arrived at the studio. I said hello and had a chat with him. Little by little, more people arrived at the studio, both disabled and non-disabled dancers. I asked people to just walk around and say hello to each other before we started. A couple of minutes before we started, I suddenly saw the man in the electric wheelchair roll out of the studio. His assistant went out after him. I ran after them and caught them in the entrance hall. I asked him where he was going. He looked like he was in a bit of a panic; he was sweating and stared intensely at me. He said:

– I can't be here, I can't, I have to go.

I said:

– Do you want to leave? But we haven't even started yet.

He looked terrified, made sure that he kept a long distance to me and said:

– No, no, I need to go.

I asked him:

– Do you want to tell me why?

He said:

– I can't see all those disabled people. I am not used to being with disabled people. I don't feel well. I am used to being with non-disabled people. I feel much better with only non-disabled people around me.

I was struck by the answer and did not quite know how to reply. He looked so terrified and he obviously did not want to be there. It was also clear that he did not want to come close to me, as if I represented something dangerous. He stuck to the opposite side of the room. I said:

– But are you sure that you don't want to try? You can just try today and then we can talk about it afterwards. I think you would have a lot to contribute to this group.

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266 Horton Fraleigh (1987, p. 17)

The assistant did not look very comfortable with the situation and said to him:

– I think you should try at least. It might be fun.

But the man had made up his mind. He said:

– No, let's leave.

I said:

– Ok, that is a pity but it is you who decides. But if you change your mind, you are welcome to come back or call me.

The man said:

– No, I won't do that.<sup>267</sup> quote field notes

And then this man left. He never came back and I did not hear from him again. I was left with something new to think about. I think that in the setting with other wheel chair users this man felt extremely hyper-exposed and this made him feel even more invisible as the whole person he defined himself as. Thinking about it, I have realised that even if this man made quite an extreme distance to something (disability), which he at the same time represented, it is both human and understandable. It is, for example, fully possible to be a woman and at the same time reject many aspects of the cultural narratives of being a woman. Of course, most women still do not reject completely being together with other women, but then the dominating cultural narratives defining women today are less negative than those defining people with disabilities. But this tendency to both be and not-want-to-be, to identify with and wish to create distance to, is understandable.

A situation where a distance to both my own body and to other bodies is created is rather hopeless. Christine Lomas<sup>268</sup> writes about this when saying that as people within the Western foundation of dualism have become entrenched in terms of “them” and “us”, they have also suffered a loss of hope for self and society. The political-economic emphasis on power through dominance and individualism has made people in the West suffer the loss of communities and the sense of integration of self. As a consequence, others are easily labelled in negative terms. Lomas continues by saying that the facilitation of community interaction is not something people should do for others; instead, it is something we ought to recognize as a need in ourselves. The gesture of reaching out and getting in touch with other and different people in our community holds the possibility of hope, change and meaning.

In the meetings between different people, where they reach out to improvise and create together, change is possible. New lived experience can give birth to the construction of new cultural narratives. A 22-year old non-disabled woman reflects about how she has stretched both her body and mind when evaluating the semester with the Mixed Ability Group:

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<sup>267</sup> Quote based on my field notes from August 2005.

<sup>268</sup> Lomas (1998, p. 152)

I think that it has been a very exciting meeting between different dancers, full of learning, especially because I have discovered so many opportunities that I have never thought of before. The most important aspect is maybe that I have developed a conscious relationship to the fact that you don't need to be able bodied to dance, not even to perform dance.<sup>269</sup> quote  
evaluation sheet

In her second interview, Heidi reflects on how she has been part of a culturally created narrative of disability and how that has influenced how she acts as an individual. But she also talks about change:

– I have noticed that in the beginning I was very careful towards Karen and Vera. I did not quite know how to treat them; I felt that I had to be careful with them. Now it feels very different. Of course I am normally careful, but I am not over-careful any more. It feels good to experience that.<sup>270</sup> quote interviews

In the performed lecture A Poetic Skeleton<sup>271</sup> in 2007, Anna says that:

– I am a professional dancer and I am also a piece of research material in this project. It took some time for me to slow down, and allow myself to listen into the impulses from the other dancers. This opened up quite new possibilities to relate and create together. I describe the act of listening as being led, being tutored, being guided. To listen is about devotion, empathy and attention. Listening is strength and integrity.<sup>272</sup> line from performance

In this Anna tells about how experiences in dance improvisation with differently bodied dancers have broadened her definition of what it means to *listen*, and the importance of the ability to listen in order to build a new kind of relationship to the other dancers. Benjamin<sup>273</sup> is a dance artist and teacher who highly appreciates and stresses the importance of developing good listening skills between dancers in the dance class. It seems that both the ability to listen and the character of the gaze towards “the other” have the potential to develop and change in artistic and art educational contexts where diversity is appreciated.

In a seminar in 2008 a female dancer and wheelchair user in the Dance Laboratory said that:

– In the Dance Laboratory I feel empowered. My ideas are listened to and I am not just seen as a wheelchair, but as a whole person. I wish it could be like that also in everyday situations.

<sup>274</sup> quote field notes

The quotes shared here talk about change and support Engelsrud's<sup>275</sup> suggestion that the ways we use and express ourselves with the body will influence what the body can become. The different dancers quoted here have experienced the dance improvisation classes as a space to stretch their muscles and minds and go beyond the cultural narratives about the body and identity they inhabit. I wish to underline the relational and dialogical side of this reality where the body is in

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269 Quote from evaluation sheets in the Mixed Ability Group, autumn 2001.

270 Quote from interview 2 with Heidi, April 2004.

271 A Poetic Skeleton with the Dance Laboratory (2007).

272 Line written and delivered by Anna in the performed lecture A Poetic Skeleton (2007)

273 For example, Benjamin (2002)

274 Quote by a female dancer during a presentation for health workers in November 2008 in Trondheim.

275 Engelsrud (2006, p. 147)

becoming. It is the flow of different perspectives on the body, with different persons (different bodies) involved, that feeds into a dialogue about what the body can be. This dialogue is ripe with pedagogical possibilities and it has political implications, which can change the sense of community between different people.

### 2.3. Different bodies balancing on the splinters of a dualistic worldview

There seem to be surprisingly few artistic (or other) arenas where disabled and non-disabled people can meet to create and communicate as equals, at least in Norway. It seems that the usual state is one of separation, where people do not really meet, but walk (or wheel) around in their own spaces, and when they meet it is usually in a situation where non-disabled people *help* or *assist* disabled people with something. It seems as though we are split into different worlds. When we actually meet, touch and discover each other as active, creative human beings, we are surprised. As Anna said in an interview in *Adresseavisen* in 2007:

– The Dance Laboratory is a meeting place with many layers. Just the fact that we *actually meet*, to start with.<sup>276</sup> quote press clip

The experiences with initiating, starting and trying to keep alive a project like the Dance Laboratory have several times made me trip and fall into the division that seems to exist between different bodies. Everywhere I have met attitudes that seem to be grounded in the suggestion that people with and without disabilities are fundamentally different. That what goes for disabled people, does not go for non-disabled ones. Often I have been met with the attitude that disabled people cannot dance. This is because, as I have already mentioned, the concept dance implicitly carries with it a narrative of an able bodied dancer. Another attitude is that if disabled people danced, the kind of dance teaching for them would differ distinctly from teaching non-disabled people. And if there are non-disabled people in the project, then their task must somehow be to help the disabled dancers.

Also the language used to describe the Dance Laboratory tells about this urge to divide different people into different and distinct categories. When journalists write about the group, many (but not all) of them insist on calling it “integrated dance”. In an article in *Adresseavisen* in 2007 a journalist wrote that:

Ever since her studies in London, Tone Pernille Østern has been interested in and curious about integrated dance.<sup>277</sup>

But I have never said that. I am interested in and curious about *dance*: what dance can be and who it can be for. The formulation “integrated dance” is something the journalist has invented herself and I think it comes out of the urge to specify that this is not really dance as the readers know it. In this way a separation between “dance” and “integrated dance” is created, a separation which seems

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<sup>276</sup> Anna, quoted by Gullestad in *Adresseavisen* 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2007, p. 7.

<sup>277</sup> Gullestad in *Adresseavisen* 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2007, p. 7.

to bounce back from the underlying Western dualistic worldview and right into the journalist's writing. In the performance which the journalist writes about, there is one blind dancer and three non-disabled dancers. Without the blind dancer the project would most certainly have been called "contemporary dance". Because of the presence of the blind dancer it is instead called "integrated dance". The concept "integrated dance" seems to have the function of some kind of warning sign for the reader: "watch out, this dance is different!". Benjamin<sup>278</sup> has many times said that hopefully the need for dividing dance into "dance" and "integrated dance" will eventually cease. I hope so too. I still do not manage to see how this piece with one blind and three non-disabled dancers in any fundamental way differs from other pieces within the wide realm of contemporary dance. The choreography circles around an exploration of space, time, dynamics, form, relations and some kind of a theme, as contemporary dance in one way or another always does. In my view, this is a piece of contemporary choreography with differently bodied dancers.

At the time of writing this in 2008 I have been working with the Dance Laboratory for about five years. The project has started to make itself heard and as a result of this I am sometimes asked to teach improvisation in different settings. Last year, I had a request from a national organization for dance about teaching improvisation for dance teachers at A-level from the whole country. The request specified:

As there are only A-level teachers on this course, there should be no integrating aspect to this improvisation course. The focus should be on basic, ordinary improvisation skills.<sup>279</sup>  
quote mail correspondence

I found this request quite stunning, since the arrangers know that I have worked especially with disabled and non-disabled dancers together and that is why I have received a reputation as an improvisation teacher in the first place. The organisers behind this request failed to see the meeting between different dancers as a space which includes inspiration and learning possibilities for everybody. A good "integrated" dance improvisation class is one which works perfectly well with and without disabled dancers, because the focus is on solving movement tasks and making new connections. They also failed to see that teachers of A-levels could have something to learn from a class with an "integrating aspect". As I discussed with the arrangers and pointed these things out, they wrote that:

There is no need to think about integration, as teachers at A-level will never be faced by disabled students anyway. That won't happen on that level.<sup>280</sup> quote mail correspondence

Again I was stunned. Who says it won't? I know it happens in England, so why not in Norway? I hope in the future that there will be space for differently bodied dancers in dance education at both A-level and universities in Norway and other countries. For that to happen, a discussion about what dance is, what dance can be, and how dance is taught is urgently needed. Disabled people must not only be included into an existing form and tradition of dance, but must be

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<sup>278</sup> Benjamin (2002, pp. 13–14) and in informal discussions with him.

<sup>279</sup> Quote from e-mail correspondence with a national organization (autumn 2007)

<sup>280</sup> Quote from e-mail correspondence with a national organization (autumn 2007)



allowed to speak their voice, reach out into unknown territory, really touch the dance aesthetics and contribute with their ideas about what the condition of dance could be like.

I suggest that this unnecessary and deeply problematic split, separation and hierarchy that is created between disabled and non-disabled people (and between white and coloured people, between men and women, between heterosexual and homosexual, and so on), comes right back from the dualistic foundations of Western society. So what is this dualism about? And why do I keep bumping into the consequences of it as a dancer and dance teacher? This is, I suggest, because a dualistic worldview, and all the paradoxes and consequences of it, meet and clash exactly in the body, turning the body into a battlefield. This battle is about understanding of the body. This again turns dance into an art form which stands in the line of fire of this fight, always mediating understanding of the body as part of aesthetics and pedagogy, either conserving or transforming them. In the meetings between differently bodied dancers, this splintered and divided view of the body and different bodies becomes visible. It is no longer a tacit worldview, but a tangible presence which needs to be dealt with.

A dance teacher or choreographer who enters this context has great possibilities to learn, influence and transform understandings about the body, dance and identity, but then she needs awareness of all the spaces that dance operates in. This learning context is not only about aesthetics, but also about power and politics. To take part in a context like this can have a really huge impact on the different dancers' understandings of each other and of dance, as the interpretation of the interview material in this study shows, and it offers a great – but sensitive – learning context.

Engelsrud<sup>281</sup> explains dualistic theory as a theory which claims that it is possible to create a separation between two parts or categories belonging together, and that these are believed to stand in an outer instead of inner relation to each other. The classical example of this is the dualism between the body and the mind, inherited from René Descartes<sup>282</sup>. Typical of this dualism is that it not only separates parts that actually belong together and have an inner, not outer, relationship, but it also creates a hierarchy between them. There should be no doubt that at this point in history, “the mind” is far more appreciated than the body in Western society. “The mind” is defined as who I *am*, my personality, a separate entity from my body, which again is I something I *have*. Again, it is tempting to ask what we shall with the body these days at all. It would seem so easy to just get rid of it, if we still can exist, independent of our bodies, airy and weightless. But if the dualistic theory is right, it should be possible to construct criteria for what the one category (body) is that the other (mind) is not. This seems quite tricky. What about my feelings, for example? They are often defined as belonging to “the mind”, but they are in fact of a very bodily character. My feelings are understandable to others through my smile or my tears, which are bodily acts, and if I feel anything at all it is because I sense anger, joy or fear precisely in my body.

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281 Engelsrud (2006, p. 25)

282 There are numerous texts which treat and discuss this dualism within a range of different scientific approaches, as it appears to be one of the most debated philosophical aspects through the times. My intention for this study is not to give a detailed description of the roots to this dualism, but to make an account of how I still face the consequences of it as a dance improvisation teacher with differently bodied dancers, and how improvisation offers a profoundly anti-dualistic alternative in approaching and understanding the body. Here, I only give a shallow description of the origins of this dualism.

In this context it is again important to underline that this dualistic view of body and soul as different entities independent of each other is characteristic of a Western, dualistic and Christian worldview. Engelsrud<sup>283</sup> writes that not all languages and cultures have a word for body. To distinguish *body* as a concept is not universal. Engelsrud<sup>284</sup> describes how to be *besouled* in some cultures is understood as a holistic phenomenon, not as the Christian separate and immortal “soul”. Engelsrud also points to how casual words about the body can be used: aspects that some cultures name as soul, others would call body. Plato<sup>285</sup> is often referred to as the thinker who first established the separation between body and soul in the West. But Eli Torvik<sup>286</sup> writes that even if Plato was engaged with the body, the *definition* of body did not come until later, with Plato’s student Aristotle<sup>287</sup>. Descartes<sup>288</sup> later radicalized Plato’s dualism in claiming that the body and soul are completely different entities which actually can exist independently of each other.<sup>289</sup>

Within the Western world-view there is a dualism and hierarchy not only between body and mind, but between other aspects like feminine-masculine, nature-culture, artistic-scientific and – I add – disabled and non-disabled. These aspects are often separated as fundamentally different parts, as opponents of each other, when they instead should be seen as different aspects of the same whole. I quite like Peter Payne’s<sup>290</sup> description, inspired by Eastern philosophy, that it is like when you look at any three-dimensional shape and turn it around to look from different perspectives. The shape is still one whole, even if it looks different from different angles. As Engelsrud<sup>291</sup> asks, how can nature and culture be seen as opponents of each other, when the separation between them is always defined from within culture? How can art and science stand in a dualistic relation to each other when they both are about human knowledge? And how could feminine and masculine or disabled and non-disabled be viewed as different, separate and hierarchical categories, when they all are ways of being human?

Shapiro and Shapiro<sup>292</sup> emphasise that the Cartesian view of the mind as separated from the

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283 Engelsrud (2006, p. 146)

284 Engelsrud (2006, p. 146)

285 Plato (428/427 BC–348/347 BC).

286 Torvik (2005, p. 17)

287 Aristotle (348 BC–322 BC).

288 Descartes (1596–1650)

289 Even if Descartes was the main force behind the dualism described here, it is fair to emphasise that also he was part of a time and space. Olsson (according to my notes from a course in Dance History at Danshögskolan University College for Dance by Cecilia Olsson, 1999) argues that the Cartesian dualism must be seen as a cultural phenomenon, rather than belonging to the “mind” of one man only. The development of an “objective gaze” was important at the time of Descartes. This was a time when the sciences were about to liberate themselves from the arts. This division between the sciences and the arts paved the way for the modern sciences, technological advances and the industrial development which was soon to come. An objective and dualistic way of relating to knowledge, man and the world was probably needed to make possible the high technological and medical development which we experience in our time. Also Molander (according to my notes from a course in Philosophy of the Sciences with Bengt Molander, NTNU University in Trondheim, 2004) points out that Descartes himself perhaps was not as dualistic as history wants him to be, but that he was part of a cultural phenomenon which has been given his name afterwards.

290 Payne (1981/1994, p. 37)

291 Engelsrud (2006, p. 41)

292 Shapiro & Shapiro (2002, p. 28)

body, the influence of Augustinian Christianity with its disdain for the flesh and the bourgeois masculine desire to distance and control nature over time worked together in creating the existing Western dualistic epistemological foundation. When trying to understand the body as a both lived and constructed phenomenon, I find it important to emphasise which remarkable facets dualism has created in our thinking. As Cecilia Olsson<sup>293</sup> points out, today the dualism between body and mind penetrates all Western thought: it is implicitly present in our language about the body and in our bodily practices, and it is part of our cultural heritage. I find it fair to say that a dualistic worldview goes right *under the skin* of Western society (and also that working with the skin through touch is a way of releasing the dualism which is bent in right under it, which I will come back to in more detail later). A dualistic worldview almost functions as a spinal cord reflex which has been rubbed into and onto us during many centuries. As Engelsrud<sup>294</sup> underlines, this has huge consequences for the frames of references and attitudes that have developed, attitudes which show themselves in a context like the Dance Laboratory, where differently bodied dancers meet to create together.

The Dance Laboratory as a local community is involved in constructing another way of looking at ability and disability. Instead of seeing disabled and non-disabled dancers as fundamentally different and divided from each other, a view is slowly constructed where ability, different abilities and disability are seen as different possible nuances of the same whole, which is the human being. This seems similar to Payne's<sup>295</sup> description of the widespread Eastern tradition which says that within a whole, different aspects can be seen, just as any complex shape looks different when looking from different points of view. And this is not "first one, then the other" like "first the non-disabled, then the disabled" but rather an emergence of a new unity, a new energy in the dance improvisation where the meeting between different dancers *is* the form which becomes a generating force in itself. I agree with David Gere<sup>296</sup>, that dance improvisation is as a phenomenon which challenges the dominant and disembodied dualism:

In fact, if the Cartesian dualism of body as separate from mind is ever to be surmounted ... dance improvisation provides the perfect paradigm. For it is while improvising that the body's intelligence manifests itself most ineluctably, and that the fast-moving, agile mind becomes a necessity. The body thinks. The mind dances. Thought and movement, words and momentum, spiral around one another.<sup>297</sup>

Shapiro and Shapiro<sup>298</sup> suggest that the affirmation of the body is crucial to a process of knowing which opens up new terrain for epistemological inquiry. This makes it possible to start talking about sentient knowledge as opposed to disembodied reason, which has for so long influenced Western philosophical thought.

In my study of the Dance Laboratory I am informed by an environment which is embodied,

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293 Olsson (1993, p. 33)

294 Engelsrud (2006, p. 27)

295 Payne (1981/1994, p. 37)

296 Gere (2003)

297 Gere (2003, p. xiv)

298 Shapiro & Shapiro (2002, p. 28)

aesthetic, cultural, political and educational. The knowledge generated in the Dance Laboratory is embodied and minded, and it has weight. The dancers in the Dance Laboratory show themselves to me as being minded and mindful, embodied and en fleshed. They dance-move-think-feel-relate-communicate in one movement and one moment. The dancers sweat, breathe, move, take place in space, stretch out, show themselves, think, feel, talk, discuss, learn, share, observe and reflect. There is body, pulse, voice, attention and presence in space.

As a dance teacher in this fleshy environment, I reject the dualistic thought that dance is just for some bodies. Dance can be developed in and by different body-subjects. Dance improvisation has the power to create a sensuous, vital and shared space where body-subjects communicate in their bodies' ways. In dance improvisation, when taught with awareness, the tacit and dualistic hierarchy between different people can be destabilized. This off-balance position is a good place for meaning-making and the building of new understandings and sentient knowledge.

## 2.4. The lived body

In her evaluation of a year with the Dance Laboratory, a young female non-disabled dancer wrote this:

I saw the performance by the Dance Laboratory and was just so surprised and touched. The wheelchairs started to tilt and float and other aspects were turned up-side-down and that all made me reflect. And I knew, I wanted to be part of all that; of this ease, this tempo and togetherness.

And soon I found myself in the improvisation class for the first time and ...oh my goodness! I was not sure that I wanted to do this, because I was tired after work and now I was thrown into a class which demanded so much of me: to open myself! Just the exercise when we should close our eyes and move, led by others and accompanied by music ... to experience this flow ... it was just too much, at this point it just was not possible for me, I was too confronted with myself. But then, strangely, when time passed, the group also gave me energy and then we always had the opportunity to discuss things, which was very important for me. And the teacher just mixed us all together and said "Let's do this! Go!" But then she did not tell us exactly how to do things! But I also knew that if I did not want to participate in an exercise then I did not have to, I could sit down and watch, and that was important. I was so inspired by the experiments in movement together with different people, who I did not know, they all inspired me and also I was inspired by the movements of certain people in the group. But also other aspects made a strong impact on me, for example Karen's laughter and seeing how she experienced everything. Slowly, I started to feel well and in the last lessons I have started to really integrate myself, I could even let myself be lifted by others and notice that that gives me energy. I also love watching the others; to share their movements and the atmosphere and most of all I just enjoy having everybody around me! This semester has been like therapy for me, it has brought me further and it has changed me. It was great to finish with taking part in the performance, to look at the audience and in their eyes recognise the same surprise and joy as I felt myself when I saw the first performance. <sup>299</sup> quote evaluation sheet

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299 Quote from evaluation sheet by 19-year old female non-disabled amateur dancer after one semester in the Dance Laboratory, spring 2005. Translated from German to English by me (the dancer was a native German speaker).

The dancer describes how she lives the dance improvisation and how it makes meaning as a lived experience. It is a story about dance improvisation as a lived, meaningful experience. In a phenomenological reading of this story, this young woman tells me about how she lives her body in dance improvisation. She lives the space; it becomes alive around her. She is highly present in the experience. The dance and the other dancers brush against the surfaces of her body and she connects to them and the dance with movement, emotions and reflections. The bodily experiences in the improvisation create a space for her to move, sense, feel, think, reflect and change. She is thrown into a whirl of communication; the communication going back-and-forth, here-and-there, in different directions between herself, the others, the dance material and the teacher. This is an overwhelming experience for her and she actually wants to flee, but the connection to the others and to the space holds her back. She chooses to stay. The young woman constitutes her own lived body and lived experiences through her story, while at the same time constructing her body and her experiences as meaningful. She writes her body as both moving and moved, feeling and felt, communicating and communicated. She also tells about change, how the dance improvisation is an arena which changes her.

When, as a dance teacher, I whirl around in dance improvisation class; sweating, moving, thinking, sensing, feeling and communicating, all at once, it is impossible even to try to hold on to a dualistic and divided view of my body, the other dancers' bodies and the knowledge created in the meeting between us. As a dance improvisation teacher, I am based in a holistic and anti-dualistic view of the body and thereby this is also the view on the body that I pass through to the dancers as I teach. My view of the body gives me a specific attitude, which influences the way I teach. I view the body as a body-subject-of-culture: the body is my "I", my first-position perspective in the world, which allows for experience and being-in-the-world. This "I" is pre-reflectively cultural before I have any notions about the culture I belong to. In other words, culture is embedded in the body.

In improvisation, first and foremost, the body is *lived*. All the spaces that dance improvisation operates in have meaning in the improvisation as lived. The aesthetic space, the fictive, the cultural and political space – they are lived in the movements, in the relations, in the choices made, in the thoughts accumulated. As Rouhianen<sup>300</sup> notes, the felt-sense of the body is heightened through movement. As I dance, I sense everything and everybody around me, I sense my body working, hear my breath, feel my pulse rising. I sense the pain in my muscles when they work hard, in my bones as they press towards the floor or in my skin bursting under my foot in a glide. Emotions rush around in my body and I think a hundred thoughts. The dance energizes me. Sometimes when I am partnering somebody when dancing, and our dance really works, I *am* the relation between us. All of my attention is focused on the listening between us.

The empirical material collected in the Dance Laboratory in this study shows a deeply lived context, where the making of meaning is an ongoing process. In the Dance Laboratory meaning-making is never fixed, stabilized or predictable. Instead, *meaning is always on the move*, as the dancers keep moving, relating and exploring aesthetic form.

My view on the body is influenced by many scholars. Merleau-Ponty's anti-dualistic

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300 Rouhianen (2008, p. 245)

understanding is a base. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*<sup>301</sup>, Merleau-Ponty writes extensively about the body as lived and ambiguous:

The experience of our own body [on the other hand,] reveals to us an ambiguous mode of existing ... [Therefore] the body is not an object ... Either it is a question of another's body or my own, I have no means of knowing the human body other than that of living it, which means taking up on my own account the drama which is being played out in it, and losing myself in it. I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is as it were a "natural" subject, a provisional sketch of my total being. Thus experience of one's own body runs counter to the reflexive procedure which detaches subject and object from each other, and which gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality.<sup>302</sup>

Based on Merleau-Ponty, Gallagher and Zahavi<sup>303</sup> point to the fact that I am not conscious of my body as an intentional object, I do not perceive my body; *I am my body*. The body itself is always my perspective on the world. When I talk about anything at all, also about body and identity, it is always *from* my body. Dance should be seen not as only self-expression, but as an art where body and identity actually is being created, known, debated, transformed and expressed. Being a body is always a drama, but in dance improvisation this can be an explicit experience because the focus is on communication and exploration in the meeting between bodies. The sensuous, capable and communicative body, seen as a subject, is highlighted.

Research in the field of cognitive psychology, neuroscience and development psychology has seriously challenged a dualistic body understanding. The work of Antonia Damasio<sup>304</sup>, who is a professor of neuroscience, neurology and psychology, has had influence. He argues that the beginning of becoming conscious of something always starts with a feeling, and feelings are sensed in the body. I recognise this regarding my own research process: the process of wondering, which led me to this research started with a feeling. Descartes said that since feelings can be vague, they cannot be trusted. Damasio<sup>305</sup>, on the other hand, says that without that vague feeling, we could not be made conscious of anything at all. Everything a person thinks about starts with a feeling. Feelings are not a luxury, Damasio<sup>306</sup> says. They serve as internal guides and they help us to communicate to others signals that can also guide them. Feelings, he writes, form the base for what humans have described for millennia as the human soul or spirit:

Feelings let us catch a glimpse of the organism in full biological swing, a reflection of the mechanisms of life itself as they go about their business. Were it not for the possibility of sensing body states that are inherently ordained to be painful or pleasurable, there would be no suffering or bliss, no longing no mercy, no tragedy or glory in the human condition.<sup>307</sup>

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301 Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002)

302 Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002, pp. 230–231)

303 Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, p. 143)

304 Damasio (1994; 1999)

305 Damasio (1994, p. xix)

306 Damasio (1994, p. xix–xx)

307 Damasio (1994, p. xix)

Lakoff and Johnson<sup>308</sup> forcefully challenge a dualistic understanding of mind and body as different categories independent of each other. The mind is inherently embodied, they say. Thought is mostly unconscious. Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. These three major findings of cognitive science matter deeply and in a radical way change our understanding of reason, and thereby also our understanding of ourselves, Lakoff and Johnson<sup>309</sup> claim. It is disturbing, they say, to realise that the human being actually is completely different from what we dualistically have been told. It is bodily existence which shapes the thinking. And our ability to move in the ways we do and track the motion of other things gives motion a major role in our conceptual system. What is important is not just that we have bodies and that thought is somehow embodied, but that it is the peculiar nature of our bodies that shapes our possibilities to think the way we do.<sup>310</sup> The thinking comes from the brain (which belongs to the body) and from the experiences of the rest of the body, Lakoff and Johnson write:

Reason is not disembodied, as the tradition has largely held, but arises from the nature of our brains, bodies and bodily experience. This is not just the innocuous and obvious claim that we need a body to reason; rather, it is the striking claim that the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment. The same neural and cognitive mechanisms that allow us to perceive and move around also create our conceptual systems and modes of reason. ... In summary, reason is not, in any way, a transcendent feature of the universe or of disembodied mind. Instead, it is shaped crucially by the peculiarities of our human bodies, by the remarkable details of the neural structure of our human bodies, and by the specifics of our everyday functioning in the world ... Reason is only universal in the way that it is a capacity shared universally by all human beings. What allows it to be shared are the commonalities that exist in the way our minds are embodied.<sup>311</sup>

The body has feelings, intention and meaning. Body and thinking come together, because they are one. To move, feel, sense, think – these are all bodily processes. And this is also what I mean with the expression *bodily*, which I use frequently throughout this study. A bodily experience is an experience which includes all possible human processes of being in, experiencing and understanding the world: processes like moving, sensing, feeling, thinking, relating, communicating.

The experiences in dance improvisation are bodily: they are lived and they have an impact on sensations, feelings and thoughts, all at once. In her second interview Heidi says that:

–It is very much like... in improvisation ... you really expose yourself. And ... that feels both good and terrifying. I think, it can make an impact in very many different ways.<sup>312</sup>

An important component of lived experience and of the lived body, is memories. Within a phenomenological understanding, there is no memory without the body memory. It is the body–subject who remembers. Jaana Parvainen<sup>313</sup> claims that body memories are part of the tacit knowledge of human beings. Body memories exist in the margins of our existence, but at

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308 Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p. 3)

309 Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p. 3–4)

310 Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p. 19)

311 Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p. 4)

312 Heidi in interview 2, April 2004.

313 Parvainen (1998, p. 56)

the same time they have a very central meaning. Without our body memories we would not be the human beings we are and we would not be able to do the things we do. Body memories are nothing we *have*, they are something we *are*. Body memories come in the form of feelings, like different felt qualities in the body. These body memories are not easy to verbalise. Parviainen<sup>314</sup> writes that body memories manifest themselves by continuously disappearing into the depth of our bodily existence, at the same time as they continuously come back from the same depth.

When dancing, body memories are constantly at play and they have importance and meaning foremost as lived, not as thought. In the Dance Laboratory body memories are central in constituting the context and the themes which might turn up for aesthetic elaboration in the project. Again, the methodology used in the Dance Laboratory is what Marques<sup>315</sup> calls context-based: it uses the group itself to create the content of the classes and choreographic material. Dancers can also more explicitly be stimulated to activate specific body memories by instructions from the teacher, like for example: Try to move as if you were inside a very small room. How can you move when you don't have much space to move? This is a task which demands both body memory and the imagination of being in a small room. Sometimes, the other way around, movements create specific memories, which can be told about.

The meeting in dance between different body-subjects, inscribed with culture, body memories and different life experience is rather explosive. The dancers all hold their individual narratives, which either go with or clash with the cultural narratives about body, identity and dance that prevail in the dance studio.

## 2.5. The cultural body

The body is not just lived, but also culturally constructed. It is interesting to bring in the writings of Judith Butler<sup>316</sup>, who writes from a perspective of feminist theory. Butler underlines that the body never is “purely” body. Butler defines history as materialised through our bodies: history sits in the body and thereby constitutes the ear we hear with and the eye we see with; in other words, the body already inscribed by history and culture constitutes the ways we experience and interpret our situational lives.<sup>317</sup> Butler also claims that when the body is made into “pure material”, independent of history, language and culture, it becomes possible to exercise power based on what kind of bodies we have/are (male, female and so on).<sup>318</sup> This argument about the body as pure nature has always been used as a mechanism of exclusion of women and sexual minorities, Unni Langaas<sup>319</sup> writes in her discussion of Butler, but also I add, of people of different colour and ability.

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314 Parviainen (1998, p. 56)

315 Marques (1998, p.171)

316 Butler (1990; 1993; 2005)

317 In Langaas (2008, download p. 2)

318 In Langås (2008, download p. 2)

319 Langaas (2008, download p. 2)



I agree with Peter McLaren<sup>320</sup>, who suggests that the body-subject is a terrain of flesh in which meaning is inscribed, constituted and reconstituted. He argues that the body is conceived as the interface of the individual and society, as a site of embodied or “enfleshed” subjectivity, which reflects the ideological sedimentations of the social structure inscribed into it.

No one can be understood as isolated bodies. Co-existence is a fundamental way of being-in-the-world. As Engelsrud<sup>321</sup> points out, the body is relational and we notice both ourselves and others through the body. In dance improvisation this is highlighted: as the dancers communicate through movement, they also live each others’ bodies. In improvisation, I understand the other and her intentions through attuning my body to hers. I perceive the other dancer’s body not as a thing-like body, but as a lived, intentional body. There are communicative experiences in improvisation – and also in other situations – where the borders between myself and the other can be vague. Where does my experience stop and the other’s start?

Merleau-Ponty<sup>322</sup> is sometimes criticised for suggesting a way of being-in-the-world and relating, which is similar for everybody, despite cultural differences: a kind of “anonymous existence”. Feminist theory<sup>323</sup> criticizes this and says that, in this way, the body he describes is neutral or even androcentric. Elisabeth Spelman<sup>324</sup> writes that the belief in a pre-personal, anonymous existence, which is similar to everybody, can result in a kind of “boomerang perception”, where I “look at you and come right back to myself”. Sullivan<sup>325</sup> argues that this closes real communication between myself and the other, because others become mere reflections of me which come back to myself.

I agree that a view of human beings as anonymous and independent of attributes like gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, ability, and individual life experience would be problematic. For me there is reason to question this anonymity: the complex group of dancers in the Dance Laboratory instead make body-subjects *with* cultural and personal influence visible. The different dancers’ possibilities to understand each other as equals are not anonymous and obvious. Instead, these possibilities must actively be created in the group through a real dialogue between the different participants. However, Merleau-Ponty was not unaware of culture as part of the body. On the contrary, he believed that individuals are the true subjects of history. Rouhiainen<sup>326</sup> writes about how Merleau-Ponty claimed that social and cultural life transcends the immediacy of the body. He meant that people are fundamentally historical and that they exercise living history before any explicit historical interpretations are made of the events they live through.

In this way, Merleau-Ponty<sup>327</sup> emphasised a non-objective conception of culture by thinking that we live in the social realm before we are in any way aware of it. I agree that as bodies we carry, exercise and perform culture in a pre-reflective way. As body-subjects, we are also bodies-

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320 McLaren (1991, p. 150)

321 Engelsrud (2006, p. 32)

322 See, for example, Merleau-Ponty (1995/1962) or Rasmussen (1996, p. 105–106)

323 See, for example, Sullivan (1997), Butler (1989) and Allen (1982).

324 Spelman (1988, p. 12)

325 Sullivan (1997, download p. 8)

326 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 131)

327 In Rouhiainen (2003, p. 131)

of- culture, but since we are cultural in a pre-reflective way, our body-of- culture might become rather invisible to us. In a dance improvisation context, where differently bodied dancers explore and create together, the ways the dancers exercise influence and power on each other can become visible and thereby discussed and changed. In this, cultural narratives can be destabilized.

To create this context demands pedagogical awareness – it does not happen by itself. To gather disabled and non-disabled dancers and teach conventionally, “just including” disabled dancers, will not do. It is important to remember that conventions are created within the established and dominating cultural narratives of body, disability and dance. To allow more people into the field of dance calls for a change of those very conventions. Differently bodied dancers cannot just be gathered and looked at in a similar way, pretending that the cultural narratives of body and dance are not there. If I neglect the fact that we are not just neutral bodies who understand each other in an anonymous way, but in fact different body-subjects-of- culture, I will equip myself with a “boomerang perception”. In the meeting with a woman in a wheelchair entering the dance studio for the first time, I cannot just assume that I can look at her and come right back to myself. Instead, the differences between us must be seen as possible meaning and used as a vitalizing force. Otherwise, I might just end up re-establishing cultural narratives about disability and ability. This very easily happens when dance improvisation in a context of diversity is taught badly. I have done that, too, for lack of a better awareness.

In 2007 I was teaching a one-day workshop for university dance students, together with dancers from the Dance Laboratory. At the end of the workshop the participants were asked to create a short sequence in pairs. I asked Vera to work with a non-disabled female dancer of her own age from the university. They went to work and I could soon see that there was not a real connection between them. The university dancer seemed determined to create a fast, fancy and quite long sequence, which she did, in fact mostly by herself. I could see Vera getting tired, it went too fast for her and she was left out as a creative contributor. When they showed their sequence it looked perfect – except for the fact that Vera was not really taking part. The other dancer was dancing around her, tilting her chair, giving weight – but actually managing perfectly well on her own. If Vera had been removed from the chair, you would hardly have noticed. There was no meeting between them. When evaluating their work together, the university dancer said:

– Actually, there is no difference between us. It’s just the level. She’s in a chair, I am not.<sup>328</sup>  
Quote field notes

The university dancer in this example looked at Vera and “came right back to herself”. She did not see that the differences between them were more than a practical thing: the level in space. In fact, there were more important differences between them, for example, the degree of dominance, where Vera, through who she is, was more used to letting other people make choices for her. To give Vera voice would have demanded the university dancer slowing down and taking some time to listen into the meeting between the two of them. This story also is an example of bad teaching. I should have intervened as soon as I noticed that things were going wrong instead of leaving the two dancers alone.

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<sup>328</sup> Quote by student on a one-day-workshop in 2007, written down in my field notes.

Shannon Sullivan<sup>329</sup> argues that we need to remind ourselves that other bodies do not speak to me in a straightforward manner that needs no interpretation by my (different) body. She also writes that when I open up to the foreignness of the other and rid myself of the assumption that, in an anonymous way, I already know what an other tells me, then I can start understanding another human not as a projection of my own body-subject, but as a construction which takes place in the meeting between two different individuals. This is what was missing in the meeting between Vera and the university dancer.

As a dance teacher, my view of the students-dancers as body-subjects is of importance as this influences how I will teach. In my view, the body is not instrumentalised. Instead, I understand the dancing body as both lived and constructed; characterized by meaning and experience. In the body the dancer's experience is gathered, inscribed, expressed, stabilised and transformed. The body is flexible and always in becoming, always in movement and always *on the move*. As Hämäläinen<sup>330</sup> says, the body is the origin of perceptions, sensations and feelings. I see the dancers as moving-feeling-thinking human beings. When they enter the dance studio, they do not bring with them "a body" to be trained and instructed by me. Instead, they bring with them *their body*, or more precisely: they enter the studio as the body-subjects-of-culture they are. That means that they are not a piece of nature to be modified into the standards of dance, but rather a subjective body of culture which gets into dialogue with the dance field through me and my teaching.

In that body, the dancers hold everything about themselves: their lived lives, their previous movement experience, their life experience and the cultural narratives which cling to their body. It is also important to underline that a relation between a dancer and a dance teacher is not one between two thing-like bodies. Instead, it is a lived relation between two body-subjects. Both dancer and teacher are present in the dance class as subjects, experiencing and living the situation. It is also a hierarchical relation, where the teacher holds power over the dancer's body, which should be treated with care. An ethical relation from the dance teacher towards the student-dancer is one where the student is not looked on as a thing-like body to mould and correct. Instead, the dancer should be recognised as a lived body, always experiencing, always meaning-making, always imprinted with culture and always capable of creating embodied knowledge.

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329 Sullivan (1997, download p. 8)

330 Hämäläinen (2007, p. 74)

## 2.6. The body constructed through touch

The use of touch is a very central part of improvisation in the way it is used in the Dance Laboratory. The way touch is used in dance improvisation is not *any* kind of touch, but a *specific* kind. This kind of touch is not demanding but communicating, not helping but respecting, not sexual but sensuous, not aggressive but powerful. Touch is used to allow the dancers to communicate with the use of different body surfaces, through the skin, through the contours of the body, through the taking and giving of weight. Through the use of touch the dancers give and take information about themselves and about the meeting created between them: an ever-changing meeting. Through touch, the dancers acknowledge each other, live each others' bodies and construct each other.

On the video material for this research, I watch a sequence filmed 11<sup>th</sup> of May, 2004, where I am being “danced” by Vera, Heidi and Paul. This sequence was filmed on our very last class during that spring and we were doing long improvisations in smaller groups. One at a time, I, Paul, Heidi and Vera lie down on the floor and close our eyes. The others start dancing with an arm or a leg of the dancer who lies down.

As I watch the sequence where I am the passive dancer, starting on the floor, my body remembers it. I am lying down. My eyes are closed. Vera is holding one of my arms. My lower arm rests towards her wheelchair, while she is moving my fingers. Heidi moves my other arm, and Paul is bending and stretching my legs. Vera's skin is dry, and as she is bending every joint of my fingers, there is a scratching sound. Heidi has a firm hold of my other hand while she makes curves with my arm in space. The air sighs as she swings my arm around, and it sweeps past my ear. Paul simply puts his hands on different parts of my legs, listening into me. As the dancers start moving around each other, I am not sure any more who is where. Somebody touches my neck, supports my head up and leads me to one side. I crash onto the wheel of Vera's wheelchair. The touch of the chair is very different. It is cold and hard, in sharp contrast to the warm, breathing touch of the dancers. I hold on to the wheelchair, leaning my chest towards it. As the chair starts spinning around its own axis – the brakes are off – I have to start walking to avoid falling. Still with my chest towards the chair, I soon end up in an extreme backwards bend. Somebody puts her hands behind my neck to support the weight of my head. Vera leans towards me – I can feel her breath and the nearness of her torso – and takes me by my upper arm. With a strong impact she pulls me up to standing, but I am off-balance and fall backwards. As I fall, I am met by a supporting body. This is Paul, I recognise his way of catching me. With my back I sink into his chest and shoulder. I am taller than him, and as my upper back leans into his shoulder he is able to give me a little lift – I fly for a short moment – and directs me into Vera's lap. She receives me and allows me to spiral backwards, around her body and further around the chair. I am floating in a universe where only movement and touch direct me in my dance. The touch of all three partners, who I am dancing with, is different. The improvisation allows me to connect to all of them.

Touch is a powerful mediator of communication between human beings. The fact that dance improvisation uses touch to a high degree turns it into a powerful but also demanding art form.

In the danced performance *A Poetic Skeleton*<sup>331</sup>, a dancer in the Dance Laboratory was pondering about touch. She said:

–Touching is a very powerful way of listening. Touching is the gift of the skin. Touching is both an exciting and risky business, because touching also puts you at risk of being touched.

<sup>332</sup> line from performance

In this the dancer talks about the fact that, as Rouhiainen<sup>333</sup> writes, touch is reversible. This is maybe the most distinct feature of touch. When I touch, I am being touched right back. There is no clear line between where you stop touching me and I start touching you. When touching, people blend into each other as human beings. When my skin meets somebody else's, the border between me and the other is slightly being rubbed out. Therefore, touch is always a dialogue. It is always communication. It is never a monologue: it can never go only in one direction. And touching is a way of communicating which we cannot live without. Touch is elementary for human beings to become human beings.

When the Argentinean choreographer Gustavo Lesgart visited Trondheim to produce the performance *SPOR*<sup>334</sup> in 2005, I interviewed him for the magazine *På Spissen*.<sup>335</sup> He told about his ideas for the performance:

–When I look at the map of the world I think of all the people I have met everywhere. I think of my journeys, all places where I have danced and choreographed. A map has its physical limits, but the traces of all these people whom I have met and danced with exist forever inside of me and on my skin. The skin is a large sensing organ, the only organ we have which really remembers. And I think about the body, the human being, as a kind of a map. On the skin there are myriads of journeys, stories and meetings, which can be remembered and come alive through touch or movement. And I think about space. I think about how a human being is one, small limited space through her body but how that human at the same time is an enormous space. Her memories, stories and imagination exist in her as a never-ending space. The individual, physical body also includes this never-ending space; all the experiences of a human being and her inner space of imagination.<sup>336</sup>

I find it intriguing to think about the skin as a map and I recognize well what Lesgart means. My skin, my body, wears the invisible imprints of all those people I have been dancing with. I remember that first partner using a wheelchair in Brighton, dancers everywhere in a lot of different settings, my teachers, co-students, Adam Benjamin, students of mine, co-dancers in performances, colleagues, Vera, Anna, Mona, Karen, Teresa, Ida, Heidi and Paul. They all have created a myriad of traces, stories and memories on my skin. I know them through touch and movement. In a way, I embody them through the memories they have left on my skin.

Touch is fundamentally important in dance improvisation, especially in contact improvisation.

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<sup>331</sup> *A Poetic Skeleton* with the Dance Laboratory (2007)

<sup>332</sup> Line written and delivered by a dancer in the performance *A Poetic Skeleton*.

<sup>333</sup> Rouhiainen (2003, p. 104)

<sup>334</sup> *SPOR (Traces)* was produced by Musikkteateret in Trondheim in 2005.

<sup>335</sup> Østern in *På Spissen* (2005, pp. 10–11).

<sup>336</sup> Interview with choreographer Gustavo Lesgart, in *På Spissen*, Østern (2005, pp. 10–11)

Actually, touch is the axis which contact improvisation spins around. But not only contact improvisation is created through touch. On a very fundamental level, so are human beings. All human beings are dependent of touching and being touched. As newborn babies, the touch of our mothers, fathers or other caring adults actually and very concretely creates us as human beings. The body-subject is created through touch, and human beings need to be re-constructed and re-acknowledged through touch in all ages: over and over again. In this very simple way, the body tells us that we need each other.

Skin specialist Ole Fyrand<sup>337</sup> writes that we constantly need to be acknowledged by others to be able to be part of the human community. In this community between human beings we both confirm each other and mediate information about ourselves through touching each other. Our early experience with skin contact remains in our bodies as sediments about what it is like to be in the world. In the immediate time after birth we sense our surroundings mostly through the near senses; touch, smell and taste. The tactile sense, that is the skin, is the most developed sense at birth. Fyrand<sup>338</sup> emphasises that early skin contact is essential and influences the development of the personality and immune system, and that these first experiences of touch are of importance for our later relations with other human beings.

As I am writing this, my brother has just had his first baby, a daughter. When I see her parents carry her, cuddle with her and massage her when she cries I am reminded about the life-important need for touch. My brother likes to lie on his back with his daughter sleeping on his chest. There, she is completely calm. At the same time, however little she is, she calms him right back. The skin contact and warmth between them connects them deeply to each other. In this, they bind to each other as father and daughter. I realise that as her parents touch her, they give my niece the desire to live and give her the possibility of relating to other people. But again, she is not only being touched by her parents: she touches them too. And with her touch, she changes them forever. Because, as Cooper Albright<sup>339</sup> says: *the act of touching does change you.*

Touch, with all its different nuances, has an enormous impact on human beings. Touch is simply essential in human life. To experience trust in “opening up our skin” for caring touch as children makes it possible for us as adults to “soften our skin” and use the skin as a mediator of information, respect and care for ourselves and other human beings. In that way, touch is strongly related to connecting, relating and communicating. Fyrand<sup>340</sup> argues that touch is a prerequisite for nearness, survival, social relations and development of culture. Skin contact gives rich information about the other, and through touch human beings are challenged to meet and take part in the other person’s world. Since touch is such a fundamental way of being part of human community and since the skin has the power to both embody and release memories, touching can also be scary, difficult and painful. Throughout life touch is a means to change. In an interview for Adresseavisen in 2007, a dancer in the Dance Laboratory said that:

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337 Fyrand (2002, p. 13 and 20)

338 Fyrand (2002, pp. 45)

339 Cooper Albright (2007, paper at the conference Re-thinking Practice and Theory. International Symposium on Dance Research. Centre National de la Danse, Paris)

340 Fyrand (2002, p. 13)

– In the Dance Laboratory we use skin contact a lot. In the beginning, when I started, it felt strange, but now I get a lot of energy from it and from being part of the group. <sup>341</sup> quote press clip

I suggest that the use of touch to communicate the way it is used in improvisation holds a vast and unused potential in education. The act of communicating through touch blurs the sharp distinction between “me” and “you”, and turns the other into a body-subject possible to connect to.

Based on a dualistic worldview, in Western society it is commonly believed that thought and reason are reliable, but that we cannot trust what touch, feelings, or the body, tell us. Touch has been seen as a problem, and this started a long time ago. In Aristotle’s *Peri psychês*, which means *On the Soul*, the famous thinker is struck by the problem of touch.<sup>342</sup> Aristotle was troubled that touch is not clear: it is inapparent, obscure, secret and nocturnal. Aristotle pointed to the fact – and for him, the problem – that all the other senses perceive over a distance (as seeing, hearing and smelling) but that touch (and taste) requires physical contact. Aristotle concluded that touch must have both a tangible and a non-tangible aspect. The tangible aspect is the body, which is only the medium of touch, but the “organ” which really senses the touch is situated farther inward in the body, in other words *the soul*:

It is a problem, Aristotle says, whether touch is a single sense or a group of senses. It is also a problem, what is the organ of touch; is it or is it not the flesh? On the second view, flesh is “the medium” of touch, the real organ being situated farther inward. <sup>343</sup>

Jacques Derrida<sup>344</sup> concludes that this paradoxical situation arises: when pondering on touch, then also the untouchable has to be tampered with. Derrida writes that, down to this day, these elements have not stopped spelling trouble in the history of this endless problem with touch. He writes that once this incredible “truth” was uttered, it has resonated down to the twentieth century, even within discourses apparently utterly foreign to Aristotelian ideas.

In our time, many contemporary dancers and improvisers can be called anything but Aristotelian in the way they work with and as bodies. Much post-modern contemporary dance and contact-based improvisation presents a very different view of the body. The body is not seen as an instrument, but as a sensuous subject, which is in and makes sense of the world. In contact improvisation, touch is not at a distance: it is right in the centre of what is going on. Contact improvisation *is* belief in what touch and the body tells about. David Williams<sup>345</sup> says that the skin-to-skin contact point in contact improvisation can be thought of as the “third mind”, allowing the dancers to get closer to both themselves and others. Sometimes in improvisation the dancers even work with their eyes closed. This is often done because sight is such a dominating way of receiving information. With the eyes closed, the dancers can practise ways of opening up and receiving information through their other senses.

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341 Quote by female non-disabled amateur dancer interview by Gullestad in *Adresseavisen* 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2007

342 Derrida (2000/2005)

343 Derrida (2000/2005, p. 5)

344 Derrida (2000/2005, p. 18)

345 Williams (1996), here referred to by Cooper Albright in (2007, paper at the conference *Re-thinking Practice and Theory*. International Symposium on Dance Research. Centre National de la Danse, Paris)

Cooper Albright<sup>346</sup> says that embedded in the physical experience of touch is the opportunity to change the lived relation between “I” and “the other”. Again: *the experience of touching does change you*. This is an important statement. It is the distance between “me” and “the other”, “the unknown” and “the untouched” which makes other people’s bodies strange to me. It is because I look on them as “another body”. Connecting to them through touch, connecting to the body, to the other, lessens that distance and allows me to identify other people’s bodies more as “mine”. Because of the unique experience of different bodies, Cooper Albright<sup>347</sup> argues, it is important to work with different dancers. Through being in touch with different bodies, dancers learn about what it is like to be that other body. And through the use of touch in dance improvisation, it can serve as an arena where dancers re-acknowledge each other as human beings and create a more hopeful community.

## 2.7. Discussing lived experience

The language which has developed in track of Cartesian dualism gives one specific way of conceptualising the body which gives it status as an object. Engelsrud<sup>348</sup> points to how Merleau-Ponty’s radically different way of seeing the body as lived and experiential paves the way for a very different language about the body. This language should be able to talk about the body as a body-subject always in movement, always in becoming, always on the move. It will take time to develop this language, as the dualistic worldview already is bent into the concepts and words we have available when talking about the body. A word like “physical”, for example, is already dualistic and assumes that there is an aspect of the body which is simply physical.

In Norwegian, and also in English, there is a lack of possibilities to talk about the body with verbs. Instead, we are left with a lot of nouns about the body. The body *has* arms and legs instead of the body *is* arms or legs, or even more difficult to conceive: that the arm and leg or other body parts would be possible to express as verbs. We cannot say *I arm a circle in space*, but instead are left to say, for example, *I draw a circle in space with my arm*. This linguistic twist bounces back from a worldview which tells us that body and body parts are something we have, instead as something we are. There is not really a verb for body (even though we can say embody). But there is a verb for thought: *I think*. In that way, it becomes easier to express how my thoughts change through different parts of my life, than to express through a verb how my body also changes. I can, for example, say that *before I thought that, but now I rather think this*, but I cannot say *earlier I bodied this situation like that, but now I body it differently*. In this way, the body, through our quite verb-less body vocabulary, becomes a rather static entity instead of a lived phenomenon. When I talk about body changes, in line with the thought of the body as something I have, I usually talk about how I have modified the body as an object: I have lost weight, or I have received treatment

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346 Cooper Albright (2007, paper at the conference Re-thinking Practice and Theory. International Symposium on Dance Research. Centre National de la Danse, Paris)

347 Cooper Albright (2007, paper at the conference Re-thinking Practice and Theory. International Symposium on Dance Research. Centre National de la Danse, Paris)

348 Engelsrud (2006, p. 34)



or I have had an operation. Also, when people talk about how they train their bodies, the view of the body as an object to be exercised is clearly implicitly there. According to Engelsrud<sup>349</sup>, the person becomes an agent who exercises training through activating the body as an object. This reduction of own sensitivity skews the focus away from what happens in and with the body.

In my opinion, the dance improvisation class has a double valuable opportunity in encouraging discussions about the body and improvisation as part of the class. The first value is that verbal dialogue constructs understanding of improvisation by the improvisers. The second is that the dance improvisation class, ripe with diverse bodily experiences, is the ultimate playground for developing a rich language about the lived body.

Traditionally, to discuss and reflect is not part of a dance class. I cannot remember a single occasion from my years of dancing as a child and teenager when I was ever asked about my opinion, or asked to tell about my experience when dancing. The only one who talked in the dance class was the teacher. As an adult I have often reflected about how much more silent dance class is compared to classes where other subjects are taught, also compared to other art subjects. I see this as a serious problem and I am willing to characterize this silence and monologue in the dance class as a shadow from the past. An authority is given to a dance teacher found in few other spaces in contemporary Western life. This gives the dance teacher enormous power.

As I write this, I must also stress that there is also something good and positive with the level of concentration and attention often found in dance classes. Also, it must be stressed that there are numerous dance teachers today who teach differently. In fact, I believed all dance teachers today taught differently, but the other day my neighbour called me to talk about her concern about the things her daughter was told about her body and behaviour in dance (classical ballet) class. These were very corrective things, and with no possibility to protest, since nobody was allowed to talk during the class. I was very troubled as I heard this. I maintain that this silence in the dance class must be broken in order to use the full capacity of dance, in order to revise the body and understand it as a body-subject, to give dance a more central place in people's lives and in society, and not least, to engage with the dancers-students as ethical and responsible dance teachers.

In her research, Hämäläinen<sup>350</sup> has investigated dialogue in the dance class. She confirms that verbal reflection traditionally is not part of dance class. Still, in her investigation among dance students at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki, students experienced reflective discussions as a very positive aspect of the dance class. The dancers had a hunger to talk about their experiences in dance. As an outcome of her research, Hämäläinen<sup>351</sup> argues that the teacher – in her research, a teacher of choreography – needs to encourage a reflective learning process, where discussions have a central position. These discussions should take place between students, and between students and the teacher. Through verbal reflections the students learn to verbalise both their choreographic work and their experiences and feelings. This allows for a verbal sharing of their own experience between dancers, which is valuable. In this way, the students learn from each other, Hämäläinen<sup>352</sup> continues. She also underlines that it is more valuable to talk about movement afterwards, when

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349 Engelsrud (2006, p. 138)

350 Hämäläinen (1999, p. 255–260)

351 Hämäläinen (1999, p. 255)

352 Hämäläinen (1999, p. 256)

the dancers have moved, instead of explaining *about* movement before the actual movement task. Talking in advance becomes theoretical, talking afterwards, based on lived experience, tells about the lived body engaged in movement, which is a very different matter. This is a talking “with” instead of talking “about”.<sup>353</sup> This is also my experience. The interesting thing is to talk and discuss afterwards, not before. Talking before dancing in the dance class means that I *explain* what we are going to do (which of course also is necessary to some extent). Talking afterwards means that we *discuss* and *reflect* together about what we have done.

The role of the teacher in order to foster reflective discussions is to ask questions which the students can reflect around and put their own competence, thoughts and observations into the discussion. Based on Inkeri Sava<sup>354</sup>, Hämäläinen<sup>355</sup> argues that artistic elaboration in a dance choreography class, which moves between trying, improvising, doing, relating and discussing, sharing thoughts and reflecting, leads to a richer artistic and pedagogical activity, which holds and creates more knowledge. This is a good description of the dramaturgy of the classes with the Dance Laboratory. The dancers improvise and discuss, discuss and improvise. But even if the possibility to discuss were there, the interpretation of the empirical material collected in 2004 for this study shows that, as the dance teacher, I could have asked different kinds of questions: questions directing the dancers’ attention more closely to their lived experience. Still, and as this has developed, the opportunity for verbal reflection that was and is there in the Dance Laboratory is one of the strengths of the project. Different dancers have talked to me about this on several occasions. In her third interview in 2004, Ida told this:

– I have learnt a lot about how important it is with feedback. I have received positive feedback from others, which has surprised me. That has made me realise that not only is this group nice, because I have known that, but that I am nice as part of the group. That feedback I remember very well. If we had not talked together, it would have been different. Then you would have been much more tense and it would have become more of an achievement.<sup>356</sup> quote interview

This utterance by Ida really touched me when I interviewed her. In a way, her words say everything about the importance of dialogue in the dance class. The verbal dialogue between dancers takes away a tension. This tension diminishes when the dancers are allowed to talk to each other about their experience, to feed back and discuss.

Of course, this should not be *any* kind of feedback or discussion, but an *ethical* and *responsive* discussion, where the teacher and the dancers take responsibility for each other. Strictly speaking, this means that the dancers are encouraged not to judge each other, but to describe, ask and engage in reflections.<sup>357</sup> This is a way of discussing and looking at each other, which needs to be learnt. To develop an ethical mode of reflective discussion and feedback among dancers clearly is the teacher’s task and responsibility. It is my experience that this is something that the dancers learn quickly and that they also highly appreciate this non-judging, reflective way

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353 See also Shotter (1999a), who argues for “witness”-writing instead of “aboutness”-writing.

354 Sava (1998)

355 Hämäläinen (1999, p. 257)

356 Ida in interview 3, May 2004.

357 See also Ravn (2001, pp. 113–115)

of talking about body and dance.

It is important right from the first talk to make the dancers understand that when they give feedback, they talk about another person *who is a subject*. I usually start this process of learning to talk about dance by giving the dancers a very concrete and limited task. If the dancers have worked with partnering through the back, for example, I can ask the dancers to tell about one limited, very concrete thing that they have learnt about the other dancer's back. They must choose only *one* thing and it must be a concrete, bodily thing. It is fascinating to hear (and see) the dancers search for words – among poor linguistic tools to describe the lived and relational body – to tell about how they sensed the other dancer's back rotate, twist, stretch or fold in special ways. It is a real challenge for the dancers, but eventually they also become very skilled in verbalising their lived experience.

As the interpretation of the empirical material collected for this study in 2004 shows, my awareness of the importance of a language attuned to the bodily experience was rather low back then. As the years have passed, my awareness about the importance of a language attuned to lived experience has developed hugely. Thus, the use of language in the Dance Laboratory has developed generally, and today I see the verbal skills and willingness to talk about body and movement among the dancers as one of the most intriguing outcomes of the project. I often send different dancers out to seminars and workshops to tell. I am fascinated and also proud of how capable they are in answering questions and verbalising their own, lived experience and knowledge about dance. Another important thing with this is that it is not myself talking *about* them, but the dancers themselves who tell. This moderates my power to describe on behalf of others, which is sound and important.

It is meaningful to talk about improvisation and lived experience.<sup>358</sup> It is especially meaningful in the dance class, because this is a learning space which traditionally has been far too silent. In postmodern times, the monologue by the teacher in the dance class should cease and be replaced with dialogue. There should be dialogue and discussion *both* in movement *and* through verbal reflective discussions.

## 2.8. Different perspectives on space in dance

Based on my investigation of the body as a lived and constructed phenomenon in this chapter I create my different perspectives on space in dance.

I am creating perspectives on space in dance which I call the lived, fictive, aesthetic, narrative, cultural and political space, as shown in Figure 1. From my perspective as a dance teacher and researcher in the Dance Laboratory, dance operates in, shapes and holds the possibilities to transform these spaces. Each and every one of these spaces holds a lot of sub-spaces; in other words, each space is endlessly spacious.

I use the concept *space* instead of, for example, dimension or aspect. This is a conscious choice, which is based on my assumption that space, dance and body cannot be separated. Also,

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<sup>358</sup> See also Engel (2007, p. 96)

by using the concept space I try to open up to re-negotiations. A space can always be redefined and filled with new meaning.

Valerie Briginshaw<sup>359</sup> writes that postmodernism has brought about an enormous interest in ideas about space, the ways space is experienced and its characteristics as a social construct. Rouhiainen<sup>360</sup> writes that space is never simply neutral space. Briginshaw<sup>361</sup> argues that space, like subjectivity, is a human and social construct. Space has a history which is tightly connected to a history (histories) of the body, because it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived and produced in the first place. The rational subject inherited from Descartes, Briginshaw continues, is reduced to co-ordinates in time and space, and this time and space are seen as mathematically measurable. Gallagher and Zahavi<sup>362</sup> point out how this has given birth to the idea about the body as a *spatiality of position*. According to Briginshaw<sup>363</sup>, this means bracketing off other ways of experiencing time and space. Leaning on Merleau-Ponty, Gallagher and Zahavi<sup>364</sup> instead lift forward the body as a *spatiality of situation*. This is a frame of reference that applies to the lived body as perceiver and actor.

As Briginshaw<sup>365</sup> claims, the fundamental structuring categories of space and time have major consequences for meaning and representation, subjectivity and agency, culture and society, identity and power. The wish to create my teacher and researcher perspectives on space in dance is because I acknowledge the body as a spatiality of situation. When I observe and take part in the Dance Laboratory, roll around over and under the dancers, run across the floor, hear the studio filled with laughter, blush because I am moved, sense the tension between dancers struggling to find out, fly on top of tilted wheelchairs, listen to quite different dancers' reflections and sweat as I try to create choreographic material, this is by no means a neutral, objective or one-dimensional space. Actually, it must be the furthest away from a neutral space you could possibly think of. This space is so lived, it is so emotional, it creates its own aesthetics and there are ideological, philosophical and political parameters hanging in the air, in space, in the bodies, in the dance. In each and every aspect this is a space with huge aesthetic and pedagogical implications and possibilities. It is a space for learning – at its best, a generous and spacious one.

Briginshaw<sup>366</sup> claims that dance is a pertinent arena for exploring subjectivity, because dance immediately presents representations of bodies in space, their relations to space and to other bodies. The Dance Laboratory is indeed such an arena. My choice to define different perspectives on space in dance as lenses to look at the empirical material in this study is an attempt to go into dialogue with some of Briginshaw's<sup>367</sup> most interesting questions: *What* and *how* space means in dance, how it is possible to think of space differently, and what this means

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359 Briginshaw (2001, p. 5)

360 Rouhiainen (2007, p. 112)

361 Briginshaw (2001, p. 4 and p. 20)

362 Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, p. 142)

363 Briginshaw (2001, p. 20)

364 Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, p. 142)

365 Briginshaw (2001, p. 4)

366 Briginshaw (2001, p. 5)

367 Briginshaw (2001, p. 9)

for dance and subjectivity. I agree with Birginshaw<sup>368</sup>, that through a focus on space in dance, dance can challenge, trouble and question fixed perceptions of subjectivity and fixed cultural narratives about different bodies.

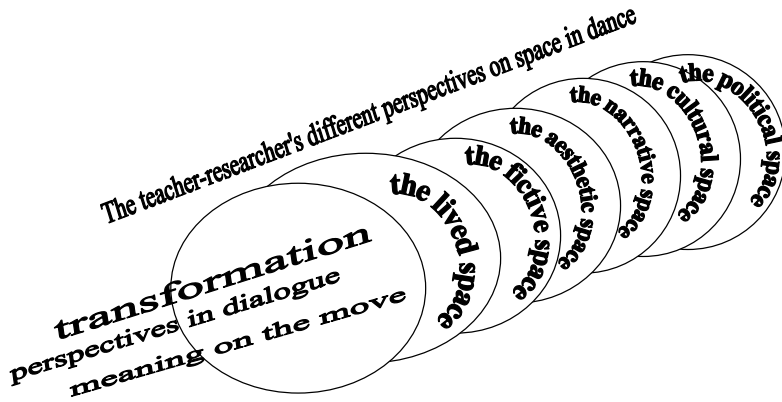


Figure 1 (Østern). The teacher-researcher's different perspectives on space in dance.

Figure 1 visualizes my different perspectives on space in dance, constructed through an investigation of the body as a lived and constructed phenomenon. These perspectives form the beginning of an interpretative tool, which I will use and develop throughout this thesis. I use these different perspectives on space in dance to look at and interpret the empirical material collected for this study.

The point with distinguishing different perspectives on space in dance is not to separate them; that is neither possible nor advisable. All perspectives on space in dance cling together and are in constant dialogue. The point with distinguishing them is rather to create awareness and to see different meaning-making possibilities, operating within different spaces, in dance.

In a passage between the different spaces in dance, a transformation of dance, body, identity and cultural narratives takes place. In this passage, the different perspectives on space in dance are in dialogue with each other in a stream which flows in all directions. In this stream, both normative and emancipatory processes work at the same time.<sup>369</sup> The stream is normative because dancers dance and think inside of an historically inherited social context which is “under their skin”, and emancipatory because in this stream dancers always have the possibility to “sail off” and sense and experience other possibilities than the ones they already know. Human beings can reach out to touch each other, *open their skin* and create a new space for co-existence.

In the meeting between differently bodied dancers there are great possibilities to discover new meanings of the different spaces which constitute dance. In the meeting between *you* and *me* there are unknown and unexplored ways of moving and relating to each other. I argue that to negotiate about space for different dancers is important for every *body*. I find it equally important for the dance field itself. The field of dance needs to open up, let go of protectionism

368 Birginshaw (2001, p. 6)

369 See, for example, Shapiro & Shapiro (2002).

and reach out to touch and be touched by a variety of different people and genres. Unexplored space exists in the meeting between different dancers, or more precisely, in the space which *we create* through who we are and what we bring with us. Dancers have the possibility to negotiate about new space, and not least, they get the chance to ask themselves some questions: What are my perspectives? What are my prejudices? And further, as also Benjamin<sup>370</sup> asks himself: What are the consequences of my prejudices and attitudes? Who do I embrace and who do I exclude in dance? Who has admittance to the studio and to the stage – which is a public space with public debates attached to it – as a place to share her experiences, dreams and visions about new and different ways of living?

The different perspectives on space in dance are keys to unlock or lock the other perspectives, as they work together and are in constant dialogue. The way awareness is created around the different spaces in dance will, I suggest, widen and broaden the field of dance.

In Chapter 3 I will use the perspectives on space created here to look at dance improvisation as a spacious discourse, filtered through the Dance Laboratory. When doing that, I will simultaneously define the kind of dance improvisation that is being developed in the Dance Laboratory and position the project within a broader field of dance improvisation.

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370 Benjamin (2002, p. 40)



*Photo 3.*  
*The Dance Laboratory during discussions about improvisation, spring 2005.*

### 3. Improvisation as a spacious discourse filtered through the Dance Laboratory

A mind that is stretched to a new idea never returns to its original dimensions.  
*Oliver Wendell Holmes*

This project is not about disability, it is about dance. The aesthetic part of it does not necessarily have to do with how much you move. It is more about using everybody's possibilities.<sup>371</sup>

*Mona, dancer in the Dance Laboratory*

In this chapter I will look at dance improvisation as a spacious discourse filtered through the experiences I had when teaching and engaging in the Dance Laboratory. I will examine improvisation looking from the different perspectives on space in dance which I created in Chapter 2. I will explore the lived, fictive, aesthetic, narrative, cultural and political space in dance improvisation through my experiences in the Dance Laboratory in dialogue with existing theory. Together – but none of them alone – these perspectives on space in dance give a description of how dance improvisation operates in and creates different spaces.

I will simultaneously define the Dance Laboratory as part of a continuously developing broader field of dance and dance improvisation. This includes describing my own contact with other dance artists, since the way I move, work and think is a result of my dialogue with an ever-changing field.

#### 3.1. The lived space

The experiences in dance improvisation contexts are deeply lived through many and inseparable bodily processes that happen at once. Improvisation is moving, sensing, feeling, thinking, communicating and relating activity.

I remember one class in the Dance Laboratory in the spring term of 2005. We were doing a leading-and-following task. I was watching the dancers improvising together in couples. Anna was working with a woman in her 20's with learning difficulties. At some point they drew my attention. There was a special attention between them. The woman in her 20's was looking very carefully at Anna, while she was leading her, slowly, up and down to the floor, in circles and curves. As Anna was following, with her eyes closed, she received a special softness which spread onto her body and face. She opened up and followed every impulse from her partner with a smooth elegance. I had never seen them connect to each other this way before, even if they had worked together in the Dance Laboratory for almost a year. After the class, Anna came

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<sup>371</sup> Quote from interview three with Mona, May 2004



up to me as I was on my way out. She said:

– That was such a great experience to dance with her. Suddenly I was able to just listen to her and follow, instead of taking the lead myself. I realised how I was invited into her movement world.<sup>372</sup> quote field notes

This experience changed something of Anna’s understanding of the dance context she was part of. I also remember when the Dance Laboratory started up in the autumn term of 2005. A 23-year old non-disabled woman was one of the newcomers to the group. When the participants arrived for the second class, I went around and talked individually to everybody. I asked how they felt about the first class. This young woman told me that:

– I am fine, but it was a completely new and overwhelming experience last week. The class gave me so many thoughts and they have been buzzing around in my head all week.<sup>373</sup> quote field notes

I am quite sure this woman not only had thoughts, but first of all a lot of bodily sensations and feelings. This feeling that something was overwhelming came out of the context that the Dance Laboratory presented to her: new ways of relating to differently bodied people, the use of touch and the discovery of new ways of moving. These bodily processes of sensing, moving and relating were something she deeply lived. Sensations and feelings arose, which led to thoughts and questions.

The attempt to find words for the lived space in dance is an endeavour to tell about the very core of what dance is. The lived space which dance creates is *why people dance*. It is the experience of dancing itself. This experience has meaning and value as lived. It is lived in one single movement. In line with Merleau-Ponty’s<sup>374</sup> phenomenology, lived experiences are experiences in which we are self-evidently attuned to the world. The body functions as a unification of its parts.

This experience of the body as a unification of its parts gives birth to a special feeling of synthesis, or *flow*. The experience of flow is a characteristic of the lived space in dance. With “flow” in this context I mean something slightly different from Rudolf Laban’s<sup>375</sup> flow. Flow is one of his four basic motion factors<sup>376</sup>, the use of which determines the dynamics of a certain movement. In this context, I rather mean flow as an overall feeling of dance as an ongoing activity; a flow of attention that continues with a certain fluidity, regardless of the dynamics of the movements.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi<sup>377</sup> has investigated the experience of flow. He calls flow a state when a person’s entire being is stretched in the full functioning of body and mind. Whatever one does becomes worth doing for its own sake, Csikszentmihalyi continues – living becomes its own justification. From my perspective as a dancer I would say that flow is a state where time

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372 Quote from field notes, spring 2005.

373 Quote field notes, autumn 2005.

374 For example, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1994)

375 Laban (1948/1988)

376 Weight, space, time and flow; see, for example, Laban (1948/1988). Rudolf Laban’s movement analysis has had great impact on the development of the early modern dance in Europe and for various dance contexts like dance in education, community dance and dance and movement therapy.

377 Csikszentmihalyi (1997, pp. 31–32)

and space is completely embodied. The body lives time and space in one single movement. It is important to underline that the feeling of flow belongs to situations where the body works without struggle, or as Csikszentmihalyi<sup>378</sup> says, flow occurs when a person is fully involved in overcoming a challenge that is just about manageable.

The feeling of flow is characteristic of dance, when the dancing takes place without struggle, but it is by no means exclusive for dance. Rather, I would like to position the experience of flow as a characteristic of *the lived body*. The feeling of flow is situated in the body. The body is immediate and one hundred percent present. Also processes like thinking (which is a bodily activity) can give rise to a high feeling of flow, but the flow feeling itself is not thought; it is lived. Dance easily gives this feeling, those times when the body does not become a struggle in the dance.

In this study, some of the dancers express aspects which I interpret as connected to a lived space in dance. What they talk about, then, is *how they live the dance improvisation*. When doing so, they use concepts like the experience of flow and freedom, receiving new energy and getting in touch with their emotions. Mona talks about flow when describing her experiences in the Dance Laboratory:

– Improvisation is difficult to describe. When it works, there is a flow in it... Dance is a lot about the feeling of freedom. Dance is a possibility to close the world around out at the same time as you open up for the inner world... There is a joint, invisible link between everybody, which makes the experience very close to everybody, without this fellowship being verbalised. The art in it is in a way the state when I sense a special flow in everything I do. Dance easily gives birth to this experience, but I can also experience it in other situations in life. <sup>379</sup> quote interview

I want to hang on to Mona's line "there is a joint, invisible link between everybody, which makes the experience very close to everybody". This tells about another aspect of the lived space in dance: The lived space in dance can be *shared*. In improvisation, there is a high focus on bodily communication. In the Dance Laboratory, the dancers are constantly communicating with the other dancers. Rouhiainen<sup>380</sup> describes the outlines of the body as *porous*, allowing us to reach into the world. This reaching out into the world includes reaching into others. The skin opens, and emotions and information pass in and out through the porous outlines of the body, creating a connectedness to other dancing bodies and the space. In this bodily communication, a stream of sensations and emotions flows in, on and between the different dancers. Motion and emotion cling together. (E)motions function as information, possible for other bodies to perceive and live. In this way, the dancers involved in improvisation enter a state of deep embodied co-existence. In my interpretation, Mona's statement "there is a joint, invisible link between everybody" is a description of this embodied co-existence which she has experienced in the Dance Laboratory.

One important concept in this context is inter-subjectivity. In Merleau-Ponty's<sup>381</sup> phenomenological understanding, human beings first of all perceive each other as subjects. This state of inter-subjectivity is an important characteristic of how dance improvisation works. Other

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378 Csikszentmihalyi (1997, p. 30)

379 Quote from interview 3 with Mona, May 2004.

380 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 105)

381 For example, Rouhiainen (2003)

dancers are viewed as subjects, expressing and creating themselves in connectedness to the other body-subjects in space. In perceiving another person, Rouhiainen<sup>382</sup> explains, the pre-reflective body is immediately aware that the perceived other is something familiar and reminiscent of what it itself is. This “something familiar” is simply that the other person is body, as I am. We share physicality; not the same physicality, because we are limited and individual persons. Instead, what we share is the fact that we are bodies perceiving in a phenomenological field.

The interpretation of the interview material in this study shows that the feeling of connectedness across bodily differences is one of the most overwhelming experiences for many of the dancers in the Dance Laboratory. This feeling affects the lifeworlds and meaning perspectives of the dancers. The dancers start participating in each other’s lifeworlds to a higher degree, which means that they start sharing a common sense of who “we” are, and lessen the split into categories of “we” and “you”. It seems the dance improvisation manages to offer the dancers a space to break down existing cultural and rather limited meanings spun around the body and especially around “the disabled body”.

With the lived space in dance I mean, then, that the dance experience is lived in one single movement. This movement embraces all bodily processes like moving-thinking-sensing-feeling-relating-communicating. This lived space is shared between bodies. The lived and shared space in dance offers the experience of a deep embodied co-existence between different people. The lived space is characterised by a stream of sensations and emotions, clinging tightly to the motion itself. The lived space in dance, creating connectedness between body-subjects, can give rise to an existential feeling. With this I mean a feeling of being very much alive, very much *here*, and very much connected to everything else. In that sense, I am inclined to say that the lived space in dance is *why people dance*.

### 3.2. The fictive space

Dance belongs to the world of fiction. Similar to play, dance is for real but still not “really real”. When I move in dance it is for different reasons than when I move to make dinner or drink tea. I want to stay with this “real, but not really real”, which is characteristic for both play and for dance. The fact that dance is for real makes it a concrete, bodily experience for the dancer. The fact that it is “not really real” gives it a fictive dimension. In comparing dance to play, Åse Løvseth Glad<sup>383</sup> writes that, when dancing, the (e)motions in the child’s, or dancer’s, body are both real and yet not really real. Thereby, dance offers the possibility to step, or roll, onto the domains of fantasy and unknown possibilities. This is especially true for dance improvisation. In other words, improvisation offers a possibility to play, which is a very serious activity. When playing, you can trick, triple, turn around, make choices, new connections and many mistakes – only to solve problems in new and unexpected ways. Winnicott<sup>384</sup> says that *to play is to be in*

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382 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 125)

383 Løvseth Glad (2002, p. 23)

384 Winnicott (1953)

*the third room*. This is a space which lies between the inner and outer reality, as Løvseth Glad<sup>385</sup> writes. As also Benjamin<sup>386</sup> points out, this third room has a door which opens in two directions: improvisation feeds into “real” life, as “real” life feeds into improvisation.

In some moments in improvisation, the feeling of being in a playground is stronger than at other times. The fictive space in dance improvisation becomes visible. New and creative connections are found. In an open improvisation in spring 2004 I got drawn into a duet with Karen.

A fictive line was drawn in space. On one side of that line was “the real world”, on the other side “the dance world”. “The real world” was a place to sit down and observe “the dance world”. Any dancer could enter “the dance world” whenever she wanted, stay as long as she wanted and then leave to go back to “the real world”. At some point Karen and I bumped into each other in “the dance world” and started relating.

I remember some details of our duet very well. Our spines were glued to each other. Karen’s back was warm. As we rubbed our itchy backs towards each other I could sense information exchange between us. Suddenly, she uttered a sound and I picked up on that. Through the contact point between our backs I could feel attention rising. She tried another sound, and I echoed. Then I sang her a sound, which she transferred to yet another. The tempo was increasing between us. As we rolled from the back to the side to the stomach and back again, still glued to each other, standing tall, sharing weight, some kind of a song developed between us. I do not remember the words, but I remember the sound vibrating in my rib cage. I became aware that everybody else had disappeared from “the dance world” and was watching us intensively. Karen and I were connecting tightly, both of us on thin ice, discovering new ways of relating. The only way to go on was together. I remember a moment when she released her hip joint to bend down and I could do nothing but go down with her. I sank deep into my hip joints as I balanced my whole left side towards her. In the next moment I pushed off from my feet, leaning into her and led her up to standing again. All the time the development of the sound connected us as much as did the sides of our bodies. It was a play between us, a really important one. It stretched our minds.

In the following, I will keep playing. I will let my thoughts fly out to the bigger space: the universe. As I have a childish fascination for astronomy, I will borrow concepts from the universe to improvise about dance improvisation in a postmodern aesthetics for differently bodied dancers. I am obviously a pure amateur astronomer and physicists must excuse me for any faults that might be found in my text about black holes and event horizons. In this context, they are only meant to be an exciting landscape to borrow metaphors from.

The concept *event horizon* is taken from science about the universe and it is part of describing the anatomy of a black hole. The astronomers call black holes the biggest mystery in the universe. Albert Einstein’s<sup>387</sup> general relativity theory explains that matter or gravity is not only a force, but that gravity actually creates a curve in space-time itself. A black hole is created by such an enormous field of gravity that a deep well in space-time is created. The curvature is extreme and

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385 Løvseth Glad (2002, p. 23)

386 Benjamin interviewed in article by Pesonen in Pohjalainen on 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2004.

387 See for, example, Couper & Henbest (1998/2006, pp. 20–21) and

[http://rstnett-r94.cappelen.no/autoimages/633\\_generell\\_relativitetsteori.pdf](http://rstnett-r94.cappelen.no/autoimages/633_generell_relativitetsteori.pdf) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

the gravitational field of the black hole is so intense that not even light can escape. At a certain distance from the gravity on the bottom of the well, there is a critical radius. This radius is known as the event horizon; it has also been called the magical circle. When something has crossed that horizon there is no way back – it stays on the other side forever. Behind this horizon, the inward pull of gravity is overwhelming and nothing, no information, not even the light, can escape the event horizon. Astronomers can only imagine what would happen if the event horizon was crossed. Heather Couper and Nigel Henbest<sup>388</sup> writes about a fictive future astronaut who travels into a black hole. “As she crosses the event horizon, the dark space is suddenly replaced with a series of breathtaking sights. Space-time inside the black hole is distorted to such an extent that she is allowed to get a glimpse of other universes”.

The event horizon almost becomes an adventure horizon – a real magical circle. Safe down on earth I can borrow the concept *event horizon* and its content to imagine a new space for dance. As I cross my existing horizon of understanding as a teacher-choreographer, the quite narrow (minded) space that I am carrying through my dance heritage is replaced with spaciousness and generosity. Space and time in dance is re-negotiated with the dancers to such an extent that it allows a glimpse of other ways of relating. Also, there is no way back: I cannot escape my new horizon of understanding.

With this, I suggest that dancers today do not first of all need to stretch muscles; they are already stretched out to a maximum. Instead, they need to stretch their minds about what dance can be and who can be a dancer.<sup>389</sup> To reach out for a new adventurous horizon of understanding in dance is to move on from the standards of what we take for granted as normal, typical or universal. These categories have developed within a Western worldview. But to look for and elevate the “normal” or “universal” means looking for knowledge that transgresses both time and space. And also; when looking for what is *normal*, you simultaneously define what is *abnormal*.

In this context, the body represents a completely opposite language. The knowledge of the body is a matter which “curves space and time”. Neither time nor space nor individuality can escape the knowledge that a certain body holds. Knowledge can be shared between people, but the body’s knowledge cannot be stabilised to exist universally, outside time and space. People understand and create knowledge through their body, which is already a body-subject-of-culture. Knowledge never hangs in the air in an embodied way: knowledge is always connected to some *body*. A thought can never be drawn out of the head the way Professor Dumbledore does in one of the films about Harry Potter<sup>390</sup>. In this film he draws difficult thoughts out of the head and lets them drift away. This is a fascinating but fictive idea, based on the dualistic split between thinking and body as two aspects which are understood as completely independent of each other.<sup>391</sup> In reality, thinking processes are not that airy; they have weight, time and space,

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388 Couper & Henbest (1998/2006, p. 28)

389 See also Benjamin (2002)

390 Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire © 2005 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

[www.harrypotter.warnerbros.com](http://www.harrypotter.warnerbros.com) (accessed on 3rd November 2008)

391 By the way, the enormous popularity of these films shows how deeply rooted the dualistic worldview is.

These films could never have had such an appeal had not a broad mass of audience accepted at least the idea of the body and soul/mind as two entities independent of each other.

and they always have the perspective *from* a body. Thoughts and ideas can clearly be shared, but then not as disembodied thoughts, but as a sharing between thinking body-subjects-of-culture.

I suggest that a postmodern aesthetics within dance needs to generate movement, ideas and knowledge based in the involved dancers in a certain context, like Marques'<sup>392</sup> context-based dance education. Then it becomes uninteresting to shape the dancers into "normal" standards set by other bodies. Instead, the interesting aspect becomes to invite differently bodied dancers into *the third room, which lies between the inner and outer reality*. This is an experimental-fictive space in dance, where rules and taboos can be broken and new ways of moving and relating can be improvised. All the elements of dance are constantly under re-negotiation – that is part of the aesthetics.

This fictive space in dance feeds into "real life", and vice versa. In the summer of 2008 a big site-specific contemporary dance project called Landing08<sup>393</sup> took place at the hospital in Trondheim. Thirteen art projects were shown at different venues at the large hospital. The audience showed up at the Landing centre and from there they were guided by guides to the different performances. Landing engaged dancers from the Dance Laboratory as guides. Karen was one of those who volunteered. As a result, people who showed up to see performances were met by and guided by a blind woman. It was a great situation to watch, the surprise and then the joy in people's faces when they realised that they were going to be guided by a blind woman, using her cane. The usual roles were turned upside down. The sighted were guided by a blind. That is not fiction, but real. It happened because bodies, minds and ideas had been stretched within a space of possibilities. This is a space that dance improvisation, when taught and used well, can offer.

### 3.3. The aesthetic space

When I started the Dance Laboratory and this research project I did not have the same awareness about the aesthetic (or any) space in dance as I have today. That means that the aesthetic principles for the Dance Laboratory as I will investigate and describe them in this section were not there when this project started. Instead, a definition of them is part of the result of this study.

I watch a video tape of the performance Wanted:love<sup>394</sup> by the Dance Laboratory. This was the first longer piece which the Dance Laboratory developed. In the 30 minute long performance there is one piece of choreography which really interests me also today. It seems to touch on all aspects of the aesthetics that is being developed in the Dance Laboratory. The three dancers in the piece are Karen, Anna and a female 24 year old non-disabled amateur dancer. I will call her Tine in this story.

They all wear sunglasses. Also, they all hold some kind of a stick in their hands. Karen has her white cane, Anna has a measuring stick and Tine a broom. Tine sits down on the chair. Right from the very start and throughout the piece, they seem to have threefold awareness. They are aware of themselves and what they are doing. In addition, they are focused on each other and

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392 Marques (1998, p. 171)

393 Se [www.landing.no](http://www.landing.no) (accessed 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

394 Wanted:love by the Dance Laboratory (2006)

relate closely. They also all have awareness out, towards the *expectators*, or the audience.

The three dancers are waiting, anticipating, looking around, as a low mumbling in the music increases.<sup>395</sup> The volume rises until the score bursts out in a dark rhythm. With the rhythm, the dancers also open up the space in movement. They are dancing, but still they stay within extended everyday movement. In different ways they all start treating their stick. Tine brushes with the broom, almost like washing the floor, but she follows the rhythm of the music. She swings the broom in directions that correlates with what the other dancers are doing. They all move their sticks, not in the same direction, but in directions which seems to make the sticks talk to each other. The moving occurs in the same rhythm; one-two-three-pause, one-two-three-pause.

Then something different happens. The rhythm is broken. Karen bends deep forwards, glides diagonally to the front, Anna glides down to lying into another diagonal, Tine rises up from the chair she is seated in and starts walking to yet another diagonal. The movement material is complex, a lot of different things happen at the same time. The dialogue through and about form is also complex. Everything unnecessary is scratched away; no movement is there just for show or as garnish. Everything is there because it is chosen and agreed about among the dancers.

Touch is a central aspect of the piece, and touch is used for different reasons in the piece. Anna goes into a handstand towards Karen's back, hooking her feet onto Karen's shoulders. Through that touch, they connect in shape; one head up, one head down, otherwise very similar. As Tine throws herself sideways onto Karen's lap, Karen strokes her from head to toe, only to give her a push and tilt her onto her feet again. In a moment where Tine and Karen stand next to each other, Tine presses her hand on the back of Karen's knee. Karen releases her knee joint, and throws her other leg into the air simultaneously, releasing her hip downwards. Tine's touch acts as an impulse which sets off a chain of movements in Karen.

The three dancers move differently, and they contribute with different things to the meeting between them. Anna allows her body to be positioned in the forces of gravity. As she releases down to the floor, she allows gravity to pull her down, instead of using a lot of muscle strength. The going down is fluid, quiet, ongoing. She does not struggle against gravity, but welcomes it and allows it to help her. When she turns and twists in different directions, her spine rotates freely, allowing her to spiral into new and different directions. This is a bodily knowledge which she has developed through years of training and which she knows pre-reflectively. The other two dancers use their bodies more as one piece; there is less awareness about movement possibilities of the joints. They use their muscles more and the physical forces around them less. Their backs do not easily spiral and less fluidity in the movements is created. The movement principles explored in the Dance Laboratory are still not fully incorporated and do not function pre-reflectively. In the heat of the beat, they are forgotten in favour of spatial coordination.

Together with Anna, Karen is the one who knows and goes with the rhythm. She is exact in her counting and is precise on the agreed musical cues. Karen is a true musician<sup>396</sup>, and as she cannot use vision to position herself spatially, she uses the music to orient herself on stage. This ability is consciously used in the building of the piece: the score works over a rhythm where it

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395 The score is composed by Paul.

396 Karen is a professional pianist.

is possible to count the beats. Tine does not embody the music in the same way. In a couple of places in the choreography she starts a sequence too early, but Karen and Anna pulls her back into the agreed pulse.

Karen brings surprise into the piece like none of the others. It is surprising to see her use her white cane as a dance prop instead of a tool for walking. With her cane, she takes part in creating a choreographed pattern. She throws her cane, drops it, gives it away, as she also drops her own weight, leans into the others and welcomes running bodies onto her body. Her disability – being blind – and the circumstances around blindness are stretched away from being “a disability” into a unique possibility for choreographic research. Karen brings the surprise on stage and Anna is most recognisable as the way the audience is used to see a dancer. Tine functions like a bridge between the two of them. With her body, she binds a spectrum from the recognisable dancer to the surprising one.

But then – and this is the real surprise, the magic – as the piece goes on, all these characteristics are slightly displaced. As the three dancers move, run, stretch out, touch and float around each other, the different aspects they bring with them into the piece start to communicate and blend. The surprise becomes recognisable. The recognisable becomes a surprise. The bridge becomes the spectrum. The outer pools of the spectrum become the bridge. Everybody starts to spiral. One cannot be distinguished from the other. Gravity affects them all. The touch used is reversible. Who actually touches who?

This piece of choreography touches on many the different elements that together make up the developing aesthetics in the Dance Laboratory. I will return to a description of all of these elements shortly, but first I will explain my use of the concept aesthetic space on a more general level.

The aesthetic space in dance is where life and fiction, movement and form, dynamics and energy, culture and politics, themes and ideas are turned into the creation of new expressions, forms and choreography. The ideas are developed and processed through an aesthetic process into a fixed or ever-changing form. This process in itself is an aesthetic process. The concepts aesthetic and artistic lie very close to each other. When I choose to talk about the aesthetic space, this is because I understand it as an even wider concept than artistic. In my interpretation, an aesthetic space embraces an artistic space. There are a large number of books written about aesthetics, as one of its meanings is a branch of its own within philosophy which deals with questions of beauty and artistic taste. When I use the concept “aesthetic space” I rather use it to point to the fact that in dance there are always a set of aesthetic principles at work. These principles are aesthetic and to use them is to be in the process of meaning-making.

To define my use of “aesthetic”, I turn to the Oxford dictionary<sup>397</sup> to investigate the origins of the word. The dictionary tells me that the Greek origin of the word is *aisthetikos*, from *aisthesthai*, which means “perceive”. When I go on and trace the origins of perceive, the dictionary tells me that as a verb it means:

– become aware or conscious through the senses.

Aesthetics then has to do with perceiving through the senses, and an aesthetic space in dance

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397 Oxford Dictionary on <http://www.askoxford.com/?view=uk> (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)



has to do with a space for perceiving through the senses in movement. This perceiving leads to a becoming aware or conscious through the senses. This is an important part of what I mean with an “aesthetic space” in dance. The aesthetic space is a place of knowing and generating knowledge in dance. It is a space where meaning is made through an elaboration with a set of aesthetic principles which are characteristic for this art or genre. Through this aesthetic space, the dancers make meaning and become more aware of the aesthetics and the art form itself.

When I investigate what perceive means, the dictionary<sup>398</sup> tells me that its origin is old French *percevoir*, from the Latin *percipere*, which means to “seize” or “understand”. The meanings of “seize” are, according to the dictionary:

– 1 take hold of suddenly and forcibly 2 take forcible possession of 3 (of the police or another authority) take possession of by warrant or legal right 4 take (an opportunity) eagerly and decisively.

Finally, the Latin origin *sacire* to “seize” in the phrase *ad proprium sacire* means

– 5 claim as one’s own.

This makes sense for my understanding of what an aesthetic space in dance is. The meaning that is made and the knowledge that is generated aesthetically give a high level of ownership. This is a characteristic of aesthetic ways of finding out, which I suggest are true for all art forms. As the aesthetic exploration demands high involvement, it is *lived* through. The knowledge is not given or told to the dancers. It is made by and through them, through active participation. Together with others, with the leader and in the meeting with the form and ideas, meaning is made through a set of aesthetic principles. As the dancers have lived through the aesthetic exploration, the meaning and knowledge generated is their own. They *claim it as their own*, often eagerly and decisively. Sometimes it feels like the knowledge generated through aesthetic processes is seized suddenly; like an insight, in a flash. The knowledge created often has an existential meaning for the participants in the aesthetic process, creating a sense of connectedness.

To conclude then, my use of the concept “an aesthetic space” in dance means that I recognize a space where meaning is made through a set of aesthetic principles. In this aesthetic space, the dancers become aware, make meaning and generate knowledge through the sensuous body. This meaning is lived through by active involvement in a complex and conscious aesthetic process and the knowledge created has a high level of ownership. What the dancers know, they know in their bodies, including their minds.

Neither the process nor the finished form which is being developed in a group has a *general kind* of aesthetics, but a *specific kind* of aesthetics, developed within a field of aesthetic ideas. This is true also for the Dance Laboratory. The aesthetics used and constantly under development start from the ideas and intentions I as the teacher-choreographer bring with me into the group. The ideas I bring with me are a result of my personal story as a dance artist. All my earlier dance and life experience, all the teachers I have had, all the performances I have seen, all the discussions I have

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398 Oxford Dictionary on <http://www.askoxford.com/?view=uk> (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

had about dance, life, politics – all these aspects dwell in me. Already in this section I will mention some of the teachers, dancers, choreographers and aesthetic streams which have influenced me. I will come back to them more thoroughly in the section about a cultural space in dance in this chapter, where I will position the Dance Laboratory into a cultural-historical context.

Within contemporary dance, the use of the word “natural” to describe or instruct movements can often be heard. The word natural is often used as opposed to the strictly determined movements inherited from the classical ballet. But as Robin Lakes<sup>399</sup> argues, no movements can be instructed as “natural”. All movements instructed or suggested by a teacher are cultural, and have developed within certain aesthetic rules and values. They might feel natural for the teacher, as she has worked this way for a long time. But they are not “natural” to every body. This might be forgotten when a dance teacher or choreographer works only with advanced or professional dancers. They are already socialised into the world of, in this case, contemporary dance, and they know how to react to different instructions. To work with dancers who do not know the conventions of contemporary dance or dance improvisation gives new perspectives on what is learned and what is “natural”.

I remember during one class with the Dance Laboratory in the spring term of 2005, when I wanted to work with the giving and taking of impulses. I wanted the dancers to work in couples and I asked a male non-disabled amateur dancer in his early 30’s if I could demonstrate with him. In this task, I wanted one dancer to give the other dancer an impulse, for example through pressing his shoulder. As I pressed this man’s shoulder, I expected him to move from that shoulder and whirl into some kind of improvised movement. He didn’t. He just let the shoulder fall back into place and stood still, waiting for another impulse. I tried again, many times, to give him different kind of impulses at different spots of the body. None of them led to much movement from his side. Then I understood that the understanding of “receive an impulse and let that take you into movement” is nothing “natural” or obvious. Instead, it is learnt within a certain set of aesthetic ideas that I hold.

In my meeting with the Dance Laboratory, the experience which makes up my total qualification enters a deep dialogue with what the different dancers bring with them. Our ideas meet, debate, clash, blend into each other and transform. As a result, a way of working and creating dance material is produced. We make up the way as we go along; there is simply no other way of doing it. In other words, we are improvising, on many levels. That is part of the aesthetics. What is being developed, then, in the Dance Laboratory is a transformative aesthetics. What is being created happens in the meeting between the leader, the ideas, the form and the participants. The aesthetics developed is a forceful and never finished dialogue between my intentions, the ideas and expectations of the different dancers, the form and dance itself. A starting point for the transformative aesthetics developed in the Dance Laboratory, then, is recognition of the loading of body-subjects-of-culture that meets in the dance studio. Thus, the aesthetic process starts from an awareness of the multiplicity that already exists as the aesthetic process is about to start, and a willingness to use that multiplicity as a generative and creative source.

When teaching contemporary dance, influenced by the field I am part of, I try to relate to the

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399 Lakes (2005, paper at the International Conference on Dance and Human Rights. Montreal, Canada)

physical forces that make up the world. These are the forces of, for example, gravity, momentum and laws of friction and inertia. When I dance, develop dance material and teach dance, I try to direct attention to the body within these forces. I allow these forces to be in me. In this way, I am connected to something bigger, not in a spiritual way, but in a very concrete and physical way. The force of gravity holds the world together and allows it to exist in space. I can actively use gravity and create awareness of how gravity falls through me. When I work *with* gravity, and allow it to affect my weight, I can use less muscle effort and release instead of tightening the muscles. This is why the field of contemporary dance which I am connected to often is called release technique. I also actively use other physical laws like inertia to work on my body. I created awareness around inertia when I took classes for the Argentinian choreographer and contemporary teacher Eugenia Estévez. Inertia has to do with how mass, speed and force are related. The bigger mass at speed, the longer time it will take to slow it down. When rotating, the further away the heaviest mass is from the centre of the rotation, the more force it will take to rotate that mass. In terms of the body, this means that I can use the heavy body parts like the hips or the head to create force, or I can easily rotate around myself if I use my heavy body parts as the centre. This awareness of the physical forces which constantly work on us opens up for endless movement exploration. Within this awareness, a range of dynamic aspects can be investigated. When I teach or choreograph this kind of awareness of the body in relation to the physical forces is part of the aesthetics I take part in developing.

Awareness about form, disorientation, problem-solving and the connection between form and identity also belongs to the aesthetic principles which describe the work done in the Dance Laboratory. Form is a both abstract and concrete aspect of dance. Form has never-ending possibilities and dancers can always surprise themselves with finding new forms in dance. Form is also very concrete: dancers can work directly and concretely on form. And the form is always transformative. To create form is a method for developing choreographic material and form is a goal for a choreographic process. And to improvise with form is also a powerful way of finding out new things about identity. Improvisation with form opens up for the possibility of understanding identity as a mobile and nomadic position rather than a fixed condition.

As Cooper Albright<sup>400</sup> writes, there is a slippage between a somatic identity – the experience of one’s own body – and a cultural one – how one’s body with its attributes renders meaning in society. The slippage between these two types of identity means that the somatic identity leaks influence to the cultural, and vice versa. In other words, I am influenced by how my culture looks on me, but I can also influence that gaze back. Again, there is reversibility. As society touches us, we as individuals and local communities touch society back. Cooper Albright points to how this slippage between a somatic and cultural identity allows for some of the most interesting explorations of identity in contemporary dance.

Choreographically, and in the dance improvisation class, one important tool which allows for an exploration of this slippage between a somatic and cultural identity is to investigate form. Dancers and choreographers can de-construct form as they know it, turn things upside down, change perspective and see things from new angles. It is about trying, failing, falling and sometimes succeeding in re-constructing form in new ways. When working with differently

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400 Cooper Albright (1997, p. xxiii)

bodied dancers, one way of exploring form is to extend a disability away from being “a disability” into a unique opportunity for choreographic research. It is about throwing dancers – and choreographers – into unknown situations. Invite the dancer in wheelchair to come out of the chair and onto the floor. Deconstruct the chair and use the parts for another dance. Discover that the chair is not a part of the dancer using it; it is just a tool which helps the dancer to transfer in space. Or try positioning a walking dancer in the chair. Wheelchairs are not exclusively for people who cannot walk. Dancers can consciously choose to use the chair in unconventional ways to create an artistic expression.

This exploration of form is connected to training in disorientation and a problem-solving ethos, which are other important principles for the aesthetics developed in the Dance Laboratory. Training in disorientation is about stepping out of well-known patterns and positions, explore falling, being upside down and letting go of control. To work within a problem-solving ethos means that all those problems that the dancers and the teacher-choreographer are going to dance into, are not avoided, but dealt with. If something does not work out, find out why. These problems, frustrations and challenges are exactly what feed into the tasks that can be solved through an aesthetic investigation. This is true for both dancers and teacher-choreographers. Dancers need to solve problems in the meeting between them, and the teacher-choreographer needs to solve teaching problems then and there, right in front of and in dialogue with the students. Actually, as Benjamin<sup>401</sup> points out, when dancers with and without disabilities improvise and create together, this invites them to work like choreographers. They need to try out new things, open up for unknown possibilities, throw away methods and material which do not work, and find new connections.

The problem-solving ethos is closely connected to the ability to listen. Training in listening is also part of the aesthetic principles used in the Dance Laboratory. “To listen” means both to listen inwards into one’s own body, and outwards to the other or others, and to what is felt in space. “To listen” is more than simply hearing with the ears. To listen includes listening with the surfaces of the body, out in all directions. In the performance *A Poetic Skeleton*<sup>402</sup> Karen describes her definition of listening when saying:

– Listening is something different than simply hearing. Listening demands attention, focus. Listening is an experience. And using touch is a powerful way of listening.<sup>403</sup>

Another central aspect of the aesthetics used and developed in the Dance Laboratory is the use of touch. Touch is used in the majority of the tasks that are investigated in the group. The way touch is used in improvisation is not *any* kind of touch, but a *specific* kind, as I already have written about. It is a way of both giving and taking; *taking in* the other person and at the same time giving information about oneself. The way touch is used in the improvisation class is a way of getting to know each other, creating tolerance for each other and a way of communicating and exchanging knowledge and ideas.

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401 Benjamin (2002, p. 7)

402 *A Poetic Skeleton* (2007) with the Dance Laboratory

403 Line written and delivered by Karen in the performance *A Poetic Skeleton* (2007)

To conclude, the aesthetic space in dance improvisation in the way it is used and developed in the Dance Laboratory, can – today (in 2008) – be described by the following aesthetic principles. These principles should be seen as fluid and ever-changing. The definition of them is a process, not a product.

An ability to distinguish and verbalise these aesthetic principles has developed slowly through this study. They are in a way both my pre-reflective starting points for the practical work with the Dance Laboratory, and a reflective outcome of this study, and they are constantly on the move. In the Dance Laboratory, then:

1. Dance improvisation is seen as a space for meaning-making – a world of possibilities.
2. The group works through a dialogical, transformative, context-based aesthetics, where the meeting between the dancers, the leader, the ideas and the form are starting points for what is being created.
3. The meeting and relations between the different participants are of central focus for movement exploration.
4. The multiplicity in the group is seen as a generative and creative force.
5. Ideas are developed both through movement exploration and through reflective discussion in the group.
6. Movement is created by relating the body to the physical forces in and of the world, like gravity and friction.
7. A range of different dynamic possibilities is investigated.
8. Form and identity are investigated.
9. Disability is stretched away from being “a disability” into a unique opportunity for choreographic research.
10. There is training in disorientation.
11. A problem-solving ethos leads the work.
12. The ability to listen is developed.
13. Touch is used as a way of relating, creating and communicating.

The aesthetic space created in the Dance Laboratory with the help of these aesthetic principles, is by no means exclusive to this group. Many of these principles can be found in similar dance improvisation contexts. This is so because the Dance Laboratory does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, it is part of an ever-changing field which keeps extending into the future. I will come back to this in Section 3.5. The cultural space.

### 3.4. The narrative space

To find a name for what I distinguish as the narrative space in dance has been tricky. First, I thought of naming it a cognitive or mental space, but these concepts seemed too restricted. When I decided to call this space a narrative space, it is because I wanted to embrace thoughts and reflections, but also something broader than that. The concept “cognitive” reflects that this space is concerned with thinking, which is one aspect of dance. But what “cognitive” does not connect so clearly to is language and the act of storytelling. With the use of the concept narrative space, I want to embrace cognition and thinking-processes which exist in dance, but in addition I want to make a clear connection to the development of language and story-telling. The concept narrative space also, I suggest, implies that not do we only *think about* dance, but we also *create a specific understanding* of dance through the stories we tell.

Narrative means *story*, to build a story. Dance is connected to narration and language in many and multi-layered ways. Dance is originally part of a story-telling tradition, but with the narrative space here I do not mean the dance and movement itself, but rather the thoughts, stories and the language *about* dance.

It is possible to think about dance, teach dance, describe dance, express how dance is lived, reflect about dance, philosophize about dance, argue for dance, criticise dance and write about dance. All these processes involve language, and are part of developing a language about dance. To teach dance is to be part of a development of language connected to dance. In order to teach dance, you must be able to tell about dance: instruct, explain, describe, encourage and reflect. In a contemporary dance or dance improvisation context which uses many of the aesthetic principles described in the last section, a quite poetic language about dance is developed when teaching. This language consists of a specific way of directing focus to the body, to the physical forces of the world which affect us, to the skin, to create awareness of the space and direct attention to the other dancers.

I always start the Dance Laboratory with a little talk to the dancers, as is almost always done in contemporary and dance improvisation settings. When this story or these instructions are told, this is done with a calm voice, pausing between every sentence. The intention is to direct attention to the body, the space and the other dancers and to the fact that this moment is *a time for dance*. The opening instructions, or little story, for my students-dancers could be the following:

– Start with focusing on your body. Spend some moments to get tuned on being here, being present, preparing yourself for the dance. Pay attention to how gravity falls through your body, and how your own muscles provide you with enough force to keep you standing or sitting. Try to use just exactly as much muscle force as you need to stand or sit tall. Release the rest of your muscles. Soften your skin and let it open up to take in information and impulses from the space and from the others. Keep your eyes open and warm up your gaze by letting it wander over the faces of each dancer in the room. Let your gaze rest for a while on each dancer’s face, to really take in her presence. Allow your gaze to soften, as well as your skin, keeping the surfaces of your body open. Open the pores of your skin so that the space can enter your body. And then start giving yourself a little rub, a little massage, like standing in the shower. Shower yourself with touch and rub your skin gently open.

This little talk which starts the improvisation class is always improvised and it ends up leading the dancers into movement (as in this example, by giving themselves a rub). When I start talking I never know exactly what to say, but I circle around the aesthetic principles which we are going to investigate, knowing that I wish to direct attention to the body, the space and the others. In this way the language developed in improvisation class helps in realising the aesthetic principles which the class is spun around. Dance and language about dance and body cling tightly together.

I have already written quite extensively about the importance of reflective discussions in order to construct understanding of improvisation by the improvisers and the teacher in Section 2.7. Discussing lived experience. Another aspect of the narrative space in dance is the words and concepts dancers choose to use. These are not irrelevant. Quite to the contrary, they are of crucial importance and they will influence our understanding of dance. Benjamin<sup>404</sup> writes that it is language rather than anything else that most frequently continues to limit expectations.

One concept of importance for this study is the concept disability. During my research process I have developed the concept “differently bodied” dancers. In my understanding, our body is first of all something we *are*, and not something we *have*: in line with this we *are bodied*, instead of *having bodies*. With the concept “differently bodied” I want to move around all the cultural narratives that are immediately released when people read or hear about disabled people. Many people seem to immediately lose interest, presuming that activities which include disabled people must be some kind of special needs activity of no personal interest for them. The concept “differently bodied” seems less loaded with cultural prejudice. It includes everybody, since we all, in one way or another, are differently bodied.

When this is said, I want to stress that I also frequently use the concepts “disabled” and “non-disabled”. The use of the concept “differently bodied” only might lead to the superficial presumption that there is no difference between disabled and non-disabled dancers and that without any struggle we can come together, dance and live happily ever after. As should be clear by now, this is not the case. When disabled and non-disabled people meet to explore dance together, this is in a majority versus an oppressed minority situation. This situation presents issues which need to be paid attention to and dealt with consciously. Apropos disability, Benjamin<sup>405</sup> points out how the prefix *dis-*, like in *disabled*, goes back to the Latin interpretation of *Hades*. As is known, this is the name for the underworld of the ancient Greeks. And, as Benjamin writes, life in many ways indeed continued to be like hell for many disabled people over the centuries to come after that. Disability awareness is a rather young phenomenon, but definitely part of postmodern, contemporary society.

As I already have written, dance improvisation, ripe with bodily experience, is a great place for a rich language about the lived body to develop. Language about lived experience in dance is developed when dance is described and reflected about, verbally and in writing. This seems not a very easy task, though. Dancers and dance researchers struggle and grope to find the right vocabulary, the right tone, the right mode to describe what they experience as they dance and

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404 Benjamin (2002, p. 12)

405 Benjamin (2002, p. 25)

improvise. I have already argued that even if it is difficult, it is important to still keep trying. A developed language about dance will also develop dance itself. It will help the influence of dance in new contexts. Language helps in creating awareness. A development of language goes side by side with a development of awareness. This development goes in two directions. Language determines what we become aware of, and the other way around, our experiences and awareness determine how our language develops. Since our language has developed within a dualistic worldview, it seems difficult to express something beyond dualism. In a way, a dualistic understanding seems “trapped” within language. As a consequence, our thinking also easily gets trapped by dualism. This is the most important reason, I suggest, why dancers struggle to find words to describe dance. Their experience is not dualistic, but the language available is. An important narrative is lost.

In this study, the dancers are asked to tell about their experiences in the Dance Laboratory. Thereby, an opportunity for thinking and telling about dance is created. This is a possibility to connect movement, experience and language. In her second interview, Ida tells and reflects about a sequence which was also filmed. The video material in correspondence with Ida’s reflections about it shows how her meaningful experience is anchored both in her lived experiences and in the stories she tells about them:

...Karen impresses me all the time and she makes the group both lively and safe. She opens herself a lot and makes me feel safe... To see Karen run, led by sound, without hesitation, makes me feel happy. This has opened my eyes to other ways of working with dance. <sup>406</sup> quote  
from interview

The video material from the occasion Ida tells about in this quote shows how Ida lives the improvisation: she sings, laughs, runs, dances. This is a deeply lived experience for her, and when asked to tell about her experiences, this is a moment she remembers. When narrating the sequence, she tells about how she felt and what she learnt. She concludes with saying that “this has opened my eyes to other ways of working with dance”. The sequence has meaning for her as such, as an experience, but when telling about it she creates even more meaning out of this experience. She becomes aware not only *that* she enjoyed the experience but *why* she enjoyed it, and what she learnt from it. She creates this meaning through a reflective discussion about the experiences she had while improvising.

The Dance Laboratory is rich with opportunities to tell, reflect and develop awareness about dance. The dancers are invited into numerous shorter or longer reflective discussions about the experiences they had while improvising. In addition, for the sake of this study they are interviewed individually about these experiences. Thereby an extended opportunity to tell and reflect is created.

The awareness about language and the need to develop a language about dance has slowly grown in me during this research process. For me, an increased awareness about the importance of language and about a narrative space in dance is a result of this research process. There is a need to develop awareness about the narrative space in dance in general. Then new concepts and new stories can emerge. A phrasing which is thoroughly grounded in the bodily, lived experiences

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406 Quote from interview two with Ida, April 2004.



of dancing and relating can keep developing. This will, I suggest, feed into a deeper dialogue about lived experience in dance. This again can broaden the meaning potential embedded in the different spaces which dance creates and operates in.

### 3.5. The cultural space

The cultural space in dance clings tightly together with a political space, and also with the aesthetic space. The aesthetics developed within a dance genre holds the cultural values of the surrounding society, which again hold certain political values. My way of distinguishing different spaces in dance, is done in a “soft” way. In reality, when dance takes place, the spaces in dance come together as one package, and the different spaces in dance are in constant dialogue. Still, and this is the reason why I softly distinguish different spaces in dance, awareness can be increased about these different spaces that are embedded in dance. It is simply too easy to say that “dance is just aesthetics” or dance is just “personal and lived”. As a complex, public and contemporary phenomenon with its roots in the past and its tentacles in the future, dance is more than that.

In this section I will, then, investigate what I call the cultural space in dance. Compared to the next section, where I investigate the political space in dance, this one will be more oriented towards the connections within the dance field and between culture and aesthetics in dance. Dance in all its forms develops inside the culture which it is part of.<sup>407</sup> I will try to describe the aesthetics and culture of the Dance Laboratory by positioning it in a broader dance field. The next section about the political space in dance will be more oriented towards society and narratives about different bodies, and how this has opened or closed doors for differently bodied dancers in dance. Still, without doubt, these two sections overlap, and both are directed towards dance as part of the wider society. Both include dance historical considerations.

The Dance Laboratory does not exist in a vacuum. It has not come to be on its own. Instead, the Dance Laboratory with myself as the teacher-choreographer is part of, using Merleau-Ponty’s vocabularly<sup>408</sup>, a *cumulative* dance history. Rouhiainen<sup>409</sup> explains that a dance tradition does not simply exist in an explicit or linear fashion. Instead, a dance tradition is formed out of an endless number of historicities. A historicity can be defined as the production of historical situations by actors. According to Rouhiainen, when used by Merleau-Ponty, historicity means that traditions and history are transmitted through tacit corporeal relations between people and artefacts in addition to through cognitive practices and literary sources. Correspondingly, Rouhiainen writes, the tradition of contemporary dance is continued through the works of all dance professionals and how they grasp and expand the tradition. Being part of this cumulative history of contemporary dance and dance improvisation, with this work with and study of the Dance Laboratory I add on to a constantly developing field. There are a range of books which describe and interpret dance improvisation culturally, historically and discursively. I will not

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407 See, for example, Joann Kealiinohomoku (1970) and Jennifer Fischer (2005).

408 See Rouhiainen (2003, p. 132)

409 Rouhiainen (2003, p. 129–133)

repeat a complete historical overview of the development of dance improvisation already made in excellent ways by other researchers.<sup>410</sup> Instead, I will filter the dance cultural-historical space in dance improvisation right through the Dance Laboratory. From the perspective of the Dance Laboratory I will refer and connect to other sources and thereby try to bind to a field of contemporary dance and dance improvisation.

The Dance Laboratory is situated in Trondheim in Norway. On a national scale, Oslo, being the capital of Norway, is no doubt also the capital for dance in Norway. Norway still (in 2008) does not have a national infrastructure similar to the national dance agencies in England or *danskonsulenter* in Sweden, which work to strengthen dance in different parts of the country, but a lot of effort is now being made to have approval for this idea in the Ministry of Culture. Trondheim lies 500 km north of Oslo, in the middle part of Norway. The city does not have much of a dance reputation, even if this clearly has changed over the last 10 years<sup>411</sup>. On a global scale, Norway honestly cannot be considered well-known in the dance world either. On the contrary, Norway exists in the periphery of the well-known dance world, even if the dance field in Norway has developed tremendously over the last decades. Dance as art has a very short history in Norway compared, for example, to its neighbour country Sweden. In saying this, it must be stressed that Norway did not become independent before 1905 (the constitution is from 1814). On and off in different historical periods, Norway has been part of either Denmark or Sweden. Because of this historical situation, Norway did not have its own king, court or aristocracy of any importance during the time when the classical ballet developed in Europe and in the neighbouring countries of Sweden and Denmark. Egil Bakka<sup>412</sup> writes that in Denmark and Sweden the first court ballets took shape already in the 1630s. In comparison, Norway did not have its own National Ballet until the 1950s. According to Bakka<sup>413</sup>, the Parliament voted for the setting up of the Norwegian Opera in 1958, which included both opera and ballet. Ballet does not have much to do with dance improvisation, but what this tells is that the tradition of theatre dance has a very short history in Norway.

Regarding the tradition of modern dance, according to Bakka<sup>414</sup> the German *Ausdrückstanz* came to Norway in 1916 and was given the name *free dance*. Bakka tells that there were attempts to start independent dance groups already during the 1930s, but that this failed due to economical struggle. Not until the 1970s a new type of dance companies started to emerge in Norway. According to Bakka the first so-called independent dance group which managed to establish

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410 For further reading on postmodern, contemporary dance improvisation from a historical-cultural-political perspective, I recommend, for example, *Sharing the Dance. Contact Improvisation and American Culture* by Cynthia J. Novack (1990); *Choreographing Difference. The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance* by Ann Cooper Albright (1997); and *Making an Entrance. Theory and Practice for Disabled and Non-Disabled Dancers* by Adam Benjamin (2002).

411 This is much due to the work of DansiT (Dansekunst i Trondheim), a non-profit organization for professional dance artists in Trondheim, see [www.dansit.no](http://www.dansit.no) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009). The organisation develops the infrastructure for dance including the possibilities to create, perform and teach dance in Trondheim.

412 Bakka (1997, p. 241–242)

413 Bakka (1997, p. 241)

414 Bakka (1997, p. 238)

itself and which worked outside of the institutions in Norway came in 1969<sup>415</sup>. Bakka<sup>416</sup> tells about how the new types of independent dance companies during the 1970s aimed at a new form of organisation with less hierarchy and more shared decision-making within the group. From an aesthetic perspective, these companies were the forerunners of contemporary dance companies, but many of them still worked within the genre of jazz dance and often with the clear influence of ballet. During the 1980's the independent dance companies grew in number, and during the 1990's Norway has also produced contemporary dance companies which really have made themselves heard on the international scene<sup>417</sup>. The national Norwegian contemporary dance company Carte Blanche<sup>418</sup>, with the state as its major owner, was founded (or actually reorganized) in Bergen in 1989. In 1979 dance made its entrance into the system of higher education in Norway, with the foundation of Statens Balletthøyskole, which today is the faculty of Performing Arts at Oslo National Academy of the Arts<sup>419</sup>.

In connection to the Proposition about Cultural Politics until 2014<sup>420</sup>, which was delivered by the Government in 2004, politicians have admitted that dance has been “step-motherly” treated compared to the other arts in Norway. This has led to a higher awareness about dance as an art form and many efforts have been made to improve the infrastructure for dance in this country, most of which I will not describe here.<sup>421</sup> I will only shortly mention a large national investigation about living conditions for artists in Norway<sup>422</sup>, which was made on order by the Ministry of Culture. The investigation aimed at mapping the work and living conditions of professional artists in Norway and the results of it were published in the summer of 2008. It concludes that among the artists in Norway, dancers (together with visual artists and art photographers) are a low-income group. They have a much lower income for their artistic work than the average population in Norway<sup>423</sup>, even though they have a higher level of education than average. It is disturbing to see this in a gender perspective. Around 80 % of the dancers in Norway (in 2008) are female. The 20 % male dancers earn considerably more for their artistic work than the women, but still also male dancers earn little. Among the dance artists also the “richest” partners are found. That means that still in 2008 in Norway many female dancers are dependent

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415 The dance company Høvik Ballett, according to Bakka (1997, p. 243).

416 Bakka (1997, p. 243)

417 For example, Ingunn Bjørnsgaard Project [www.ingunbp.no](http://www.ingunbp.no) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009) founded in 1992; Jo Strømgren Kompani [www.jskompani.no](http://www.jskompani.no) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009) founded in 1998 and Zero Visibility Corp with the choreographer Ina Christel Johannesen [www.zerocorps.com](http://www.zerocorps.com) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009) showing its first piece of work in 1997.

418 [www.cartelblanche.no](http://www.cartelblanche.no) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

419 See [www.khio.no](http://www.khio.no) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

420 Proposition. St. meld. nr. 48 (2002–2003) Kulturpolitikk fram mot 2014, delivered by the Minister of Culture and Church Affairs, Svarstad Haugland. The proposition can be found at <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dokumentarkiv> (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

421 Danseinformasjonen, Dance Information Norway, can give up to date information about the dance field in Norway, see [www.danseinfo.no](http://www.danseinfo.no) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

422 Telemarkforskningen. Sluttrapport fra Telemarkforskning om levekår for kunstnere. (Final report from the Telemark Research about the living conditions for artists). Delivered on the 1st of July 2008 to the Minister of Culture and Church Affairs. See [www.regjeringen.no](http://www.regjeringen.no) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

423 They also have a lower total income when their earnings from cafe jobs and other jobs irrelevant to dance are counted in.

of their partners to make a living from the work that they have taken years of higher education to qualify for. As the Union of dancers Norske Dansekunstnere<sup>424</sup> commented on the result of this investigation, this is depressing and unacceptable. It should be remembered that this is in Norway, which at the moment (in 2008) counts as one of the Top 10 richest countries in the world<sup>425</sup>, and which (in 2008) has a high share of women in the Parliament and the Government.

The point of this brief historical cultural outline is to point to the fact that dance as art has a short tradition in Norway and that it still fights for its existence and work conditions. When postmodernism exploded in the US with Cunningham in the 1960s and further contact improvisation with Steve Paxton in the early 70s, Norway had hardly had its first established independent contemporary dance company. What is clear is that the impulses from other countries always have been and still are of huge importance for dance artists and the field of dance in Norway. Generally speaking, I would say that most dancers in Norway spend some time abroad studying dance, at least in the form of workshops, festivals and conferences. This is not true only for Norway and Norwegian dancers, but for Western dancers in general, as the contemporary dance community is one which by far extends national borders. The birth and development of the whole field of Western contemporary dance as such, has come into being through a circular movement of ideas sweeping back and forth across the Atlantic between Europe and North America. Also, it should be stressed that the field of contemporary dance has always been deeply influenced by impulses from non-Western cultures, for example Japan and the art of butoh.

To give a very short and compromised story of the development of modern dance<sup>426</sup>, it started with European pioneers like Rudolf Laban and American Isadora Duncan. Mary Wigman, who studied with Jaques-Dalcroze and further Laban, can perhaps be called the first modern dancer in Europe. She was central to the movement of *Ausdruckstanz*, which developed and flourished before the war in Europe. In the US modern dance developed from the 1930s with Martha Graham and her contemporary Doris Humphrey. During the 1930s new ideas leading to the art of butoh were explored in Japan by artists like Kazuo Ohno.<sup>427</sup> Butoh did not emphasise the Western *how much* you move, but simply *how* and *when* the performer moved. These ideas of *how* instead of *what* and *how much* connected to butoh would later influence postmodernism and contact improvisation in the US. As the Second World War broke out in Europe the situation, as we know, became devastating for all those who differed. Benjamin<sup>428</sup> describes the horror situation in Europe well when writing:

As the war spread across Europe, economic pressure continued to favour the eugenicists' arguments and in Germany, Nazi ambition to create a pure-blooded, God-like nation, translated into a new and terrible policy. A quarter of a million of Germany's own disabled (referred to as the "useless eaters") were murdered at the hands of Nazi doctors. Soon the methods used on Germany's disabled would be extended to Jews, Poles, Gypsies and

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424 [www.norskedansekunstnere.no](http://www.norskedansekunstnere.no) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

425 Information from [http://internationaltrade.suite101.com/article.cfm/world\\_s\\_richest\\_countries](http://internationaltrade.suite101.com/article.cfm/world_s_richest_countries) (accessed on 3rd of November 2008). This ranking is based on GNP per capita.

426 See, for example, Bakka (1997) and Parviainen (1998, pp. 80–86)

427 Benjamin (2002, p. 28)

428 Benjamin (2002)

Germany's own artistic, dissident and gay community until there was, quite simply, no one left to protest.<sup>429</sup>

As a result of these Nazi policies, the development of *Ausdruckstanz* in central Europe was completely lacerated. Many German artists fled to Britain and the US. Benjamin<sup>430</sup> describes how the dance artists in refuge took with them the improvisational and educational concerns to their new home countries. There, the ideas could blossom again in a more tolerant and optimistic age after the war. In England, particularly Laban's<sup>431</sup> work would lay the ground for the influential work of community dance that would come. The postmodern era in dance, which is linked to the work of Merce Cunningham<sup>432</sup>, and later to the movement of contact improvisation (CI), is US based. Cunningham's work has its roots in the 50s. His radicalism lay in the fact that he turned his back on the age-old mimetic nature of dance and started to develop a dance which simply "was", instead of representing something. He worked with the idea of chance, and also insisted that all dancers on stage were equally important. Still, Cunningham kept working with technically brilliant dancers, aesthetically using the long and formal lines of ballet and he also stayed "on stage".

The complete break with all that dance had ever been, came with the development of contact improvisation. The development of contact improvisation is excellently documented in Cynthia Novack's book of 1990.<sup>433</sup> Artistically and socio-politically, CI has its roots in the 60s and the revolutionary politics based on solidarity and equal opportunities of that decade. Banes<sup>434</sup> writes that the sixties and seventies in the US saw an emphasis in postmodern dance on freedom, abundance and community. Improvisation often served well to embody these values. Contact improvisation was radical in many ways, presenting a complete break with the formal lines and rules of the classical dance, which Cunningham had not completely got rid of. It took dance down from the raised stage and positioned it on the same level and among ordinary people. The previous distinct line between audience and dancers was blurred. The way CI approached the body also completely differed from everything that was seen earlier, thereby creating a radically new aesthetics in dance. Novack has defined the core movement values of contact improvisation and she summarizes them in the following way<sup>435</sup>:

1. Generating movement through the changing points of contact between bodies.
2. Sensing through the skin.
3. Rolling through the body; focus on segmenting the body and moving in several directions simultaneously.
4. Experiencing movement from the inside.
5. Using 360-degree space; three-dimensional pathways in space, making spiralling, curved, or circular lines with the bodies.

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429 Benjamin (2002, p. 29)

430 Benjamin (2002, p. 29)

431 See, for example, Laban (1948/1988)

432 [www.merce.org](http://www.merce.org) (accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> of July 2009)

433 Novack (1990)

434 Banes (2003, p. 77)

435 Novack (1990, p. 115–132)

6. Going with the momentum, emphasising weight and flow.
7. Tacit inclusion of the audience; conscious informality of presentation, modelled on a practice or jam.
8. The dancer is just a person; dancers generally do not distinguish between “everyday movement” and “dancing”.
9. Letting the dance happen.
10. Everybody should be equally important.

These core movement values of CI hold the aesthetic space which contact improvisation has developed within. This aesthetic space expands far beyond the cultural values of control, virtuosity, able bodies, symmetry, formal lines, focus on the product and stereotype gender roles inherited from the classical ballet, which for so long time have overshadowed also the field of contemporary dance. In addition, these movement values hold certain cultural and political values which aspire towards a different society. As times have changed, so has dance improvisation, but CI continues to have major influence in contemporary dance communities all over the world, not least in contexts with both disabled and non-disabled dancers. The last point of Novack’s list, that *everybody should be equally important* in CI opened up for a whole new spectrum of bodies to enter the dance field. The really radical aspect about contact improvisation was, as I see it, its availability. The development of contact improvisation has been central for disabled dancers to take part in, and also influence, the contemporary dance field. As Cooper-Albright<sup>436</sup> writes, CI had a willingness to take physical and emotional risks, thereby producing a certain psychic disorientation in which the seemingly stable categories of able and disabled become dislodged.

It is interesting to compare these core movement values in CI with the aesthetic principles which I have defined earlier in this chapter for the Dance Laboratory. This comparison shows that the aesthetics of the Dance Laboratory clearly can be seen as part of the field still developing in the track of American postmodernism and CI. The Dance Laboratory is not a “pure” contact group, but it no doubt uses the aesthetic basis on which CI developed: movement is generated through the contact between bodies, working through touch. Sensing and listening through the skin is important. The dance is process-oriented. Training in dis-orientation is an important aspect. *Everybody* involved in the dance is equally important.

Disabled dancers first entered the dance field in the US and England, starting during the 70s. The growth, then, of a cultural space for disabled dancers to enter the field of dance seems to have started in the US and Britain and from there spread to various parts of the world. Looking at the history of dance and disability, Alito Alessi with the DanceAbility project in the US and Benjamin, previous artistic leader of the CandoCo Dance Company in Britain have both had major impact. Another important contributor when the field of dance and disability started to develop was Bruce Curtis, a disability rights activist who came into touch with CI in the 70s, and from there started to think – and move – about dance.<sup>437</sup> In his book in 2002 Benjamin<sup>438</sup>

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436 Cooper Albright (1997, p. 85)

437 Benjamin (2002, p. 32–33)

438 Benjamin (2002)

writes a detailed and fascinating description of the entrance of disabled dancers into the dance field mainly through CI.

It seems to me that it is possible to trace many dance artists and companies working in various places with both disabled and non-disabled dancers today to the influence of either Alessi or Benjamin. Alessi from Eugene, Oregon in the US got in touch with dancers trained in CI in the 1970s. In 1979 the company Joint Forces<sup>439</sup> emerged out of the Eugene collective. Originally, the company had no disabled members, but by chance Alessi met Emery Blackwell, who has cerebral palsy. They started experimenting, and from the mid 80s also showing work.<sup>440</sup> In 1990 Alessi became the director of the DanceAbility<sup>441</sup> project in residency of the University of Oregon. Alessi has also taught DanceAbility for many years at the major European dance festival ImpulsTanz<sup>442</sup> in Vienna. He has also developed Dance Ability teacher qualification courses which he has offered since the 1990s.

In Britain, Europe got its first internationally touring professional dance company with both disabled and non-disabled dancers in 1990. This was the CandoCo Dance Company<sup>443</sup> in the U.K., founded by Benjamin and Celeste Dandeker. Benjamin had taught Tai Chi for some years when Dandeker joined his class. She had been a professional dancer with London Contemporary Dance Theatre but an on-stage accident had left her seriously injured. Influenced by the principles of CI, Benjamin and Dandeker started to explore dance. From this, Candoco developed. The company soon attracted a huge following, and rapidly moved from a small to a middle-scale internationally touring company. Benjamin left the CandoCo Dance Company in 1998 to become a worldwide freelance choreographer and dance teacher, and has since then worked with dance companies in, among other places, Japan, South-Africa and Israel.<sup>444</sup>

The field of contemporary dance embracing dancers with and without disabilities operates across national borders. Ideas and experience are exchanged in a flow where impulses come and go in all directions. There are dance companies and projects with dancers with and without disabilities in many different countries. The Dance Laboratory has been in touch with some of them. Susanne Schneider is a Swiss dancer who started BewegGrund<sup>445</sup> with both disabled and non-disabled dancers in Bern in Switzerland in 1998. BewegGrund has worked with both Alito Alessi and Adam Benjamin, extensively with Dansehabile<sup>446</sup> in Genève and also with Compañía Danza Mobile<sup>447</sup> in Spain. BewegGrund visited Trondheim Community Dance Festival (now MultiPlié dance festival) in 2004, with the piece S.O.I.E. by Marc Berthon from Dansehabile. The same year British StopGAP<sup>448</sup> also visited the dance festival with a triple bill choreographed by Bettina Strickler/Filip van Huffel/Adam Benjamin. As StopGAP has developed and grown

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439 [www.jointforcesdance.com](http://www.jointforcesdance.com) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

440 Benjamin (2002, p. 33–34)

441 [www.danceability.com](http://www.danceability.com) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

442 [www.impulstanz.com](http://www.impulstanz.com) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

443 [www.candoco.co.uk](http://www.candoco.co.uk) (accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

444 See Benjamin's biography on [www.adambenjamin.co.uk](http://www.adambenjamin.co.uk) (accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

445 [www.beweggrund.org](http://www.beweggrund.org) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

446 [www.danse-habile.ch](http://www.danse-habile.ch) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

447 [www.danzamobile.es](http://www.danzamobile.es) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

448 [www.stopgap.uk.com](http://www.stopgap.uk.com) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

it has had connections both to CandoCo Dance Company, Adam Benjamin and Danze Mobile. The company has had great success both in the U.K. and abroad. Somewhere in the northern periphery of this evolving contemporary dance community of differently bodied dancers, the Dance Laboratory finds its place.

Regarding the Nordic countries, I still (in 2008) have heard of very few dance projects that work regularly with disabled and non-disabled dancers. As I was curious about this, I called the information centres for dance in all the Nordic countries in the autumn of 2007. When talking to dance information centres in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland I realised that there is a very thin selection of mixed ability dance companies working in these countries.<sup>449</sup> Except for the Dance Laboratory, in Norway, I only know about the choreographer Kjersti Engebriksen who has worked with blind dancers, among others in the piece "Fragile"<sup>450</sup>. In Finland I know about the choreographer Tomi Paasonen's piece "Olotila"<sup>451</sup> ("State of being") with both disabled and non-disabled dancers. This piece received a lot of attention and toured extensively in Finland, but Paasonen does not work regularly with disabled and non-disabled dancers. In Finland, there is also the mixed ability group Tanssiryhmä Pauliinauru & Co. Its leaders are linked to Alito Alessi and the DanceAbility movement<sup>452</sup>. I have not heard about any Swedish, Danish or Icelandic dance companies which have worked with both disabled and non-disabled dancers. In Sweden the dance agency Dans i Västerbotten<sup>453</sup> has collaborated quite extensively with StopGAP, and the company has toured in Sweden twice.

In this Nordic perspective, the Dance Laboratory, which has existed since 2003 and received regular funding from the Unit for Culture in Trondheim<sup>454</sup> since 2005, can be called a quite special project. It has happened as an alternative to dominating cultural narratives about dance and the dancing body. This, I suggest, is true for all dance projects with disabled and non-disabled dancers that have developed in different parts of the world at different times. They have presented an alternative, spacious way of looking at body and dance. Still, these projects could not have happened unless there had existed some kind of social longing for *another dance*: one which opens up for a more generous space in dance.

In this context, it can be worth reminding about the difficulties I experienced when the Dance Laboratory was about to start in 2003. The group then started with only two dancers, Vera and Anna. Gradually, the group has received more and more attention and interest. When the Dance Laboratory started last autumn (in 2008) it was bigger than ever, counting 15 dancers in total. This implies an increasing interest in the kind of dance context which the Dance Laboratory creates. What is different now is also the fact that many of the non-disabled dancers are advanced dancers. In the beginning, mostly non-disabled beginners joined the group. I remember that Benjamin<sup>455</sup>

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449 In August 2007 I talked to Senter for Dansekunst i Oslo, Svensk Danskotité in Stockholm,

Danseinformationscenter in Copenhagen, Tanssin tiedotuskeskus/Informationscenter för dans in Helsinki and Menntamálaráðuneytið/Ministeriet for undervisning, forskning og kultur in Reykjavik.

450 "Fragile", 2004. Choreographer: Kjersti Engebriksen

451 "Olotila", 2000. Choreographer: Tomi Paasonen..

452 See [www.danceability.com](http://www.danceability.com) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

453 Dans i Västerbotten in the middle of Sweden can be compared to a national dance agency in U.K.

454 Kulturrenheten in Trondheim. (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June)

455 At a workshop led by Benjamin in Vasa, Finland, January 2004.



once told that it took many years before CandoCo attracted the interest of professional dancers. I suggest this implies that for advanced or professional dancers, it takes a real stretch to open up for the thought of disabled dancers in artistic settings. Their cultural understanding of dance as connected to an able body and a high level of virtuosity is often so strong.

In this section I have made connections between the postmodern, contemporary dance improvisation field and the Dance Laboratory as well as pointed to the exchange between the development of dance and its surrounding culture. This exchange goes across national borders in a somewhat circular movement. Now, I will broaden the connection between dance and its surrounding culture with an investigation of the political space in dance.

### 3.6. The political space

The Dance Laboratory has an important political agenda. Banes<sup>456</sup> calls disability the last frontier for dance. That statement implies that there must have been previous frontiers for dance, which the dance field now has overcome. I will start this section with looking at three photos and my stories around them. These in my opinion reveal these frontiers that theatre dance has held, or still holds.

In January 2008 I wrote an article called *The body as agenda for identity, culture, politics and multiplicity*<sup>457</sup> for the Norwegian dance magazine *På Spissen*.<sup>458</sup> In order to find a photo to go with the article I contacted *BewegGrund* in Switzerland and they sent me a photo from their production *Pez y pescado*<sup>459</sup> with *Compañia Danza Mobile*. This was an exciting photo with a dancer in a wheelchair in the front with two walking dancers climbing-jumping on each other behind her. I was happy to be able to use this photo and sent it in to the editor. When I received the article back for a final proofreading before the magazine was sent to print, I discovered that the photo had been edited. The whole wheelchair had been cut away! The only thing that remained was the upper body and the head of the dancer in wheelchair, with the two walking dancers behind her. I got upset and immediately contacted the editor. What is the point of using a photo with a dancer in a wheelchair if the whole wheelchair is cut away? After some arguing I managed to get the whole photo printed, but much smaller than previously agreed.

Another picture which I want to use as an example of frontiers and cultural-political challenges embedded in dance is the photo printed on the book *Dansens Teori*<sup>460</sup> (*The Theory of Dance*). This is a book which covers dance theory in the curriculum for dance students at A-level in Norway, that is for students between 16 and 19 years old. In my opinion the cover photo on this book is an old-fashioned photo to choose for a book for dance students today – the book was printed in 2002. The photo is taken from a dance studio and it is obviously arranged. The photographer has climbed up on a ladder so the photo is taken from above. Spread out on the

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456 Banes (2003, p. 84)

457 In Norwegian: *kroppen som agenda for identitet, kultur, politikk og mangfold*.

458 Østern in *På Spissen* (2008a, pp. 22–23)

459 *Pez y pescado* (2007) by *BewegGrund* and *Compañia Danza Mobile*.

460 Breder, Lingjærde, Nordseth & Bakka (1997/2002)

dance floor a big group of adult, advanced dance students are sitting. They all are sitting with their legs and arms spread out in a wide 2<sup>nd</sup> position, pointing their toes strictly. All the female students are wearing tutus and both men and women are wearing tights. The photo is symmetric and well organized and everybody is smiling at the camera. There is only one exception from the symmetry. In the middle of the photo, among all the dancers sitting in 2<sup>nd</sup> position, there is a man in a suit. He is standing in a grey suit, red tie and black shoes with his hands in his pockets. His legs are slightly spread and he looks self-assured. He is a white, middle-aged man. On this photo, he becomes the perfect symbol of white, male power in dance institutions.

Finally, in August 2008 I had a book about dance and education, *Dans og Didaktikk*<sup>461</sup>, delivered. I opened the package with excitement, because I had written two articles in this book. All the authors in the book are Norwegian and they come from the field of contemporary dance, education, culture studies and they apply phenomenological and/or postmodern approaches when writing about dance. Improvisation is one main theme in the book. Therefore, I was disappointed to discover that the pictures on the cover and back of the book, still stayed within the conventional, classical narratives of dance. The photos on the front and back show a slim, female dancer in what I would call neo-classical positions. On the front cover the photo is positioned upside down; it looks like the dancer is hanging down from the upper edge of the book. She holds her arms in a position which is not quite like, but inspired by, a classical one. On the back, there is a full body picture of her jumping, with one leg lifted turned-out to the side. The feet and arms are perfectly stretched out and the muscles are visible on her body. Despite its attempt to pave the way for new ways of thinking about dance in Norway, *Dans og didaktikk* does not dare to completely let go of conventional narratives about dance and rather uses photos which stay within it. Thus, the photos are also not representative of the content of the articles inside.

Of course, all the dancers on the photos I have described here are white. There is no dark skin to be seen anywhere. Together, these issues connected to these three pictures encapsulate pretty much of what I see as those frontiers for dance which Banes<sup>462</sup> writes about. The power to shape the field of theatre dance within the institutions (which predominantly has been classical ballet) and the larger resources connected to that, has traditionally been white and male. The development of contemporary dance has been much more women-centered, but this has to a much larger degree happened outside the institutions with much fewer resources.<sup>463</sup> The cultural narrative attached to the dancer's body tells about a slim, controlled, able-bodied – usually female, but boyish – dancer. Non-white dancers have not been able to really influence the conditions of and perform dance until quite late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and disabled dancers have until recently been excluded. I agree that, of these frontiers, disability is the last one, but I am not quite sure that the previous ones are torn down, at least not in Norway.

Admittance to dance is not given by itself and it is not easily given to every *body*. Western theatre dance inhabits a cultural-historical heritage which has contributed to segregation in

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461 Svee (2008).

462 Banes (2003, p. 84)

463 See also Cooper Albright (1997, p. xiv) and Olsson interviewed by Landell (2005)

society as well as in dance. Western society has not only been dualistic, but also hierarchical, patriarchal, racist and colonialist. This is the cultural-political space which Western theatre dance has developed within. Theatre dance both reflects and challenges this cultural-political space. As Koppers<sup>464</sup>, I find it interesting to compare the canon of difference as negativity (and its overcoming), which is characteristic of the view of disability with the position of female or black identity through Western history. For centuries, the door has been closed and locked for all groups except white, able-bodied men to active participation in both society and on the stage. One group after the other: women, people of colour other than white, and then disabled people have fought to have an active place within theatre dance – and in society in general. But even if disabled people are the last in a row to try to make their voice heard – with reference to Banes<sup>465</sup> statement that disability is the last frontier for dance – female and coloured voices should still stay tuned. I think there is still a long way to go (or wheel) before we experience a black female dancer in a wheelchair becoming the artistic leader of the National Ballet (in any country). In Norway, I think it would still (in 2008) be impossible for a disabled dancer even to apply for a study place in dance in any higher education institution.

The social structures in society are both reflected and challenged in dance, depending on genre, choreographic or teaching style and philosophy. The cultural-political space in dance is visible within the dance *aesthetics* of different genres, as the cultural-political space is embedded in the way the very elements of dance are used. Benjamin<sup>466</sup> sees the history of Western dance as a story of fracture – fracture and division of the elements which constitute dance: time, space, movement and body. In the heritage from the classical ballet, these elements of dance are used in ways that favour symmetry, formal lines, control (a slim, controlled, highly able body and a choreographed, controlled dance), high speed, hierarchy, order and stereotype gender roles.

In classical ballet there is also a social structure which reflects how society was structured during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when the ballet got its form as we know it today.<sup>467</sup> Olsson<sup>468</sup> points to the fact that classical ballet developed within the institutions, and that the institutions as a phenomenon were established in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. At that time, the overall social structure was patriarchal. The start of modern dance in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was in many ways a women's movement, starting with Isadora Duncan. These women defined dance not as entertainment, but as art, and as modern women they did not want to relate to the stiffened attitudes at the institutions. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and still now, Olsson<sup>469</sup> goes on, modern/contemporary dance has continued to exist mainly outside of the established institutions. This outside position, which is characterised by fewer resources and bigger social sacrifices, is something which has followed female dancers all the way into our time. The

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464 Koppers (2006, p. 25)

465 Banes (2003, p. 84)

466 Benjamin (2002, p 23)

467 Wulff interviewed by Landell (2005)

468 Olsson interviewed by Landell (2005)

469 Olsson interviewed by Landell (2005)

investigation<sup>470</sup> ordered by the Ministry of Culture in 2008 in Norway and referred to earlier in this chapter proves this still to be true, revealing that dance artists (of which 80 % are women) are still a low income group in Norway, many depending on their partners to make a living.

The dancers in the Dance Laboratory have always consisted of a majority of women. As a matter of fact, the group has never had any disabled male dancer. Paul, a professional non-disabled dancer, is the only man who regularly takes part in the group. Interestingly, he is South-American. Cooper Albright<sup>471</sup> writes the opposite, that she knows of few female disabled dancers dancing in the genre of CI. She explains this with the double jeopardy women put themselves in when they display their bodies without the protective trappings of the classical body's demeanour. I do not recognize this situation. In the Dance Laboratory I have rather experienced the opposite; that it is first of all women who are willing to put themselves in the vulnerable position of *touching and being touched* in dance improvisation inspired by CI. To attract more male dancers, disabled or non-disabled, is a challenge for the Dance Laboratory.

The visible part of Western theatre dance has been dominantly white and it has missed other colours on its palette, until quite late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In writing "the visible part" I mean that the performers and choreographers have been white. In the "invisible part" of both jazz dance and contemporary dance, in the aesthetics of the dance itself, many other cultural influences have prevailed. Both jazz and contemporary dance have received major influence from philosophies, dance, movements and cultures from other parts of the world. But, as Banes<sup>472</sup> writes, even when looking at avant-garde venues in the US, coloured dancers did not seriously enter the stage until the 1980s. Even if the avant-gardists wanted to include "every body", people of other colour than white and people with disabilities were almost completely invisible during the early contact improvisation. A bit later, Banes continues, a whole wave of people with another ethnicity came into the field of avant-gardism in the USA. These dancers came to the originally "white" contemporary dance field to stay. Thereby they have taken part in influencing, changing and developing the view of body, identity and dance both in and outside the field of dance. Contemporary dance, more and more influenced by a postmodern sensitivity for difference, received multicoloured legs to stand on.

This history of dance which Banes<sup>473</sup> describes is clearly a story from the US. Dance in Norway stood far away from the line of fire when dance in the US became more multicoloured. During the 1970s the first independent dance companies were just being established in this country. As the rest of society, the dance field in Norway was, and still is, predominantly white. This is true both for classical ballet, jazz dance and contemporary dance. Norway traditionally has been a very homogenous society, even though it has always had its own minorities like the Lapps and Romani people. Today, the homogenous situation is rapidly changing, especially in Oslo and the bigger cities. But roughly speaking, I dare say that both the fields of classical ballet, jazz dance

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470 Telemarksforskningen. Sluttrapport fra Telemarksforskning om levekår for kunstnere. (Final report from the Telemark Research about the living conditions for artists). Delivered on the 1st of July 2008 to the Minister of Culture and Church Affairs. See [www.regjeringen.no](http://www.regjeringen.no) (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2009)

471 Cooper Albright (1997, p. 91)

472 Banes (2003, p. 82)

473 Banes (2003, p. 77–85)

and contemporary dance in Norway have fostered very similar dance *bodies*. As I say that, I want to stress that this is clearly changing at the moment through the work of many dance artists who are interested in a more multiple dance field and stage in Norway. Examples can be the works of the Norwegian-American choreographer Mia Habib<sup>474</sup>, who has a Libyan-Israeli background, and the Norwegian-Iranian choreographer Hooman Sharifi<sup>475</sup>. What is characteristic of these two choreographers is that they show new ways of being Norwegian. This position gives them a much needed culture critical perspective on body, identity, society and dance in this country.

Returning to Banes<sup>476</sup> statement that disability is the last frontier for dance, Matarosso<sup>477</sup> shows that the situation of disabled people is a case in point. Disabled people have for a long time been largely excluded from active participation both in the arts and in society in general. Matarosso argues that the artistic exclusion of disabled people is a cornerstone of their social exclusion because it makes it so difficult to share their experiences with other disabled people and the rest of society. He also argues that as long as disabled people are unable to take part in the arts to investigate and question their experiences, dream up new and different ways of living and relating to others and to share their visions and creativity with non-disabled people, their unequal treatment by society can continue. This has implications for dance.

Through my meeting with disabled dancers in the Dance Laboratory, I have got to know their deep longing for another way of being seen, of being listened to, of being counted in. In taking on this longing, the Dance Laboratory has a clear political agenda. If I as a dance artist continue to carry with me the Western heritage which tells me to look for what is “normal”, and if I neglect to critically look at who is in possession of the power to define what is “normal”, then I will keep closing the door to *differently bodied dancers*. I quite like borrowing Cooper Albright’s<sup>478</sup> expression “minefield” to describe this situation which dance as art seems to rest in, having closed the doors to many *bodies*, and obviously still closing it to some.

Cooper Albright<sup>479</sup> mines the dance field by distinguishing what she calls a double moment of representation in dance. In this double moment of representation bodies are both producing and being produced by cultural discourses (narratives) of gender, race, ability, sexuality and age. As I already have written about, she argues that this double moment allows for a slippage between a *somatic identity* – which is the experience of one’s own body – and a *cultural identity* – which is how a body with its attributes renders meaning in society. This is similar to Kupper’s<sup>480</sup> distinction of a double consciousness. A view from the outside, where disability is given secondary status to a central “normality”, meets a view from the inside, where disability is the primary experience, the state of normality. Through the lenses of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, Kupper sees the complexity of this double consciousness. They are not distinct, separate or in contrast with

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474 See, for example, [http://www.sweetandtender.org/wiki/index.php?title=Mia\\_Haugland\\_Habib](http://www.sweetandtender.org/wiki/index.php?title=Mia_Haugland_Habib) (accessed on 20th of June 2009)

475 See, for example, [http://www.dansenshus.se/templates/Project\\_\\_\\_1998.aspx?day=2009-06-02](http://www.dansenshus.se/templates/Project___1998.aspx?day=2009-06-02) (accessed on 20th of June 2009)

476 Banes (2003, p.84)

477 Matarosso (1994, p 5)

478 Cooper Albright (1997, p xxiii)

479 Cooper Albright, 1997, p. xxiii)

480 Kupper (2006, p. 28)

one another. Instead, the two modes of consciousness constantly feed into each other, reinforce and haunt each other. The construction of an embodied self occurs, Koppers concludes, in deep negotiation with the wider social field.

I share Cooper Albright's<sup>481</sup> suggestion that the opportunity which contemporary dance holds to explore the slippage between a lived, somatic identity and the body's cultural representation is unique and valuable. This is true for choreography, but it is also true for dance pedagogy. The political space which is part of constituting dance pleads for an awareness of power issues. Embodied political issues like dominance, activity, passivity, possibility to make own choices and possibility to be seen as creative are at play in a dance improvisation class with differently bodied dancers. Dance teachers can act like mine-steppers, exploding the full bodily, aesthetic, cultural and political potential of dance art. In this way they move towards becoming, as Shapiro<sup>482</sup> puts it, transformative instead of adaptive dance teachers.

With this, I will close this chapter, where I have investigated dance improvisation as a spacious discourse filtered through the Dance Laboratory. This investigation has shown that dance is far from "just dance". The chapter deals with Briginshaw's<sup>483</sup> questions of *what* and *how* space means in dance and how it is possible to think space differently. Dance is not just an aesthetic or bodily activity; it is not just entertainment or fun. Instead, dance is constituted by and creates many spaces which interact in an inseparable manner. When peeling off and creating awareness about these different spaces, they reveal deep cultural and political narratives about body and dance. All these spaces in dance are in constant dialogue, and each of them, I suggest, holds the key to unlock the other spaces. As awareness about the political space in dance is growing, so will the aesthetic space change and find new forms. Increased awareness of all the spaces where meaning can be made in dance will, I suggest, not only open up for, but *welcome*, differently bodied dancers and their ideas and movement suggestions.

With this understanding of dance as a multi-spacious phenomenon, I now move on to explore the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory through an interpretation of the empirical material of this study.

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481 Cooper Albright (1997, p xxiii)

482 Shapiro (1998, p. 7)

483 Briginshaw (2001, p. 9)



*Photo 4.*

*The Dance Laboratory performing the piece  
The Photographer's Moment, spring 2005.*

## 4. Meaning on the move – formulating the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory

Who dares to teach must never cease to learn.

*John Cotton Dana*

Before, dance had one meaning. Now it has multiple meanings.<sup>484</sup>

*Karen, dancer in the Dance Laboratory*

With the theoretical base created in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, in this chapter I open up and interpret the empirical material collected in the Dance Laboratory during the autumn term 2003 and spring term 2004.

My intention is to investigate how the experiences in the Dance Laboratory made meaning for the different dancers during this period of time. I look from the different perspectives on space in dance which I have distinguished and accounted for in Chapters 2 and 3. These are the lived, fictive, aesthetic, narrative, cultural and political perspectives on space in dance. By using these perspectives as theoretical lenses, I formulate a thick description and rich understanding of the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory during the year 2003–04. Based on this understanding of the meaning-making processes in dialogue with relevant theory, evolving knowledge and theory about the project will be further discussed in Chapter 5. This knowledge has aesthetic, pedagogical and cultural-political value.

The chapter at hand is heavy with empirical material. The chapter is divided into two major parts. The first focuses on an understanding of the video material, the second features the interviews with the different dancers.

In the following, I will now turn my attention to the video material.

### 4.1. Opening up and interpreting the video material

For a description of the procedures I followed and the methodology I developed for the interpretation of the video material, I refer to Section 1.3.4. Video as research material in this study.

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<sup>484</sup> Quote from interview 3 with Karen, May 2004.



#### 4.1.1. The body-poetical stories

When writing the body-poetical stories, I am using three different fonts. I have chosen to do this because I want to show three slightly different positions I take as a writer.<sup>485</sup>

The first font, which is this<sup>486</sup>, is used when I describe something I observe and interpret in the video material.

The second font, **which is this**<sup>487</sup>, is used when I write down spoken comments by someone. I write down the comments as I hear them, though translated from Norwegian to English by me.

The third font, *which is this*<sup>488</sup>, is used when I describe the camera moves; how the camera zooms, moves around or uses different angles. Comments by the video artist are also written in this same font, even if they are comments written down as I hear them.

I also use tabs to position the three different positions differently on the page. In this way, I try to illuminate and report the different positions I take into account when looking at and opening up the video material.

The spoken and teaching language on the video material is Norwegian. All comments, instructions, statements and discussions are translated into English by myself for the sake of this study.

In the following I will present three body-poetical stories of selected sequences from different classes with the Dance Laboratory, filmed during the spring term of 2004. Each story is followed by an interpretation.

#### Story one: Warming up

<b>Date:</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> of February 2004
<b>Participating dancers:</b>	Anna, Karen, Mona, Heidi, Teresa, Vera, Paul, Ida and the teacher.
<b>Video:</b>	The improvisation class is recorded by the video artist for the sake of this research
<b>Duration of filmed sequence:</b>	11 minutes
<b>Part of the class:</b>	Warm-up, after the group has gathered in a circle, talked a bit and said hello for the day.

*17<sup>th</sup> of February, story:*

*(the video camera has wide zoom, the whole group is visible on the screen)*

The class gets started. The room becomes a circle formed by the eight dancers and the teacher.

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485 See also Green (2007, p. 1126), who writes about how postpositivist researchers sometimes use writing devices such as split page formats and other graphic devices to fragment the text of the written report.

486 The font used is Foundry Form Sans, size 9, normal style

487 The font used is Foundry Form Sans, size 9, bold style

488 The font used is Foundry Form Sans, size 9, cursive style

*(as the circle is being created, the camera starts creeping around the circle, which amplifies the impression of the space as circular)*

The focus zooms up, turns inside the circle. The tension in the room increases. The teacher invites:

**– Please warm up your body as you need, by copying the movement quality of the person who steps to the centre of the circle. Anybody can step to the centre of the circle and take the lead. Don't copy the form, but borrow the quality of the movements. Try to involve the whole body.**

While talking, the teacher steps into the middle of the circle. She stands still for a couple of seconds, focuses, waits for an impulse and starts moving. She spreads out in all directions, moving slowly. All the dancers watch her in silence. The teacher moves slowly, resisting. Her arms unfurl, out in space, and then in back and front of the torso in a long line.

The slow movement quality starts copying itself around the room. The other dancers allow the dynamics created by the teacher to power them with inspiration. They move, slowly. The teacher turns slowly around in the circle and her eye catches Karen, who still is standing still. The teacher describes her movements with one sentence:

**– I move with as much resistance as possible.**

The teacher keeps moving, and observing.

*(The camera picture slowly circles around. The focus floats past Vera, Anna, Paul, the teacher, back to Paul, dwells with Paul, keeps going to Mona, Karen, Teresa and Vera again. While some dancers are in focus, others are visible in the background of the picture.)*

The circle of dancers is in transit, re-shaping all the time. Anna arches the chest backwards, opening up (to) the ceiling. Paul crunches forwards and shrinks the space. Karen still does not move much. She listens, and checks her balance without moving her feet, transferring weight from one foot to the other. Mona trickles her fingers backwards away from the circle, investigating the space behind her. Vera stretches her arms out in a long diagonal line; twisting, flying from the waist.

Karen starts moving very, very slowly forwards, by transferring weight from one foot to the other. There is resistance in her movement. She makes resistance with her voice too, inventing sounds to go with the movement. Slowly, she moves towards the middle of the circle. She does not see, but senses the closeness of the teacher, and stops. The teacher stops, too. The teacher looks at Karen. There is a moment of choice. The time waits between them for a fraction of a moment. The teacher makes the choice. The time keeps going between them. The teacher says:

**– Just keep moving, Karen. You can take my place and lead the others in another way.**

The teacher gives Karen a little push in the back towards the centre of the circle. Karen stops for a couple of seconds, listens, searches for an impulse. Then she starts speeding across the space with staccato movements starting from her head.

The circle of dancers reacts immediately. The staccato jumps on, over and to the dancers' bodies and wipes off the slow movements from before. The tempo goes up from zero to ten. The space speeds up, and the time is divided into staccato intervals. Karen soon passes the limit of the circle and the teacher asks the dancer closest to her to give Karen a little push back to the centre. Karen keeps scissoring the circle of dancers into segments, through being pushed back from the limits of the circle by the different dancers she is about to pass. She instructs while moving:

**– I move from the head, fast. I move like the way I used to move when I was little.**

The other dancers steal Karen's movement quality, but they explore it more with their feet and arms than their head. Vera jerks one of her arms in different directions but then remains sitting and swings the arm to and fro, observing the others. She is not being inspired by the staccato movements.

Karen approaches Anna, and Anna takes hold of her, stops her in the passing and says:

**– I switch places with you. And I keep moving down on the floor, very low down.**

Anna melts down to the floor and starts playing with the closeness to the floor. The floor becomes a friend, a playmate. The whole space lowers, flattens out, but keeps its tempo. All dancers contract downwards, some keep moving, some only observe and receive inspiration from Anna, who now is in the centre. The movements are still quite fast, but they are not staccato any more.

The teacher whispering asks Vera if she wants out of the wheelchair, and she receives a nodding yes as an answer. The teacher supports Vera with one arm so she can get out the chair and down to the floor. Paul also comes and helps Vera out of the chair. Vera cannot stand by herself.

*(The camera has zoomed out and has a wide picture of the whole group)*

Karen lays down on her lower arms and starts crawling across the circle in straight lines. When she is about to pass the limits of the circle, she receives an impulse from the dancer who is closest to her, and she turns towards the centre and another direction again.

The space loosens up again. The different dancers have integrated the new movement quality close to the floor and investigate it. The floor swarms with movement, but at the same time the floor is getting scissored up into different segments by Karen, who crawls in straight, fast lines back and forth on the floor, pushed by different dancers into new directions. The teacher keeps close to Vera and offers her body as support. The teacher says:

**– Try to switch leader more often. Try to have shorter leader intervals.**

As a response to this instruction a change of leaders happens in silence. A new moment of choice arises. Ida slides towards Anna, and Anna turns towards her in the same moment. There is a short moment of stillness between the two dancers, just a fraction of a moment. They do not look at each other but – it seems – they sense each other with heightened awareness. Then it seems they make a silent agreement that they have shifted roles and that Ida now is the leader. Anna marks this by sliding out of the centre of the circle, at the same time as Ida slides and spins in towards the middle and up until she stands still.

On the way out of the spin Ida lengthens her arm towards the roof and starts cutting the air with her arm, fast. The whole circle slows down to watch her. The space loses tempo, but stays focused.

Karen has not apprehended the shift of leaders, which happened in silence. Instead, she keeps scissoring the circle into segments through crawling in straight lines. She is on her way to pass Ida as Ida sees her and verbalises her movements. Ida says:

**– Cutting movements, standing up.**

Karen immediately stops, and stands up. It seems like she disappears out of focus on the improvisation. Instead, everyday movements appear. She corrects her clothes, hesitates, stands still. The rest of the dancers are being drawn into Ida's cutting, fast movement quality.

*(The camera slowly glides around in the circle, over Mona, Heidi, Teresa, Ida, Anna)*

Mona and Heidi dance next to each other with cutting, chopping, bending movements, rather slow and floating. Teresa, Ida and Anna, all three close to each other, are in their own fast joint focused dance where all joints are being bent and investigated.

*(The camera picture keeps circling to Paul)*

Paul mainly stands with his back towards the centre of the circle, and rather introvertly he explores cutting movements: he breaks, stops, changes movement flow.

*(The camera continues to slowly circle around in the space)*

Karen listens, stands rather still, moves a bit, but it seems she needs more inspiration as to what "cutting movements" can be like. Vera has come to a standing position with the help of the teacher and the teacher remains active in supporting Vera in an upright position. Everybody is inside their own dance, their own investigation. At the same time everybody takes inspiration from everybody. The space created between them is open. Similar and copied cutting movements jump from one dancer to the other, without anybody actually observing the others. They observe, imitate, inspire, transform and copy movement in the bodies' ways.

Karen remains standing rather still, listening. She needs more input. Teresa takes a couple of big steps towards the middle. She says:

**– Big movements, slowly.**

The big movements immediately rub away the fast, cutting ones. The size transmits itself around in the circle and blows up the space. The tempo goes down parallel with the expanding size of the movements. Karen also moves now, slowly.

*(The camera wide zooms to a picture of the whole group)*

The teacher lifts Vera around in big waves. Then she lifts Vera to the middle of the circle and says:

**– Movement in couples. Duets, two and two.**

The teacher keeps verbalising while dancing a duet with Vera.

The space spontaneously formats itself into couples. Company arises from solitude. Karen stands still, Teresa takes her by the arm and they enter a danced duet. Karen creates sounds to go with the dance. Ida and Heidi dance together. They open up the space with their backs, shoulders, arms and create space for each other; they give and take weight in big shifts. The teacher and Vera continue their dance together. Anna spins towards Paul and they enter a dance together. Mona remains standing alone. The teacher observes it and says:

**– A trio is fine as well .... Anna, Paul, Mona.**

*(The camera picture zooms in on Anna, Paul and Mona)*

Mona dances her way past the others, towards Anna and Paul. Anna is being lifted around by Paul and when she is being put down again an opening is created and Mona can enter their dance. Mona is in the middle, everybody stretches their arms upwards, opening up, creating space for the others. The trio shifts weight, here and there, goes with gravity.

*(The camera focus follows the trio from above, making the stretched arms seem very long, from the side and from above again)*

Anna falls out and leans over Paul. Paul pivots around and the two meet in another weight position shoulder to shoulder. In the same moment Mona is being shoved aside and away. Mona turns around and goes into the dance again. A couple of moments they create form all together, communicating without a word. Anna puts her hands around Mona's calves and gives support to the other two, who lean onto her back.

*(The camera follows the trio closely, looks away to the other dancers for a short while, and then returns to the dancing trio)*

Three arms are being stretched against the roof, Paul twists around, puts one hand on Anna's head, Anna pivots around, Paul takes the weight of her head and leads her over in another weight position on himself. Mona remains standing on the outside again. She takes a couple of steps backwards and remains standing on the outside, observing Anna and Paul, who continue in a duet. Mona goes out of the dance focus, and instead everyday moments emerge; she corrects her clothes and hair.

*(The camera picture drifts over the other dancers, before returning to Mona and the dancing couple Anna and Paul)*

Ida and Heidi are involved in a dance low down on the floor. Vera and the teacher also dance lying on the floor, rolling, sitting, rolling. Karen is flying on Teresa's back, Teresa is standing up. Teresa keeps moving, swinging gently from side to side, and Karen floats in air.

The tempo decreases everywhere. The space turns slower. The teacher says:

**– Let's finish this. Please come to an end.**

The teacher waits for a while and allows the duets to slow down into stillness. She leans against Vera, who is lying on her stomach on the floor. Then the teacher says:

**– And now talk a bit with your partner.**

Ida and Heidi, Karen and Teresa, Vera and the teacher start talking with each other in couples. Anna and Paul continue their danced duet. Mona remains standing on the outside, watching them.

The leader looks at Anna and Paul and asks again:

**– And let it come to an end.**

Anna and Paul now glide apart from each other, and gather into a circle with Mona. All three look at each other, but nobody says anything yet. The leader interrupts:

**– Are you a bit warm?**

Karen answers:

**– Yes.**

And everybody else nods.

The teacher says:

**– Then let's go on with something else.**

### ***Interpretation of story one***

When looking at this story through the lenses of my different perspectives on space in dance, this allows me to discover and construct different dimensions in the story. I wish to underline that these dimensions are just softly distinguished from each other. In the improvisation, they all exist together, intermingled.

In my interpretation of the body-poetical story one, I will describe and discuss the following three dimensions:

*A movement dimension:* What is going on in terms of body and movement? What kind of bodily information does dance contain?

*A pedagogical dimension:* How does the teacher teach? What happens in terms of teaching and how are the different dancers affected by this?

*A power dimension:* How are the possibilities to influence and be voiced in the improvisation distributed among the different dancers, and how is the teacher aware of this?

#### *A movement dimension*

I view the aspects space, time, attention, dynamics and relations as an axis, around which both the dance and the experiences is spun in this improvisation. During the warm up which the story

tells about there are many dynamic qualities which give the dancers inspiration to investigate movement. These are *movement with resistance, fast and staccato movements, movements low down on the floor, "cutting" movements, big movements and duets*. All these dynamic changes are instructed mainly in a bodily way by the different dancers who step forward to be the leader, followed by some verbal instructions to describe the movement qualities which are needed at least for the blind dancer in the group.

The dancers' investigation of the different dynamic aspects implies transformations in both bodies, relations, in space and time. These investigations and transformations are of a bodily nature and they are part of the kind of information that dance contains and offers.

The story tells that dance improvisation offers to investigate *how the body can transform in space, use space and create space*. The story tells about the investigation of space in connection to both the individual body and to the space as a collectively shared place. When Anna arches her chest backwards and opens up for the ceiling, Paul crunches forwards and shrinks the space, and when Vera twists and flies from the waist over the wheelchair, the dancers explore space individually. The whole space is affected when all the dancers go down to the floor. It flattens out, lowers – a space collectively created by the dancers in the studio. The dancers also in an immediate and bodily way exchange information about space and other dynamic qualities when they copy and get inspired by one another.

The story also tells about how dance improvisation offers to investigate *how the body can transform through use of time and how that influences the space*. When Karen starts speeding across the space with staccato movements, the circle of dancers react immediately. The staccato movement quality jumps on, over and onto the dancers' bodies and changes the whole space. Some moments later Teresa encourages the dancers to explore big movements, slowly. In this way the dancers are invited to investigate how the body, and the space, transforms through different use of time.

In addition, the story tells about *timing* and how that is connected to *the opportunity of making choices*. When Ida slides towards Anna and Anna turns towards her, it is as if there is a short fraction of a moment when the two women negotiate without words about a shift of leader role. It seems they sense each other with heightened awareness. This heightened awareness becomes visible for me through a short moment of stillness when their bodies are directed towards each other, even though they do not look at each other. They seem tuned in on each other, and jointly make a decision about a leader shift. There is a flow between them, like an invisible flow of communication, negotiation and agreement in the space between their bodies, or put differently: a flow of communication which is visible precisely *in* their bodies.

In the story it is also possible to read about how this dance improvisation offers *investigation of relations* between the dancers. This investigation of relations has a bodily character, where body-subjects communicate with one another without words. In the end of the sequence there is a duet/trio going on between Anna, Paul and Mona. This is a duet which opens up and then closes again for a third dancer: Mona. Anna falls out and leans over Paul. Paul pivots around and the two of them meet again in another position, shoulder to shoulder, where they support the weight of each other. They connect closely. At the same time, Mona is being shoved aside and away, out of the trio. The trio disconnects. In this way, relations between the dancers are being investigated. This is done bodily through, for example, the testing of how weight can be shared

or how different body surfaces can support and lift the other. The relations can glide between connection and disconnection from one moment to another.

In this improvisation the dancers develop their *listening skills*, which is another aspect this story tells about. The ability to listen is important in dance improvisation. In this context “to listen” means more than listening only with your ears. It has an extended meaning, which includes listening with all the surfaces of your body, to listen out in the space, in all directions at once. When the movement quality by a leading dancer starts copying itself around the space, this is a sign of listening skills. The dancers allow the dynamics created to fill them with inspiration. Listening skills are needed in dance improvisation in order to relate and also to develop a good sense of timing. The ability to listen is also related to increasing or decreasing attention.

This story tells about moments with both increasing and decreasing attention. *To investigate a sense of attention* is something which dance improvisation offers. There are many words to choose from when trying to describe this phenomenon. I think of words like attention, tension, presence, involvement, awareness and focus. What these words all tell about is that there is a concentration and deep involvement in the improvisation. This can often be felt between two partners or between performers and onlookers. I have chosen to use the word attention in this study. When actually teaching, I use many of them. By *attention* in this study I then mean that the dancers show presence, involvement, awareness, focus. Benjamin<sup>489</sup> uses the word tension for the similar phenomenon. He points to the connection between *tension* and *at-tension* (attention) which both have the Latin origin *tenere*, which refers to holding (holding the attention). Benjamin writes that he is interested in how the dancer’s *intention* catches his *attention* and thereby creates *tension* in the room. I quite like the word tension and this connection between intention-attention-tension, but I am aware that the concept *tension* for many people also rings negatively. The Oxford Dictionary<sup>490</sup> tells me that *presence* comes from the Latin *praesentia*, which means “being at hand”. *Aware* means to have knowledge or perception of a situation. *Involvement* has its origin in the senses entangle or enfold. Enfold means to surround. *Focus* means the centre of activity. As one word for all these, I chose to use *attention* in this study.

Increased attention often comes together with good listening skills and a good sense of timing. There is the feeling that the improvisation “works”. The body takes and gives impulses easily, follows impulses and gives birth to new impulses in a constant flow. The skin is soft and open, as is also the heart. The expression “go with the flow” comes from this experience when the attention is high and action is made easily, without pre-planning. I suggest this is not only about *going* with the flow, but also about *creating* flow as the bodies open up and connect to each other through a process which is deeply lived. By this I do not mean flow as a movement quality – the movements do not have to be smooth and fluid, they can as well be jerky or searching – but rather a *flow of attention*.

The moment between Ida and Anna when they shift leader role in this story is a moment with high attention – a flow of attention – between the two women. In this story, there are also examples of moments with decreasing attention. At one moment Vera remains sitting and

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489 Benjamin (2002, p. 52–54)

490 The Oxford Dictionary, [www.askoxford.com/?view=uk](http://www.askoxford.com/?view=uk) (accessed on 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2009)



swings her arm to and fro, only observing the others. She is not being inspired by the staccato movements. Yet another time Karen seems to lose attention at the improvisation. The flow of attention in the dance, the play with movement, disappears and instead everyday movements appear; she starts to correct her hair and clothes. Also when Mona is shoved out off the trio, she shows sign of decreasing attention. She then also starts correcting her hair and clothes.

A body memory is also spoken spontaneously by Karen during this improvisation. In line with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, I suggest that body memories are at work all the time in improvisation. Without body memories, we could not relate to any ideas or movements given to us in improvisation. On an existential level, we could not exist at all as human beings without body memories. I refer to Parviainen<sup>491</sup>, who writes that body memories manifest themselves by continuously disappearing into the depth of our bodily existence, at the same time as they continuously come back from the same depth. Dance improvisation is a space where body memories are activated, lived and used. And sometimes, as in the improvisation narrated here, the body memory is connected to a specific situation, feeling or reflection. *I move like I used to do when I was little*, Karen says. The spoken body memory is not used for anything in this sequence, and it is also not reflected about. This is also not needed in the improvisation class, but body memories could be used both for creating choreographic material and for learning and reflecting. What you learn about is how the bodily processes you go through tell something about who you are and the life experience you have. Body memories can also be used in therapeutic work, but that goes beyond the intentions of the Dance Laboratory.

The story also tells about how the video artist functions as a co-commentator and designer of the video material. The video artist is inspired by the dance improvisation when he films. For example, as the circle is being created, the camera starts creeping around the circle, which amplifies the impression of the space as circular. Later, the camera focus follows the trio from above, making the stretched arms seem very long. Going on, the camera follows the trio from the side and from above again. In this way the video material gets depth. The video material *dances*, which would have been very different had the classes been filmed flat from the front.

The story tells about how the dancers improvise and communicate in a shared, lived space. The improvisation creates a space with what I would like to call a *heightened phenomenological awareness*. There is awareness about the dancing bodies as communicative and sensitive. There is an intense flow of impulses and information going from one's own body, connecting to the space and the others and back to the own body again. The improvisation affects the whole space and all the individuals in it. Looking from the outside, through the camera eye, it seems like the whole space moves as one: speeding up, slowing down, flattening down. At the same time, there are a variety of individual investigations within this larger whole. Within this space of improvisation, the different dancers negotiate about space, communicate and make decisions in their bodies' ways.

In this way, the story tells about how dance contains and creates information, knowledge and communication. In the improvisation described here, the dancers go through bodily processes where they investigate how the body can transform space, use space and create space; how the body can transform through the use of time; about timing and making choices; relations between

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491 Parviainen (1998, pp. 56)

different dancers; listening skills and increasing and decreasing attention.

### *A pedagogical dimension*

The learning that takes place in dance improvisation happens through bodily, lived processes. The dance improvisation teacher has a key role in creating the space for the dance improvisation, taking part in it herself (by actually dancing or by watching) and also creating space for reflections. The story tells about how the teacher, both bodily and verbally, invites the dancers into an improvisation. She steps into the middle of the circle of dancers, waits for an impulse and then starts moving. She spreads out in all directions, moving slowly, resisting. Her arms unfurl, out in space, and then in back and front of the torso in a long line. The dancers start copying the movement quality created by the teacher. The teacher takes part in the whole improvisation with the dancers, switching from leader role to dancer role and to supporting Vera to move out of the wheelchair.

On the other hand, the story illuminates that the teacher does not utilize the possibilities to reflect about and discuss different aspects of the improvisation. She gives some opportunity for reflection to the couples who formed up at the end of the improvisation, but she never lifts the discussion to a reflection in the whole group. Also, questionably, she does not give any opportunity for discussion to the trio who finish their dance slightly after the others. This would have been especially important, since one dancer – Mona – was shoved aside and out of the dance. In the end Mona showed signs of decreasing attention: everyday movements like correcting her clothes emerged and she remained standing still, on the outside. A question from the teacher like: *What was it that pushed Mona out of the improvisation?* could have started a reflection amongst the three about why the trio developed into a duet. When did it happen and how, in terms of movement? How does the use of contact, turning towards or away from, offering support or not, open up or close for a partner? For some reason, Mona repeatedly gets out of the trio, while Anna and Paul keep dancing on their own. Since the teacher continues the class without asking questions about this, an opportunity for reflection about relating through movement is lost. Another spot where attention sinks is when Vera remains sitting, simply swinging one of her arms back and fro as the fast, staccato movements are being investigated. Yet another moment is when Karen's attention decreases because she needs more inspiration as to what "cutting movements" can be like. The teacher asks no questions about these moments, and therefore they pass by the group in silence, instead of being used as possibilities to solve problems and develop the group.

Dance education is often criticised for lack of verbal dialogue. Styrke<sup>492</sup> writes that dance education is dominated by a mimesis tradition, or master teaching, where dance students learn by copying the master. Within this tradition, the dancer in many ways becomes a body-object who is given knowledge about dance according to given standards. But dancers are more than body-objects. Looking at dancers from within a phenomenological perspective, dancers more

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492 Styrke (2007, p 8)

importantly are *body-subjects*. In her research, Hämäläinen<sup>493</sup> points to the fact that there is an enormous need for dialogue in dance education. She says that traditionally within dance education, it is typical that the students learn to reproduce and receive information, but not to create, reflect and criticize. In that way, dancers are often silenced. Within the field of dance education, dance improvisation is different. Dance improvisation has the possibility to be taught in a way that allows individuality and verbal dialogue to a high degree. Therefore, dance improvisation can break new ground within dance education. The question is whether this happens or not. Is improvisation taught in a way that utilizes its in-built capacities to foster a more subjective, contemporary and reflected body?

This story reveals that in this section with the Dance Laboratory, dialogue in movement is given more place than verbal dialogue and reflection. The dancers and the teacher *observe, imitate, inspire, transform and copy movements*. This is a sign of dialogue and communication. The attention in the room is mostly high and the dancers show fairly good listening skills towards each others and the dance. But the verbal dialogue in terms of reflection and questions is not given much place during this sequence. This is a responsibility – and an opportunity – which lies in the hands of the teacher. It is therefore accurate to say that during the warm up sequence which this story tells about, the dance teaching is traditional in the way that there is mostly “movement” and little “talk”.

On the other hand, the warm up told about in this story breaks with traditional dance education in that it is not about reproducing movement material, but rather about inventing new material. Of course, this is also what improvisation as such is about. The story does not show a typical “receive information” situation for the dancers, but rather a “take and give” situation. The kind of verbal tutorial which is given has more the form of suggestions than exact instructions. When describing and explaining, the teacher avoids using an established dance vocabulary and instead uses a language based in everyday movements. No form of correction of movement takes place, and to the extent that one can distinguish correction at all in this sequence it happens in the form of suggestions: *Try to switch leader more often. Try to have shorter leader intervals.*

But then again, the story also reveals that even if the teacher is allowing and does not come with any direct corrections, she also does not give any form of verbal, positive feedback, neither during nor after the finished warm up. Nor does she treat the different participants equally, which leads to a power dimension in the story.

### *A power dimension*

The Dance Laboratory is a diverse group. Among the eight participants it is possible to create – if wanted – many different categories. It is possible to say that the group in 2004 consisted of:

- six non-disabled and two disabled participants.

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493 Hämäläinen (2006, paper presented at the conference Focus on Dance Education: Celebrating the Whole Person. Long Beach, California)

- seven women and one man.
- seven Scandinavian and one non-European participant.
- two professional dancers, three full-time dance students, three amateur dancers.
- three dancers in their 30s and five in their 20s.

I view these categorisations as both important and unimportant, both artificial and real at the same time. In the Dance Laboratory these categorisations are unimportant because the intention with the Dance Laboratory is to go away from and look beyond these divisions. The aim is to find out how dancers can meet, bridging differences and create a third way of dancing: not my way, not your way, but in the possible ways which are created in the meeting between us. In its very intention the Dance Laboratory is trying to resist power asymmetry. Instead, the Dance Laboratory strives towards a balanced power structure, where everybody's voice is viewed as interesting and has equal opportunities to speak, dance and be heard.

This categorisation *does* become important because the Dance Laboratory does not fully succeed in its intention – yet. Therefore, the division of the dancers into different categories can become a tool for increasing awareness of what is going on in terms of voicing or silencing the different participants. Hopefully, this need to label and divide will cease eventually, as the power structure grows more balanced.

The story shows that, methodologically, the improvisation was structured in a way where it was initiated by the teacher, but afterwards it was free for anyone of the participants to step forwards and take the lead. The one who takes the lead has the possibility to change the dynamic quality of the warm up. At first glance it looks like there is a good representation of at least some of the categories amongst those who lead the improvisation. They are in order:

- the teacher, Karen, Anna, Ida, Teresa and Vera/the teacher.

If I look to the categories “disabled/non-disabled” and “professional/dance student/amateur dancer” the improvisation was led by (except the teacher):

- three non-disabled and two disabled dancers
- one professional dancer, two dance students, two amateur dancers.

On a closer look, though, the story shows that it is just Anna and Teresa, both non-disabled and advanced dancers, who, completely on their own initiative, step forward and take the lead. Both of the disabled dancers take the lead only when the teacher has made the choice for them. Karen receives a verbal instruction by the leader: *Just keep moving, Karen. You can take my place and lead the others in another way.* Vera is lifted into the centre of the circle by the teacher without being asked if she actually wants to lead the improvisation. In other words, Karen and Vera did not on their own initiative step forwards to take the lead. This happened by the encouragement or even choice of the teacher. Ida takes the lead when the teacher encourages the group to change leaders more often: *Try to switch leader more often. Try to have shorter leader intervals*

The story also reveals that when the group is encouraged to create duets, then none of the

disabled participants chose a partner by themselves, but were chosen by somebody else. The teacher dances with Vera (thereby also preventing her to chose somebody else or be chosen by somebody else), and Teresa takes hold of Karen. In this way the disabled participants become more passive than the non-disabled dancers in this situation. The story also shows that Anna and Paul, both professional dancers, chose to create duets with each other. It turns out to be difficult for them to let Mona, who is an amateur dancer, into their duet, even though she tries several times. In a bodily way they show more interest in each other by turning towards, supporting and lifting each other while leaving Mona on her own.

Even though the Dance Laboratory actively and consciously tries to resist power asymmetry, the story points in the direction that a certain power unbalance still is being maintained. The dancers' ability to listen is good, but still the non-disabled dancers show dominance over the non-disabled dancers and the professional dancers show preference for each other. The teacher creates possibilities for choices in the improvisation, but she also dominates the disabled dancers by making decisions for them to a higher degree than for the others.

My argument is that this dominance is not conscious, but rather embodied through *who we are*, or more precisely, *who we are used to being*. There is reason to increase awareness around this through reflection in the group. There is also a more urgent reason to develop pedagogical awareness around this by the teacher. Her awareness will influence the possibilities for development for all the other participants. Again, in this context I would like to remember what Sullivan<sup>494</sup> writes when she says that “similarity is something we must strive for, not a starting point which we begin from in meetings between people”. With “similarities” I do not mean that we all should be identical – not at all – but that we in artistic and art education settings should have similar opportunities to believe in ourselves and our actions, have similar possibilities to make choices, and similar possibilities to influence the conditions of the dance. Tacit cultural narrative, telling that some *bodies* are more active and capable of making choices than others, should be challenged. The Dance Laboratory makes it clear to me that an important challenge is to, quoting Sullivan<sup>495</sup>, “actively create our similarities so that we can co-exist as subjects”.

Having studied and opened up this story, I collect the following knowledge concepts for dance improvisation classes to be spun around:

<b>investigate</b>	<b>create space</b>	<b>transform</b>	<b>relate</b>	<b>timing</b>	<b>listen</b>
<b>attention</b>	<b>body memories</b>	<b>reflect</b>			
<b>dialogue</b>	<b>subjectivity</b>	<b>go beyond categories</b>	<b>make choices</b>		
<b>opportunity to influence</b>		<b>create similarities</b>			

For the moment I will just collect these knowledge hooks and leave them to float on the paper. I will bring them with me into the last chapter for an aesthetic and dance pedagogical discussion.

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494 Sullivan (1997, download p. 7)

495 Sullivan (1997, download p. 7)

## Story two: Exploring form

<b>Date:</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> of March 2004
<b>Participating dancers:</b>	Vera, Paul, Ida, Anna, Karen, Teresa and the teacher
<b>Video:</b>	The improvisation class is recorded by the video artist for the sake of this research
<b>Duration:</b>	13 minutes filmed material. There is a cut in the middle of the film, which lasts for about 2 minutes. There are 9 minutes filmed before the cut, and 4 minutes afterwards.
<b>Part of class:</b>	Middle part with focus on exploration. This followed after a chat and a 15 minute long warm up.

### *16<sup>th</sup> of March, story*

The teacher demonstrates with Anna. The rest of the group watches, focused. Ida and Karen stand together, Paul stands alone and Vera and Teresa sit next to each other. As the teacher speaks, she makes a little jump and spins into an improvised dance. She talks while dancing. She says:

**– We can move freely and don't have to relate to each other in the couples.**

As the teacher starts moving, Anna walks towards her and she spins into a dance as well. The teacher keeps talking while moving:

**– But I can follow what Anna does, and look if I she does an interesting shape.**

Anna copies the teacher's first spin and falls into a rebound on her right leg. Leading with her head, going upwards from the rebound, she spirals into a light jump and spins again. The weight of her head leads her downwards, towards the floor, sit bones suddenly pointing upwards. She only passes through the position and the weight of her head leads her upwards again. Her dance is fluid and there is a heightened attention between her and the teacher. The teacher follows Anna's dance, in movement. The teacher and Anna correspond easily and they look comfortable dancing around each other. The teacher says:

**– If you see an interesting shape, then shout STOP!**

Anna stops on her way upwards and freezes in an outstretched position, legs wide, knees slightly bent, arms wide diagonally to the ceiling, like a sail in the wind. As the teacher shouts STOP!, there is a short moment when they both stop, the teacher observing Anna. Then the teacher moves towards Anna and explains:

**– And there she stops, and I can try to tilt her.**

The teacher leans her chest and shoulder towards Anna's chest, with her head behind Anna's head. The teacher holds Anna and tries to tilt her backwards. Anna keeps her shape frozen and allows herself to be still. Everybody in the studio is silent.

**– And then I maybe try to tilt her another way, the teacher says.**

The teacher steps two steps backwards and lets Anna fall into a deep forwards tilt. This second tilt works much better than the first one, going deeper with a sense of ease between them.

– **Like that. Yes, the teacher says.**

*(Paul is visible in the back of the camera picture. He looks very carefully at Anna and the teacher.)*

The teacher leads Anna into another backward tilt as she changes position herself; she runs past Anna as she floats in a shift-of-weight from one side to the other and the teacher catches Anna in her arms and chest and another deep backwards tilt is created. This backwards tilt is deep, and Anna is not far from the floor with her bottom. She remains frozen in her shape all the time and the teacher gives all the impulses to movement. They look safe and relaxed together. They trust each other. Anna and the teacher work in silence, only broken by the explanations by the teacher. Karen asks Ida:

– **How am I supposed to hear if it is you who shouts STOP then?**

The teacher looks at Karen, but keeps demonstrating with Anna. Ida whispers something to Karen. Paul is looking very closely at the teacher and Anna; he nods, says “mm” and “ok” several times.

– **And then maybe ..., the teacher says.**

The teacher gives Anna an impulse back into an upright position. The teacher bends her legs into a deep position with legs wide apart and lifts Anna upwards into a tiny lift, transferring her one meter forwards. Anna is still in the same shape, but she listens into the impulse and easily goes with the lift, allowing and helping the transfer. Their bodies melt into each other. The teacher repeats:

– **And then ...**

The teacher moves away from Anna and they both start improvising on their own again. The teacher continues:

– **And then I shout STOP again.**

Anna freezes into another shape.

– **Ok?** the teacher asks.

The teacher and Anna get out of the “demonstration mode”. The heightened attention between them disappears. They relax, their bodies “sink” a bit and they go into everyday walking. Their bodies are not directed towards each other any more; they do not listen specifically into each other. Anna sits down in Vera’s wheelchair, which stands for itself and wheels backwards. The teacher walks towards Karen.

Paul says:

– **Ok, so shall Anna be in Vera’s chair?**<sup>496</sup>

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496 Earlier during the class, Vera decided to come out of the wheelchair, and the teacher asked if Anna and Paul could borrow it.

The teacher answers:

– **Yes, try that.**

Paul walks towards Anna to work with her. Anna is in a backwards wheel and suddenly there is a small unbalance in the chair. Anna cries out and makes a counter movement not to fall backwards. [The supporting wheels on the wheelchair are out, so actually it is impossible to fall backwards]. Paul gives a start and then laughs at their reactions. Anna laughs too.

– **Just relax, because the supporting wheels are out,** the teacher says.

– **But I didn't know that,** Anna answers and laughs.

– **You can remove them, it is quite exciting,** the teacher says.

– **No, I don't think so,** Anna says and laughs again.

Anna continues with the supporting wheels out. Anna and Paul get started, as the teacher talks to the others. Anna wheels around a bit for herself, saying:

– **Shall I move in the chair then, Tone?**

The teacher says:

– **Yes, do so.**

Anna tests some movements while wheeling, stretching one leg upwards and then the other. Paul walks behind her. Then they make contact and start improvising.

*(Paul and Anna are dancing in and out of the camera perspective, while the teacher is talking with Vera and Teresa in the back)*

Karen and Ida are small-talking to get started. Both Vera and Teresa are sitting on the floor and the teacher sits down to talk with them:

– **So you start with shouting STOP, Teresa. You both move freely down on the floor and when Teresa shouts STOP, you stop, Vera. Ok?**

Both women nod.

– **Ok,** the teacher says,

and rises up to standing again. She says, to everybody:

– **Use a lot of space. And then you can all get started. Use your whole body when moving ... go down to the floor, use your arms, your back ...**

Slowly the space moves into a silence and all three couples go into the improvisation. Anna has frozen into a shape in the wheelchair and Paul tries to tilt the whole chair to one side. Karen starts walking across the space and Ida spins behind her. Vera starts transferring weight from one hip to the other and Teresa gets up



to stand in a broad position, knees bent deep, transferring weight from foot to foot. The teacher goes towards the cd-player to put on some music.

*(The camera focus keeps Paul and Anna in one corner in the back, and tries to follow Karen and Ida in the other corner in the front)*

Ida says STOP to Karen, but Karen does not react. She does not hear that the STOP is meant for her. Ida tries again:

– **STOP!** she says.

Ida stops improvising and instead starts walking towards Karen. Paul tilts Anna in the chair backwards, her foot still pointing, now like an arrow towards the ceiling. Ida runs after Karen and says once more:

– **STOP!**

Karen just keeps walking. Ida looks insecure, fidgets with her hands and does not know what to do. The teacher observes it and says:

– **Maybe use names?**

*(The camera zooms in on Ida and Karen only)*

– **Karen?** Ida says.

– **Mm,** Karen answers.

– **Maybe I'll just say your name?** Ida asks. **Because there are very many STOPS being shouted around here.**

– **Mm,** Karen says.

Both Karen and Ida seem insecure. None of them really seems to know what to do. Karen holds her arms protectively in front of her chest. Ida looks at Karen, carefully approaches her, leans her upper body towards her and tries to take her weight and tilt Karen into a forward tilt, towards herself. It does not work. Instead of giving her weight, Karen takes a couple of steps towards Ida. In the background the teacher says:

– **I'll put on some music,**

and a strange sound – something reminiscent of a chicken – is heard in the space.

*(Anna comes wheeling into the camera focus and the camera decides to follow her)*

As the sound fills the space, Anna smiles and copies the chicken-like sound. She keeps turning and twisting and looks excited to investigate movement in the chair.

*(The camera catches Vera moving and rolling on the floor, Teresa closely observing her, dancing standing up)*

Paul improvises throwing his arms here and there, and says to Anna:

– **You must say STOP.**

– **No,** Anna says, **you should say STOP. Is it every second time?**

Paul looks confused, loses attention and looks at the teacher.

– **No, it’s Paul all the time, we’ll change afterwards,** the teacher replies.

Teresa shouts STOP and Vera stops, lying on her stomach, arching her upper body backwards to the ceiling. Teresa runs towards her. In the same moment the music gets into a jerking and cutting sound. The music immediately jumps onto the teacher and Anna. The teacher reacts to the music and makes some jerky moves, running and shaking her head. Anna also reacts to the music and shakes her upper body and arms to go with the sound. Paul walks behind her. The attention is high, the dynamic intense.

*(Vera, Teresa, Anna and Paul are inside the camera focus)*

Teresa bends forwards and lifts Vera’s upper body towards her own chest. The arch in Vera’s body is exaggerated and Vera’s head melts into Teresa’s neck. Anna stops in a forwards-floating position with her arms at shoulder height pressing air down. Paul approaches her from behind and leans into her to make her and the chair tilt forwards.

*(Karen and Ida come into the camera focus)*

The teacher comes running between Karen and Ida. She takes Karen’s hand and says:

– **I’ll move with you.**

The music is quite noisy and it is difficult for Karen and Ida to hear what the teacher says. The teacher stops to talk with them and says that she will dance with Karen and that they will both stop as Ida shouts STOP. Ida is correcting her hair. Karen stands still. The task causes struggle for them.

Vera is moving intensely on the floor “jumping” from hip to hip. She listens to and goes with the music. Teresa slides from hip to hip, goes up onto hand-stands, is upside down for a moment while watching Vera. Paul takes one of Anna’s feet and one arm and lifts her out of the chair, while she remains frozen. Both Vera & Teresa and Paul & Anna are focused in an intense dialogue. Teresa shouts STOP and runs towards Vera who sits on one hip with both legs bent under her, to the side. Teresa melts into Vera, sliding her arms in under her armpits and leans her to the left. Vera stretches her legs out on the floor. Behind them, Paul tilts Anna backwards. Teresa puts Vera down, the two women look at each other for a second and then Teresa takes weight on her hands and jumps up and away. Vera looks closely at her. The music rises in energy again, and both Vera and Anna react clearly to the sound. Vera transfers weight rapidly from one hip to the other. Anna shakes her head and upper body in the chair. There is rhythmical connection between Vera and Anna through their attention to the music.

*(The camera catches Paul and Anna in the back, Teresa and Vera in the front. The four are in a long line: Vera, Teresa, Anna and Paul, all moving individually. Vera in the front is low down on the floor, Teresa behind her is half way down, Anna behind Teresa is in the chair and a bit higher than Teresa. Paul is jumping, standing tall, in the back. It is a nice moment to remember for choreography)*

The space intensifies, expands and connects between Vera, Teresa, Anna and Paul.

*(The camera zips back to the teacher, Karen and Ida. They still struggle. Ida and the teacher are trying to tilt Karen, but she does not give her weight. Looking at them, the music seems noisy and out of the place)*

The teacher holds Karen in one hand and tries to circle and spiral her around, but there is not a good connection between them. The teacher moves too fast. The music is too loud and demands a lot of attention. Karen hesitates and stiffens. Ida remains in the background. The teacher dominates the duet, now turned into a trio.

After a while, the teacher slows down. Karen connects to her. Ida says STOP. She sneaks her head under the bridge which is created by the arms of the teacher and Karen. Ida puts her arms around the two of them and leans them towards herself. Then she gives them an impulse in the opposite direction, lets go of them, runs around them and catches them again from the back. She tilts them backwards, then she gives them an impulse forwards again, and they go on.

The music changes into a ticking sound, like a clock. All three couples are now in a focused dialogue. There is also a careful connection between Karen, Ida and the teacher.

*(The camera strives to catch everything that happens and the focus zips from couple to couple, always with another couple in the background)*

The teacher holds one arm tightly around Karen's waist, leans forwards and spins around, pulling Karen with her in the spin. Ida guards and observes them, shifting weight from foot to foot.

Anna pivots around in the chair, lays her chest down in the chair and uses her feet to spin the chair around and around. Paul looks at her. Vera leans on top of Teresa on the floor. Their faces are relaxed, open. Paul lifts up Anna's feet and she tilts over the chair, resting only the top of her head and one shoulder onto the chair. Ida and the teacher tilt Karen into a diagonal line. A nice moment to remember for choreography is created, with Anna's and Karen's shapes making connection in space.

Karen still hesitates to give her weight.

Suddenly, the music explodes completely, it "freaks out": a woman's voice is screaming through a sound which can be described as an electrical storm. It is a very intense, loud and worrying sound. Ida stops. The teacher holds her ears. Anna holds her ears. The teacher tries to continue dancing with Karen, but then starts to laugh and gives up. She lets go of Karen and holds both hands over her ears while running towards the cd-player. Anna makes a grimace and stops dancing. Paul holds both hands over his ears. Karen looks worried and lost. Anna gets out of the chair and gets into a jerky running, wanting to flee the sound. Vera looks confused and disturbed.

*(The video artist laughs at the music and the dancers' reactions. He keeps laughing and laughing; he can't stop.)*

Anna shouts:

**– I get crazy!**

Now everybody stops dancing. The teacher turns the music off.

Anna says:

**– What was that?!?**

*(The video artist keeps laughing and laughing)*

The teacher answers:

**– That was Maja Ratkje<sup>497</sup>, straight into the ears.**

Everybody laughs or smalltalks, all seem relieved that the music is turned off.

**– Ok**, the teacher says, **how did this work? I mean – not thinking of the music.**

The teacher holds her hand over her heart and relaxes, laughs, lets go of the music. Vera laughs.

**– How was it?** the teacher asks.

Vera and Teresa start talking together. Karen says:

**– I missed ...**

Anna interrupts:

**–It was different. Challenging.**

Vera says:

**– Yes. Challenging.**

The teacher look at them at says:

**– Yes.**

Karen continues:

**– I missed a bit more ... Ida, if you want to lean me forwards, to the side or backwards, you could have done it a bit more. You were careful, Ida.**

Ida says:

**– Yes, I know.** Ida smiles, a bit embarrassed, and puts her hand on Karen's arm.

The teacher says:

**– But shall I tell you something, Karen, do you know how you can help Ida?**

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497 Maja Ratkje Voice (2002).

Karen says:

– **No ...**

Karen, Ida and Anna stand around the teacher and listen to her. The teacher continues:

– **You can give her more weight. Look ...**

The teacher steps forwards towards Karen and puts her hands towards Karen's shoulders.

– **Look, now ... give weight, and try to give me more weight. Release your hips and give me the weight of your hips**, the teacher says.

Karen lets go of the weight of her hips and falls into a deep forward tilt into the teacher's arms.

– **There you go!** the teacher says, **that's great!**

– **And now let's do the same backwards**, the teacher goes on.

The teacher moves to the back of Karen and Karen gives her weight backwards, carefully.

– **Give the weight of your hips**, the teacher explains. **There you go!**

Karen gives some weight, but takes a small step backwards as well, to secure herself. Ida and Anna are observing them all the time, in silence. The teacher says:

– **You need to let go of your hips too.**

Anna steps up to Karen, puts her arm on Karen's back and says:

– **You need to think that if your partner let go of you, then you would fall. So you don't stand by yourself and hold yourself. Do you want to try with me?**

Anna puts her arms under Karen's armpits and Karen gives her weight into a deep backwards tilt.

– **Yes**, Anna says. **So if I would let go of you now, then you would fall.**

– **Yes**, Karen says, **I know.**

Paul gets into the empty wheelchair and wheels it towards Karen, Anna, Ida and the teacher, who are standing in a small circle. Vera and Teresa have stopped discussing and are listening, too.

Karen says:

– **But if I let go backwards into someone, and then she wasn't be there, then I would just ... BAM!**

The teacher says:

– **But do you know what? The worst thing that could happen is that you would fall straight onto your bottom. It is not worse than that. That's not dangerous.**

– **No**, Karen says.

– **And Ida is there**, the teacher continues. **You can trust that. It is only if she... fainted or something that she wouldn't catch you.**

– **But**, Karen says, **don't you think that if I fell backwards, being outstretched, that I would not fall onto my bottom, but onto my head?**

The teacher says:

– **But you wouldn't do that. If you really did fall you would take a step backwards in the last second. Or you would bend your knees. You would do that automatically. It is like a reflex.**

Ida says:

– **It is better now to have talked about it. It was so noisy with the music.**

The teacher says:

– **Yes, you are right. I reacted to the sound too, I could hardly hear my own thoughts.**

The teacher stretches her arms upwards and positions herself in front of Karen.

– **What is "to tilt" in Norwegian?** the teacher asks (she has used the English word "tilt" all the time, although the spoken language in the class is Norwegian. Tilt in English is a established dance vocabulary concept for her)

*(– Tilt is "velte" in Norwegian, the video artist answers)*

– **Ok, "velte" (tilt)**, the teacher says. **If you tilt me, Karen, then I'll try to hold the same body shape.**

– **Yes, you kind of stiffen the body**, Anna says.

– **Yes**, the teacher says.

The teacher lets her weight onto Karen, who catches her, but takes several steps backwards, thereby creating a deep sideward tilt, too deep and the teacher will soon fall.

– **Good, and there I need to catch myself**, the teacher says and takes a step, **otherwise I would fall. I can sense that with my body.**

– **Yes, I know**, Karen says.

– **Ok**, the teacher says.

– **And then I will try to stop you falling**, Karen says.

– **Yes. That was great**, the teacher says.

The teacher goes away to talk with Vera and Teresa, who are sitting on the floor. Karen and Ida keep talking with each other. Anna stands next to them, listening. Paul is off doing his own things in the wheelchair.

Vera says:

– **That was fun.**

The teacher says:

– **That was fun? Did it work well?**

*(They keep discussing, but there is a cut in the video. The film is turned on again as the dancers have gone back to improvising again. They have now switched roles, so that the other one in the couple is the one who shouts STOP. Vera and Teresa are in focus in the front)*

Teresa plays with handstands close to and around Vera. Vera observes Teresa closely, while moving on the floor, turning, twisting. In the background, Paul is climbing to standing in the wheelchair. The wheelchair is unstable and rolls slightly here and there. Teresa stops in a tilt as Vera says STOP! Vera adjusts herself to melt into Teresa's bent leg. Teresa has a strong focus downwards towards Vera. They create a nice shape together. The attention between them is high. In the background Paul tests his balance, standing in the chair.

*(Anna touches the camera picture in the edges with light, small jumps in and out of focus.)*

The four dancers create a beautiful moment, worth remembering for choreographic work.

*(The camera switches over to Karen and Ida, who are in the opposite corner of the studio)*

Karen and Ida seem much more connected now than before. They both bend and stretch arms, circling around each other, carefully trying some giving and taking of weight. Karen shouts:

– **STOP!**

Ida stops, facing Karen. Karen reaches out for her and hesitates a bit before trying to tilt her.

*(The camera switches back to Paul, Anna, Vera and Teresa)*

Teresa spins around and takes weight with her hands on the floor. Vera turns after her, focuses on her, moves towards her. Anna tilts Paul out of the chair, using her own body as support. She lifts him all the way out of the chair and spins around once, lifting him in her arms. He smiles, seems delighted to fly for a while.

Anna says:

– **There you go,**

and puts him down in the chair again.

The teacher says:

– **Let this be the last time.**

Vera shifts weight from hips, to arms, backwards, forwards, constantly turning around. Teresa moves around her, stays close, flattens out in a low push-up position and then angles into the air with sit bones going high up. There is a strong attention between them.

Paul and Anna seem to have run out of ideas. They both stand still, looking at the chair. Their attention is decreasing. Anna asks the teacher:

– **Shall we try without the chair?**

– **No, keep doing it with the chair,** the teacher answers.

– **No, ok,** Anna says. **Let's continue!**

She runs away, takes one of her shirts off and continues improvising with Paul.

*(The camera looks at Karen and Ida)*

Karen tilts Ida into a deep sideward tilt and puts her down again. Karen moves around to tilt Ida from the back. The teacher observes them in silence.

*(The camera goes back to Teresa, Vera, Paul, Anna)*

Paul tilts the chair sharply backwards and thereby lies almost upside down in the chair. Vera and Teresa are creating a shape together, melting towards each other. Then they let their attention go, stop dancing and Teresa sits down next to Vera. Anna shouts:

– **STOP!**

and slides towards Paul.

The teacher walks to Vera and Teresa, sits down and says:

– **You invented a lot of incredible nice things now. Really nice. You are a really beautiful couple.**

Vera smiles and says:

– **I came up with some smart things.**

The teacher says:

– **Yes, you did.**

Anna tilts Paul in a sharp backwards bend to the side.

The teacher says to Vera:

– **I think it was good that you came out of the chair.**



– **What do you say, Teresa?**

Teresa, the teacher and Vera start discussing, and the other couples also talk together.

*(The camera zooms out to a wide picture. All the couples are visible. They all discuss among themselves in couples. It is not possible to hear specific comments on the tape. Everybody gives feedback to each other.)*

The teacher raises her voice to talk to everybody, and the discussions in couples end:

– **Ok, I saw a lot of nice things happening now. Here I saw very nice things** (she points to Vera and Teresa). **Karen and Ida – I saw a lot of nice things between the two of you now as well. Could you feel now how you gave each other weight?**

Karen says:

– **Yes, I try to ... sometimes I let her fall, I mean I let her fall a bit. But then when I notice that she really gives her weight, that's when I catch her. But if you are too soon to catch somebody ... I mean of course you need to be there and take her ... but if you are too fast to catch then they will miss that feeling of freedom in the fall.**

The teacher says:

– **Yes. And that is a lot about listening. To listen into each other and sense the right moment to catch the other. And it looked really good. What about you two?** (The teacher looks at Anna and Paul)

Anna and Paul look at each other. Anna laughs and says:

– **He was scared.**

Paul smiles, the teacher laughs and says:

– **Well yes, Anna kept the supporting wheels out for herself but when Paul should be in the chair then ... then she insisted on removing them.**

[Anna had removed the supporting wheels on the wheelchair when it was Paul's turn to be in the chair. This makes the chair tip backwards easily.]

Paul turns his eyes up and smiles, nodding his head at Anna. Anna laughs (out of embarrassment) and gives Paul a hug. They all laugh and joke a bit about that. Paul only smiles and laughs and does not say anything. The teacher says:

– **Ok, now let's try something different.**

## ***Interpretation of story two***

Again, I softly distinguish different dimensions in the video material, looking from the different perspectives on space in dance which I have defined. In my interpretation of the body-poetical story two, I will describe and discuss the following five dimensions:

*A movement dimension:* What is going on in terms of body and movement? What kind of bodily information does dance contain?

*A pedagogical dimension:* How does the teacher teach? What happens in terms of teaching and how are the different dancers affected by this?

*A power dimension:* How are the possibilities to influence and be voiced in the improvisation distributed among the different dancers, and how is the teacher aware of this?

*An aesthetic dimension.* How do the dancers work with making decisions about, for example, form, shape and dynamics?

*A reflective dimension.* Which aspects are brought up for reflection and how does this happen?

### *A movement dimension*

Looking at the space as a whole, the space created in this story is very different from the first one. Because of the character of the given task, there is more attention to the space created in dialogue between two and two dancers. The dance improvisation unfolds as what Shotter<sup>498</sup> calls *dialogically structured activity*. In this, responses between the dancers are meaningful acts of listening, understanding and communicating. This dialogue in couples is sensed by the video artist as the material to a much higher degree focuses on couples, and less on whole studio angles, compared to the material described in story 1.

The story tells about how this dance improvisation offers to investigate *the transformation of space, shapes and relations* between two dancers. When Teresa runs towards Vera, who sits on one hip with both legs under her, they investigate the shapes in space their bodies can create in a meeting. Teresa melts into Vera, sliding her arms in under Vera's armpits and pulls her towards her. Vera stretches her legs out on the floor. At the same time, the dancers investigate *how the space and their relation is transformed* throughout the process of the movement task. This is an opportunity which dance improvisation offers: to investigate and learn about relations between different people. When Anna lifts Paul out of the wheelchair, using her body as support, they investigate the relation between them. She lifts him all the way out of the chair and spins around

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498 Shotter (1999b, download p. 3)

with him once, while he is resting on her body. In this, they investigate their strength and how weight can be distributed between them in a lift.

An important element in this movement task is *touch*. It is not *any* kind of touching, but a *specific* kind of touch. The kind of touch used between the dancers in this task is one of numerous different ways touch can be used in improvisation. In this task, the kind of touch developed is one which leads to the taking and giving of weight. Through weight-taking the dancers can get a sense of how gravity works on and through their bodies. The dancers touch each other in order to hold, support and carry the weight of one another. This way of using touch and exploring weight builds on and develops the dancers' knowledge about gravity and how gravity affects the body, and also it develops a sense of trust between them. Cooper Albright<sup>499</sup> stresses that dance improvisation gives the opportunity to focus on *how* touch is being used. Embedded in the dancers' experience of touch is the opportunity to investigate, learn from and change the lived relation between "I" and "you"<sup>500</sup>.

The story also tells about *listening* and how that happens in dance improvisation. The dancers listen to each other by looking at each other, listening to each other, getting close to each other, sensing each other, turning towards each other and moving in response to each other. There are moments of imitating shape, tempo or other dynamic qualities, which is one way of responding to each other: Vera is moving intensely on the floor, "jumping" from hip to hip. Teresa slides from hip to hip, goes up to a hand-stand, is upside down for a moment, watching Vera. There are other moments of "filling in" and supporting each other, which is another way of responding to each other: Anna pivots around in the chair, lays her chest down in the chair and uses her feet to spin the chair around. Paul lifts up Anna's feet and she tilts over the chair, resting only on the top of her head and shoulder onto the back of the wheelchair.

In this way, this story tells about how movement in dance contains and creates information, knowledge and communication. In this improvisation the dancers investigate the transformation of space, shapes and relations: they explore the specific kind of touch which leads to the taking and giving of weight; how the use of touch is an opportunity to investigate the relation between "I" and "you" and what listening and attending can be about in movement.

### *A pedagogical dimension*

In this story the dancers go in and out of moments where they struggle with the task. Sometimes, when they experience too much struggle with the task, they stop improvising altogether. This is visible in their bodies: everyday movements like correcting clothes or hair often occur. This is the case for a long time between Karen and Ida. They struggle with finding ways to solve the task and connect to each other. Karen holds her hands protectively in front of her chest. Ida fidgets with her hands. Ida tries to take Karen's weight, but it does not work. The music is noisy

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499 Cooper Albright (2007, paper at the conference Re-thinking Practice and Theory. International Symposium on Dance Research. Centre National de la Danse, Paris)

500 Cooper Albright (2007, paper at the conference Re-thinking Practice and Theory. International Symposium on Dance Research. Centre National de la Danse, Paris)

and they cannot hear the teacher. Now, this would be a perfect spot for a reflective discussion between the teacher and the dancers in order to clarify what is going wrong and finding new suggestions. But this does not happen. On the contrary, the teacher goes right in between the dancers and splits them up by taking over the improvisation instead of helping them to solve their problems by themselves. She does that by taking Karen by the hand and in a fast tempo starting to lead her around the room. The teacher moves quite fast, spiralling and spinning around while holding Karen's hand. On the video material, this looks like a typical occasion when the dance teacher tries to move (and dance) around a problem, instead of dealing with it in dialogue with the dancers. Instead of being inspired, Karen stiffens and hesitates; the music is very noisy; she is unable to sense what the teacher is doing, and Ida remains walking behind them, not able to hear what the teacher says. The connecting between the three of them fails. This situation does not change until something important happens: the teacher *slows down*.

In interview three, I watched this video sequence together with Ida. In the discussion we had about the sequence, we talked about the fact that the teacher became too dominant. When looking at the video sequence which story two is based on, the following discussion took place between Ida and me:

Ida: Yes, that sequence. Yes, now I remember it. Yes, I remember that Karen did not understand that it was her I shouted STOP to. But she took it very nicely. Because I forget that she does not see.

Ida watches for a long time, smiles a bit.

Tone: I think that I intervene too much here now, but anyway we agreed that you would try to tilt both of us.

Ida: Yes, I remember ... there was loud music and I did not quite know what to do.

Tone: No, I have the feeling that this was a sequence ... where it does not really work. I should have stayed out of it, I intervened too much, I think.

Ida keeps looking in silence.

Ida: Yes, because here it is mostly you who move ... and then Karen is attached to you, in a way.

They talk a bit about the music and the fact that it was so loud.

Ida: I think I felt a bit unsure about what to do.

Tone: Yes, it looks that way. I think it looks like you remain a bit on the outside, frankly speaking.

Ida: Yes, I did not know whether you took over or ... yes.

Tone: Yes.<sup>501</sup> Quote interview

In this discussion Ida confirms that the listening between the dancers and the teacher failed and that the teacher's inference made her feel insecure. To solve this problem by themselves would have been an important learning opportunity for Karen and Ida. The dancers needed support

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<sup>501</sup> Quote from interview three with Ida, May 2004.

by the teacher as a partner to dialogue with, but not interference to this degree. To *slow down* and *interfere less* seems to be good advice for the teacher.

Still, this story shows an improvisation which works from within a clear problem-solving ethos. There is a movement task to investigate and a “problem” to “solve”: to explore shapes in dialogue. When questions arise, time is also given to reflect and discuss, which is another way of working with problem-solving. Benjamin<sup>502</sup> writes that dance improvisation is a kind of cognitive and physical activity which has the possibility of promoting the problem-solving ability of the students. In this sequence, the group works bodily and reflectively with solving and exploring movement challenges. The teacher gives space for exploration to the different couples, she intervenes too much but she also allows and engages in questions and discussions. In this story, the teacher uses both positive confirmation and new suggestions as feedback many times. There are no direct corrections or negative comments, but verbal and bodily suggestions. The teacher also gives space for the dancers to give feedback and demonstrate to each other like Anna and Karen do.

The story also tells about *music as partner, influencer and disturber of dance improvisation*. Often, music is not used in the improvisation class. Silence gives more space for movement investigation. In this case, a quite distinct and experimental score was used. The story shows that the music in itself was so influential that it made it difficult for the dancers to concentrate on the movement task. The music was both inviting and disturbing; it sometimes inspired the quality of the movements, but sometimes it also cut off dialogue as it drew too much attention. In the end, when the music went completely “crazy”, it even stopped the improvisation altogether. It totally dominated the space and it became impossible for the dancers to concentrate on the dialogue between them. The story can point to the power of music as an art form in itself. Music is clearly part of the space created and it needs to be chosen carefully if used. Sometimes, silence gives more space for the process of investigation that improvisation is.

This story shows a teaching style which is built on invitations for movement explorations, feedback in the form of both bodily shown and verbally given suggestions, and positive confirmation. It also shows a teacher who easily becomes too dominating. She needs to find a better balance of being involved as a mover, and stepping aside to allow the dancers to explore by themselves.

### *A power dimension*

For this improvisation, the teacher decides who is going to work with whom. She asks Vera and Teresa to work together, Paul and Anna, and Ida and Karen. For Paul and Anna, there is an additional task: that one of them is always in the wheelchair, which they borrow from Vera. That also gives Vera an opportunity to come out of the chair and work close to the floor. This arrangement means that all three couples in one way or the other works with an element of something unknown. Ida and Karen are not very used to working with each other and they represent something unknown for each other. The same goes for Vera and Teresa. In addition,

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<sup>502</sup> Benjamin (2002, p. 10)

they have the challenge of working low down, on the floor. Paul and Anna know each other quite well, but they are challenged to work with the wheel chair, which is different for them.

In a dance class with differently bodied dancers, the dancers just in *who they are* represent something “unknown” for each other. In this meeting between different participants, the dancers are confronted with the “in-between”, the unknown and un-investigated ways of moving and relating which lies in the meeting between them, who they are and what they bring with them. In this story, the different dancers investigate these relations deeply. The dialogues flow in both directions between the partners in the couples, and problems are experienced and solved by both parts. When observing this whole sequence, the group seems diverse but power balanced, where everybody seems to have a voice in both the movement exploration and the verbal problem solving. (The teacher is an exception: for a while she becomes too dominant). Everybody is needed for the movement exploration that takes place. The aspect of touch is of crucial importance. The different dancers, working in couples, reach out and touch each other. In doing this, the dancers come up with interesting and moving movement material.

There are two dancers who stand out as the most active talkers in this story. They are Karen and Anna. This is also true for the whole video material collected. Karen and Anna by far exceed the others in contributing with questions, comments and discussions. They also often discuss with each other (and with the teacher). In my experience, this contribution is mainly positive and often stimulates other participants to take part in discussions. This is also confirmed by the interviews. Especially Karen, but also Anna, is mentioned by many of the others in the interviews as somebody who has inspired them in the project.

### *An aesthetic dimension*

This story tells about an improvisation which is built around a task with a set structure given by the teacher. In couples, one dancer takes the role of a leader (or choreographer). The leader watches her partner closely and shouts STOP! when she sees an interesting shape. This exercise includes an aesthetic element: to watch and choose what shape you prefer. This invites the dancers to make choices. The observation between the dancers in the couples is a work which has a choreographic dimension. In a way, the dancers get a chance to work as choreographers when working with this task. The task invites the dancers to improvise with focus on *shape* and *dialogue in couples*. Every time a dancer shouts STOP to her partner, an aesthetic evaluation takes place.

There is also another level of an aesthetic dimension in this story, which mainly is created from the outside of the group through the camera eye. The camera catches some material which for me stands out as choreographically interesting. It is interesting because the dialogue between the dancers is attentive. The form they create in space communicates and works well. This highlights how improvisational processes are used to feed into choreographic ideas. Investigation through improvisation functions as choreographic research. Sometimes the result of such investigations in improvisation can be movement material to build choreography.

## A reflective dimension

Of the 13 minutes which this improvisation lasted, a substantial part of the time is used to questions and reflection. Actually, more time is given for talking than moving during this section. Thereby, there is a clear reflective dimension in this story.

As a result of a break which comes when the music is turned off, time is given for a long discussion between Karen, the teacher, Anna and Ida about giving weight. The teacher enters a problem-solving discussion and exploration, where Karen and Anna are actively involved and Ida is observing and following. In this discussion the movement exploration, reflection, problem-solving and learning circles around one movement quality: *weight*. Weight is a basic element in dance and the use of weight in different ways creates different dynamics. These qualities are both lived and felt in the dancers' bodies, but they are also of aesthetic importance in terms of what an observer/audience will see and feel from the outside. Also, the giving of weight is connected to trust.

The teacher asks Karen if she knows how she can help Ida to take more weight. By this comment, instead of telling Ida to take more weight, the teacher invites Karen to *act*. This builds on the assumption that when you experience a problem in improvisation, you are part of the problem but also always part of the solution. It is easy to want the other to change, but it might also be worthwhile thinking about what you can do yourself to change the situation. In the end, the teacher, Karen, Anna and Ida conclude that if you want somebody to *take* more of your weight, you can try *giving* more weight yourself.

At the very end of the story, there is also another spoken dialogue between Karen and the teacher. Again, Karen shows that she has discovered another movement aspect: *the freedom of a fall*:

– If you are too soon to catch somebody ... then they will miss that feeling of freedom in the fall.<sup>503</sup> quote  
video material

This is something Karen has discovered in movement, it is a lived experience for her, but she also reflects on it. Instead of seeing a fall as something dangerous, she has discovered the *feeling of freedom in a fall*.

The lived experience described in this story leads to thoughts and reflections. The topics reflected upon are *weight, trust and falling*.

I add more hooks collected from the body-poetical story 2 to my list of knowledge hooks which dance improvisation can be spun around:

investigate movement	create space	transform	relate	timing	listen
attention	body memories	reflect			
dialogue	subjectivity	go beyond categories		make choices	
opportunity to influence	create similarities		explore form		
work like choreographers	solve problems	freedom			
music as partner	touch	confirmation	trust		
movement qualities	allow	own action	slow down		

<sup>503</sup> Quote by Karen on the video material described in story two.

I now will now move on to the third and last body-poetical story.

### Story three: Listening into a duet

<b>Date:</b>	11th of May, 2004
<b>Participating dancers:</b>	In focus: Vera, Anna and Paul.
<b>Watching dancers:</b>	Ida, Karen, Teresa, Heidi, Mona and the teacher.
<b>Video:</b>	The improvisation class is recorded by the video artist for the sake of this research.
<b>Duration:</b>	5 minutes
<b>Part of class:</b>	Last part of the class. An open improvisation where a line was drawn between the "everyday space", where the dancers could sit down and watch, and the "dance space", where dancers took an active part in an improvisation. No time limit was set for this open improvisation. No music was used. This story focuses on the very last part of this open improvisation, on a trio between Paul, Vera and Anna, which then developed into a duet between Vera and Anna. The full open improvisation lasted 30 minutes.

#### *11<sup>th</sup> of May, story*

*(The video picture zooms up from wide focus to follow Vera and Paul, with Teresa and Anna dancing behind them.)*

Paul and Vera come walking and wheeling into the camera focus. Paul holds his hands on Vera's knees and pulls her and the chair backwards. Vera leans forwards. They are cheek to cheek. Behind them Teresa and Anna lie down on the floor and cycle with their legs up towards the ceiling. Paul – still cheek to cheek with Vera – pivots slowly around and away from Vera.

In the same moment, Teresa and Anna roll around, sitting on their bottoms, with their feet going from upwards down to the floor again, and they end up standing. Teresa ends up facing another direction and chooses to jump away from her dialogue with Anna.

Anna ends up facing Vera and Paul. Paul stands face to face with Vera; he is looking at her. The three of them are listening closely to each other. Vera does a tiny movement with her hand, probably to loosen it up, as one of her hands often stiffens and cramps. Paul picks up that movement and starts doing a tiny roll with his right hand. Anna sees his movement and picks up the same movement with one of her hands, but makes it bigger and lets the movement transmit through her body. Paul does the same and the tiny movement in his hand transmits like waves into his arms. As a response, Vera dives forwards into a deep forwards lean, sitting in the chair. As Vera lowers in space, Anna does too, flattening down into a forward bend, standing on both feet. She lets her outstretched arms whirl her around into a spin which moves her around the wheelchair. She comes out of the spin into a backwards bend over Vera, who is still in a deep forward bend in the chair. Anna gives her weight onto Vera completely. Their faces are not visible; Vera is in a deep forward bend, Anna's face disappearing behind the chair. Anna tests the balance and lifts both her feet off the ground. The balance works, and she lets her feet float towards the ceiling.

Behind them, Paul balances, both feet tight together, his back, shoulder blades and arms waving, floating,



whirling intensely; picking up the quality of Anna's foot dance.

Everybody is watching in silence.

Paul lets go of his attention towards Vera and Anna, follows the direction of his outstretched arm out away from the dance floor. He sits down to watch.

Vera and Anna are alone on the floor with everybody's attention directed towards them. The flow of attention is high between the two women. Anna contracts up onto her feet, keeps close to Vera and spins around her over to a squatting position on the other side of the wheelchair. Anna sits there for a short moment and then slides on her bottom backwards, looking for eye contact with Vera. Vera rises up to a sitting position. Both women look at each other, Anna sitting on her knees in front of Vera, Vera looking down at her.

Anna lets go of eye contact with Vera and looks at the front of the wheelchair instead. She puts her hands on the foot support on the chair and pulls the chair towards her, while sliding on her hips, rolling backwards. Vera helps in rolling towards her, using her hands to move the wheels. Anna lets go of the chair and walks slowly backwards, in a squat position, looking intensely at Vera. Vera looks at her and follows her, slowly. Vera comes to a stop and Anna rolls around on her hips, positioning herself next to Vera on the right side. Anna sits on her bottom with her left side tightly glued to the chair. She leans her head into Vera's right arm. Vera responds with leaning her head towards Anna. They stay there for a while.

The studio is very silent. Only the sounds of Vera's and Anna's moving bodies and the wheel chair can be heard; cloth gliding, wrinkling and scratching towards each other; the soft sound of the rubber surface of the wheels being squeezed on the wooden floor.

As Anna and Vera press their heads into each other, they lower forwards into a forwards bend. This movement affects the chair and it starts rolling backwards, in a circle, slowly. Vera and Anna go with the circle, still keeping in contact with their heads. Anna helps in directing the movement around by walking her feet on the floor, giving her weight onto Vera's head, leaning into Vera. After a full circle with the chair, Vera slowly rises to an upwards sitting position, Anna loses her contact point and melts down with her head towards Vera's knees. Anna pivots around; keeps going with the momentum. Vera has a strong focus downwards towards Anna and helps directing the chair with one hand. Anna rises up to standing on her knees; Vera stops the chair with one hand, and keeps it still and stable.

Both women look at each other, straight into the eyes, in front of each other. Jointly they fall, arching backwards towards each other. The back of their heads touch, the touch rolls over their necks, upper backs, and back to the back of their heads. They are both in a backwards bend, arching their upper bodies backwards, taking the weight of each other.

It is very, very silent in the room. Everybody's attention is on the dancing couple.

Then Anna lets go of the touch. She pivots around on her knees, sits down on her heels. She pulls Vera's chair in the foot support, twice, directing the chair towards the wall where the rest of the group is sitting, watching. It looks like she is trying to send Vera out of the dance space, making their improvisation end.

But neither of them lets go completely. The flow of attention between them is still there.

Vera stops the chair from rolling towards the wall. She waits for a moment, looks straight forward. Anna adjusts herself into the same direction as Vera, looking closely at Vera, following her moves.

Then Vera starts rolling the wheelchair, slowly towards the side of the studio, rolling along the line of dancers who are sitting and watching. Anna spins around on her hips and slides behind the wheelchair. Probably Vera does not notice that Anna is there. Anna sticks her legs under Vera's chair, and pushes herself with the arms so she goes with Vera's chair. Vera wheels towards the end of the row of dancers and then looks backwards to reverse the chair into the row. Then she notices Anna, and rolls the wheelchair forwards instead, out on the dance floor again. Anna follows, still with her legs under the chair. They roll for a moment, and then Anna remains laying, pointing her feet like an arrow under Vera's wheelchair.

Vera wheels away from Anna's feet and then spins around. Anna spins around in the same moment, and now takes the decision to really leave the dance floor herself. She glides off the dance floor and sits down in the row of watching dancers.

Vera is alone on the dance floor. She looks at Anna for a moment, then smiles and wheels off the dance floor. Vera's smile makes everybody smile. It is clear that the improvisation is over.

Everybody smiles and looks at each other. Anna's face is very open. Vera is smiling. Nobody says anything for a while, they just look at each other, smiling.

After a while the teacher says:

**– Some moments? Experiences? Comments? Did you see some exciting moments?**

Ida says:

**–Yes, here in the end ... when Vera spun the wheelchair around and Anna rolled around on her hips in the same moment ... that was such a nice moment.**

*(Anna is in camera focus while Ida is talking. She looks happy, nods her head; agrees with Ida.)*

Anna has a very open face. She blushes, smiles, looks vulnerable.

The teacher says:

**– Yes, I think it was a long duet between Vera and Anna which was very nice. Where the tension was very high all the time. It started over there with a trio. It was when you (pointing to Teresa) remained a bit on the outside and chose to step out. Then it was clear that it was Anna and Vera and Paul who were involved in something. From that moment I think you had an incredibly beautiful duet going on. Both of you. Both of you very good at picking impulses from each other.**

Vera smiles, she looks happy and strong. Anna nods, she looks open and vulnerable.

The teacher goes on to talk about other episodes in the open improvisation.

### ***Interpretation of story three***

In this story I recognise the same dimensions as in the previous story: a movement, pedagogical, power, aesthetic and reflective dimension. Still this story is different because it describes and interprets one trio which develops out of a long open improvisation. A lot of investigating and learning in movement takes place during an improvisation like this, but it has less “direct teaching” attached to it. Instead, the teaching is present in the build up for this task. An open improvisation is not a beginner’s task. The open improvisation space can be described like an aesthetic and fictive space which functions with a heightened phenomenological awareness. It is a world of possibilities, where the dancers are attuned to each other. By the time they enter an open improvisation, they need to have developed a fair amount of improvisation skills already, including the ability to see all the other dancers as interesting dance partners to dialogue with.

This story narrates a sequence of the last class during the spring of 2004. That means that the dancers now had worked together for quite a while. That made the challenge of an open improvisation suitable. An open improvisation is both an opportunity and a risk, as it is not “firmly in the hands” of the teacher. Anything can happen.

#### *A movement and an aesthetic dimension*

In this story, the space is energized and vitalised through the *movement*, *aesthetic choices* and the *flow of attention* between the dancers. The whole space seems extremely lived and alive. As the dialogue develops between Vera and Anna, and Paul to begin with, the audience (which consists of the other dancers) seems spellbound. It is completely silent and all that is heard are the sounds of the moving bodies: bodies which meet and share weight, surfaces of skin that stroke past each other, legs that glide over the bedding and wheels that press against the floor. The attention between the dancers is very high, it seems tangible. It has the character of a strong focus, but also of excitement and curiosity of the other and of what the dialogue will bring. Everything in the space zooms in on them. Going from wide zoom, the video artist zooms in on Paul and Vera as they start what is going to be a trio. There are still other dancers on the floor, but the video artist chooses to focus on Paul, Vera and Anna right from the beginning of the happening. It seems he sees that there is *something there*.

There are great listening skills between the dancers in this trio developing to a duet. This creates a close dialogue. I ask myself how I can see that, and I both watch the video and read the story over and over again. Why do I say that this is a close dialogue? Why does it move me?

Their listening skills, attention to each other and close dialogue is visible through the way they *make connections*. They make connections through their *use of form*. Their wordless dialogue happens through a joint exploration of form. They propose each other movements and they answer each other in movement. If one of them flattens out in space, then so does the other, maybe not in exactly the same way, but in a similar one. Vera and Anna (and Paul to start with) create similarities in form. But from that similarity they, or one of them, goes on and initiates another movement, which the other then responds to. Suggestions and answers jump back and

forth from one to the other. There is a constant switch between individuality and solidarity, movement suggestion and response, observing, connecting, touching and creating. The dialogue seems to contain the following processes:

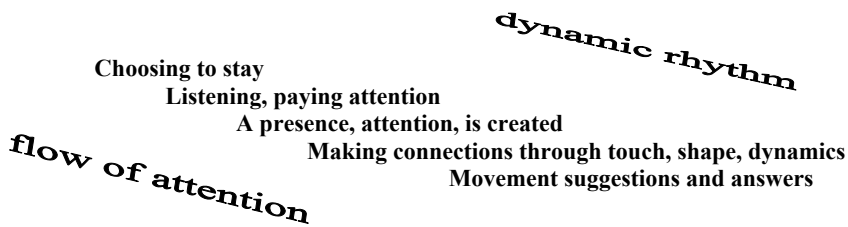


Figure 2 (Østern). Processes in the dialogue created in the improvisation between Vera and Anna in the body-poetical story three.

The processes in the dialogue seem to create and be created in a dynamic rhythm and flow of attention. As the dialogue goes on, it starts over and over again, always coming back to the critical point, which is the choice to stay.

Dancers in an improvised dialogue are constantly faced with the freedom to stay or leave. I suggest that the sensing of the dynamic rhythm and the flow of attention works as feedback to the involved dancers. If they sense a flow of attention and good dynamic rhythm, they will stay. If the flow or rhythm starts to break, there is a higher chance that they choose to leave. But as the flow of the dialogue is not only something which the dancers exist in but something which is actually created by them, they can also stay and try to re-create a sense of flow and connection between them.

As the improvised dialogue is created through making connections in form, the lived dialogue connects to aesthetic aspects. Meaning is created between them in dialogue and in this dialogue the dancers constantly make *aesthetic choices*: Which shape? What dynamics? What kind of touch? These aesthetic choices happen spontaneously through a constant suggesting and answering in movement.

Also *identity* is explored in the meeting between the two women, Anna and Vera, as they develop their dialogue. Who are you? Who am I? they seem to ask. There is a real interest from both dancers in finding out about the other person's point of view in this duet, created and expressed in movement.

This story then, tells about how the dancers *explore movement, shape, form, dynamics and identity* as they *make aesthetic choices, connect, relate closely, listen to each other* and manage to create a *flow of attention* between them. This is a kind of information and knowledge that dance improvisation holds the possibility to develop.

In an open improvisation the power awareness of the dancers is both exposed and challenged. The teacher does not offer a security gate, as she does not interfere or comment as a leader as long as the improvisation goes on (of course she always has the power to end the improvisation if something gets out of hand). So the dancers are in the improvisation with their own awareness. When I look for their awareness about power and diversity, I look for how the different dancers show interest for and make contact with different dancers. It is probably easier to make contact with somebody who you recognise as somebody quite like you. The question is, therefore, whether the dancers have created a gaze on each other which has enough of “when-I-look-at-you-I-see-somebody-quite-like-me”. I suggest that this gaze will make them contact each other despite (bodily) differences.

Another aspect to look for is the degree of initiative. Who initiates movement and dialogue? An interesting aspect is the “should I stay or should I go”-aspect. When a dialogue is started or finished, who makes the choice to start or finish it? Story three only tells about 5 minutes out of a 30 minutes long open improvisation. I do not have the space here to narrate the whole sequence. But when looking at the whole open improvisation, I see an equal and power balanced interest for all the different dancers by everybody. Everybody who is on the dance floor gets involved in different movement sequences and dialogues. That works well.

The degree of initiative and choice of staying or leaving a dialogue seems less balanced. Vera and Karen, who are the dancers with disabilities in the group, enter the open improvisation on their own initiative, but they do so as the second last and last one and only a long time after the others have started. During the open improvisation they do not directly approach others, but they are approached by and invited into meetings and dialogues by other dancers. Equally, they are never the ones who leave dialogues, but are left. In the duet between Anna and Vera, it is Anna who both comes into the dialogue and who tries to end it. Finally, it is Anna who leaves, even though she lets Vera draw her into the dialogue once more. The first time when Anna tries to finish the duet, she pulls Vera’s chair by the foot support. By pushing or pulling the chair instead of the dancer in it, she actually makes the choice *for* Vera instead of *with* Vera. Taking Vera by the hand would have made the choice more of a shared one, as they would then dance together instead of Anna dancing (for a short moment) with the chair.

To me, the different degree of taking initiative is a really tricky point, which needs to be dealt with when teaching. My explanation for why people with disabilities too often can be dominated by non-disabled people is that they, by their life situations and lived lives, are used to the fact that other people make choices for them. This dominance is embodied. They give space to other people to make choices about their lives because they, being an oppressed minority population, are often made dependent on other people in every day situations. This “giving space” is inscribed in their bodies. In the same way, non-disabled people, who represent the dominating majority, are inscribed with “taking space”. They are used to be the ones who make decisions. When disabled and non-disabled dancers meet in the dance studio, they meet with these inscriptions in their bodies. The result is a power asymmetry when it comes to initiating and making choices. This seems unnecessary. Instead of challenging existing power structures,

they are in fact easily re-established in an open improvisation situation. Here, new negotiations about space need to take place.

This can happen through the way dance is *taught* in a diverse setting. The non-disabled dancers might need to take *just one step to the side* – to give space. The teacher’s role is crucial for this to happen. She needs to take part in giving voice and space in a power balanced way to all the different dancers in class, challenging dominating and disempowering narratives about different bodies.

### *A reflective dimension*

After the open improvisation the teacher initiates a discussion about the process the dancers have gone through in the improvisation. The dance experiences give rise to reflection. During the discussion, which is led and shaped by the teacher, she asks the dancers to tell about special moments or experiences. Some of them do, and the teacher does. She points out what she thought worked well, and why, thereby giving positive confirmation back to the dancers. The dancers, especially Anna and Vera, look happy and also vulnerable. They are touched by each other, and the audience is touched by them. It is as if the space is filled with new existential energy, aesthetic discoveries and a warm sense of community.

This is where I am going to end my interpretation of story three, and add the knowledge hooks I have found in this story to the list I already have:

investigate movement	create space	transform	relate	timing	listen
attention	body memories	reflect			
dialogue	subjectivity	go beyond categories	make choices		
	opportunity to influence	create similarities	explore form		
work like choreographers	solve problems	freedom			
music as partner	touch	confirmation	trust		
movement qualities	allow	own action	slow down		
connect	explore identity	solidarity	awareness		
voice	silence	one step to the side	flow of attention		
rhythm	sense	communication	initiate and respond	challenge	
zoom in and out	suggest	a real interest			

Leaving these knowledge hooks to float on the paper for now, in the next section I will direct focus on the teacher: her moves and strategies and how she develops, based on the video material and my field notes.

#### 4.1.2. Teacher on the move

The teaching of dance improvisation is a deeply lived experience. The dance teacher needs to be highly present, develop good listening skills and be willing to solve problems and develop her teaching methods right then and there, in front of the dancers-students. In this, the dance teacher is a vulnerable body-subject who constantly puts herself and her pedagogy at risk. At the same time, since the dance teacher operates in a multi-spacious space, she also has a lot of power, which should be treated with care and awareness. The dancers put their bodies in the hands of the teacher and she will, whether aware of it or not, influence them by her worldview, understanding of the body and pedagogical orientation.

Marion Gough<sup>504</sup> writes that in the dance class the dance teacher constitutes the major resource. This is true. Everything that happens in the dance class depends on the teacher. As Gough argues, this requires from the dance teacher an ongoing curiosity regarding the process of teaching and learning and openness to finding ways of improving the quality of the teaching. The teacher should, she concludes, have a belief in the right of the students to experience the best possible teaching environment.

In this section I want to pay attention the teacher's moves and strategies, as this allows me to feed into a dramaturgy of teaching dance improvisation. A study of the teacher on the video material collected in the Dance Laboratory shows a teacher on the move, highly present and committed, active in moving and reflecting, and developing as the term goes along.

I distinguish different comprehensive teaching strategies used in the Dance Laboratory in 2004. They are:

##### *Instructing and demonstrating*

Each task starts with some kind of instruction and demonstration. In this video material, all tasks are instructed in combination with demonstration. It almost always starts with the teacher shortly telling what the task is about, and then continuing with a demonstration. This is never a demonstration of set steps or movements, but a demonstration of how this improvisation task *might* look. Almost all demonstrations are done with one of the dancers in the group. There is a gliding line between instruction and demonstration, one being difficult to separate from the other.

##### *Doing the improvisation*

This is when the dancers are doing the task: moving, exploring, trying, experimenting. Most of the improvisation is done without words, but sometimes the dancers talk to each other spontaneously and without actually stopping. Sometimes the teacher comments to everybody, directly to somebody individually or to couples working together during the improvisations.

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<sup>504</sup> Gough (1993, p. 27–28)

Sometimes the teacher takes part herself during the improvisations, sometimes she watches. This category also sometimes includes observing others, when the improvisation task creates an opportunity to either move or watch the others move. This switch between moving and watching is then always done from the dancers' own choice.

#### *Showing or watching material*

This teaching strategy refers to situations where the task clearly is that the dancers show each other something they have worked on. The rest of the group is asked to sit down and watch as one couple or group of dancers show a task they have worked on.

#### *Giving feedback in couples or small groups*

Many of the improvisations are done in pairs. Time given for the dancers working together to give feedback and discuss what they have just done is covered by this strategy. Often this strategy continues as a reflection and discussion in the whole group, as the teacher asks the pairs to share with the others what they have discussed.

#### *Reflecting and discussing in the whole group*

This strategy implies time used for talking about and discussing improvisations in the whole group. These discussions can include questions or comments and they are not only answered by the teacher. The different dancers also ask and answer each other. This reflection also often includes demonstration. A dancer can, for example, say "when we did this ..." and demonstrate with her partner to remind about an episode from the improvisation, and then from that give a comment or propose a question. Also, the teacher often answers questions and comments by showing and demonstrating together with the one who asked.

The video material together with my field notes reveal that the teaching strategies *instructing and demonstrating*, *doing the improvisation* and *reflecting and discussing in the whole group* are most frequently used (taking into consideration that the video artist cuts away many of the discussions in the beginning and the end of the classes). The strategy *giving feedback in pairs or small groups* tends to blend into group discussions. The strategy *showing or watching material* is seldom used, which reflects the fact that the Dance Laboratory did not work towards choreography this term. On the way towards choreography, the group would spend much more time watching invented material.



For the sake of the research project, I had carefully written down my plans for each class<sup>505</sup>. The video material reveals that there is always a gap between the planned and actual class. This is true for every single class. The teacher never sticks to the plan. I suggest that this is characteristic of teaching improvisation. In other words:

- The act of teaching dance improvisation calls for a high degree of improvisation skills from the teacher.

Flexibility is needed from the teacher. The teaching and learning of dance takes place in a lived and vital space, where different dancers and the teacher affect and exercise influence on each other and the shared energy in the space. Therefore it is of crucial importance that the teacher develops a good ability to sense and listen into this lived and shared space.

- Good listening skills allow the teacher to establish and alter a good dramaturgic curve throughout the lesson.

This means that the teacher should be ready to sail off from the planned activities if the sensing into the lived space tells her so. To listen into how the degree of attention increases or decreases is an excellent tool for the dance improvisation teacher to evaluate throughout the class whether the improvisation makes meaning for the dancers. The teacher needs to dare to go deeper into an improvisation which “works”, but also be ready to change or skip exercises that “don’t work”.

- When there is a good flow of attention, the teacher needs to follow that flow and not hold back or change activity.

I propose that this sensing of flow of attention is a sign that the dance improvisation is meaningful for the dancers. Time and space is fully embodied. Reminding about Csikszentmihalyi<sup>506</sup>, flow is a state when a person’s entire being is stretched in the full functioning of body and mind. Whatever one does becomes worth doing for its own sake.

The other way around, if there is no feeling of flow of attention and the energy level is low, the teacher needs to be willing to change activity and try something else. Also for the improvisation teacher, in all tasks there is always the critical point of “choosing to stay” or not, as shown in Figure 2. The teacher needs to listen into the dynamic rhythm and flow of attention in the class when choosing to stay with an exercise or move on to something different.

Also, the video material tells me that what works best is that the different tasks during an improvisation class build up for each other, so that a previous task is a preparation for the next. In other words,

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<sup>505</sup> I usually write down a plan when I teach, but not as detailed as during this period. All lesson plans from the spring semester of 2004 are stored in the researcher’s archive.

<sup>506</sup> Csikszentmihalyi (1997, pp. 31–32)

- For improvisation classes, it is good to have a red thread which runs through out the class, becoming more and more complex, instead of breaking the dramaturgic curve with completely new ideas.

If the dramaturgic curve breaks, the energy level can drop dramatically. I suggest that when presented to new ideas, the dancers start doing quite a lot of “thinking”. Time and space are not fully embodied, but a lot of planning and preparing takes place. Gradually, the ideas become embodied and the feeling of ease increases. Then it is important for the teacher to allow the dancers to go with this flow, and not stop the building up of a flourishing creativity.

The video material as a whole reveals that as time passes the teacher more and more

- Uses positive confirmation as feedback to all the different dancers.

She also, when the opportunity presents itself,

- Foregrounds aspects of disability as a unique possibility to movement exploration.

She never talks about disability as a struggle to overcome, but rather points towards the different possibilities that aspects of a disability brings with it – for everybody. Examples of this are when everybody is challenged to take a ride in and explore Vera’s wheelchair, or when different dancers are asked to work with their eyes closed, in order to be able to listen as Karen does with all her other senses. It is also important for the Dance Laboratory that the teacher

- Allows discussions and reflections about dance, as this is an intense dance space, filled with movement, emotions, questions and thoughts.

Shotter<sup>507</sup> underlines the importance and value of discussing lived experience in order to generate embodied knowledge. Hämäläinen<sup>508</sup> points to reflective discussion in the dance class as important for the dancers.

The video material reveals that generally the dance teacher dominates the improvisations by taking part too much herself. This domination seems quite obvious in the beginning of the term and then diminishes as the term passes, but it does not disappear altogether. Generally, the teacher tends to dominate the improvisations by taking part too soon and too often in improvisations. Hämäläinen<sup>509</sup> writes that the attendance of the dance teacher herself in the tasks she teaches can be seen as both positive and negative. By partaking herself, she offers a bodily model which is valuable at least in the beginning. However, Hämäläinen argues, if she continuously participates, she might become too much of a model. I would like to add that a dance improvisation teacher should create awareness about the fact that her own participation

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507 For example, Shotter (1999a; 1999b)

508 For example, Hämäläinen (1999; 2006)

509 Hämäläinen (1999, p. 258)

is never equal to the other dancers' participation, as her role as teacher gives her a dominating status. With the status of a teacher, she is given a lot of space by the students. Thereby she easily "fills" and dominates the space with her ideas.

An interpretation of the video material shows that it often seems like the teacher has an urge to make an example of how a task can be solved by participating at once herself. In doing this, she shows how this exercise can be done, instead of waiting, giving space and allowing the different dancers to find out about the improvisation by themselves, in their own way. In other words, the teacher needs to take one step to the side and let investigations take their time, allowing the different dancers to really explore and find out by themselves. This does not mean that the teacher only should sit on the sideline and instruct and watch, as it is important that she contributes with her own moving body. In this, she shares her compassion and energy with the dancers, which they also catch. However, the teacher would gain from finding a

- Better balance in taking part, instructing and demonstrating and remember to step back, give space to the dancers and watch.

It is also interesting to pay attention to the pattern of which dancers the teacher demonstrates with. Anna stands out as the one who the teacher demonstrates with the most. She is also one of those who asks and comments the most, together with Karen and also Mona, and she is usually both the first to enter an improvisation and the last to leave it. The fact that the teacher favours Anna as a partner to demonstrate with can be explained by the fact that Anna is a close colleague of the teacher. This points to a position which makes it easy for Anna to step forward and take space during the classes. Coming into the Dance Laboratory as a professional dancer and educated dance teacher, Anna has great possibilities to contribute with all her knowledge to the class. But there is also reason to believe that her position is further stabilised by receiving much attention from the teacher. The teacher should be aware of her possibility to

- Empower all dancers by demonstrating with and paying equal attention to them.

There is reason to believe that the non-professional dancers might need more, and not less, attention and support.

This is a rather invisible and complex net of dominance and influence, power and possibilities, which any classroom is spun around and which might be difficult to discover. My suggestion is that the teacher sits like a spider in the middle of this net. She has the power to open up or close the dance improvisation class as a space where different dancers can take part and contribute equally as movers, thinkers and talkers.

In this study I mainly write about and critically examine the dance teacher in the Dance Laboratory in the she-form. This is a conscious choice I have made, which makes it easier for me as a researcher to observe and examine myself as a teacher. However – the dance teacher *is me*. I *am* the dance teacher in the material collected and I have lived all the situations it tells about.

Van Manen<sup>510</sup> writes that learning to understand the essence of pedagogy as it manifests itself in particular circumstances contributes to a pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact. He calls this a hermeneutic type of competence, which is important for teachers. In the following I will write about a difficult teaching situation in the Dance Laboratory which I deeply lived as a teacher. This is because I wish to highlight the vulnerability of a dance improvisation teacher, how the teaching situation is lived and sometimes causes a rush of emotions and thoughts. To reflect about such deeply lived teaching situations helps in developing what van Manen calls a pedagogical thoughtfulness or tact. It develops by, and also strengthens, a more hermeneutic type of competence by the teacher.

This situation took place on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2004, I remember:

We were working on a task which I called opening doors.<sup>511</sup> This is a concrete exercise where we worked directly on the body. We did this task in duets or trios. It worked like this: One dancer stood in the room and another dancer walked towards this dancer. Only in the last second did the standing dancer jump away, opening her body up like a door. This was repeated several times, and the walking dancer started walking faster and faster. In the end she ran the fastest she could while shouting out loud. This is an exercise which is about paying attention to each other, developing listening skills and a sense of timing. It circles around the development of relations, and it is quite exciting since there is always the risk of crashing into each other. The dancers were having so much fun while doing this. The room went completely “bananas”. The space exploded with energy; all the dancers were running, screaming, jumping away and laughing out of excitement. Everybody understood what they were doing and was fully present in the task. It was a great connection between the dancers working in pairs. It seemed very meaningful for them, and for me. I was walking around, looking at different couples, interfering at times, giving advice, but otherwise leaving them to work on the task by themselves. I was thrilled by the improvisation.

By some reason I decided to develop this task into a more imaginative one which I called “the mouse and the dragon”. I explained my idea: when you have opened the door, imagine that you enter a room with either a mouse or a dragon in it. Develop an improvised dance based on how you would react if you met either a mouse or a dragon. Already while I was explaining the task, I could sense the energy dropping. As the dancers started doing the task, the energy level fell even more. It was such a complete drop of energy, from explosion to nothing. This second task completely killed the first task of opening doors. Nobody seemed to understand the task completely – me neither. Everything that seemed challenging and interesting in the first task disappeared in the second. In the new task one dancer walked towards the other, who jumped away, and then this other dancer remained standing very passively watching when the first dancer imagined that she met a mouse or a dragon. Suddenly, the mouse-or-dragon-meeting dancer ended her dance and walked back through “the door” (that is, the other person) which actually already was open, so there was no real meeting between the two dancers again. For Karen, for example, this was an impossible task, as she could not see the other dancer improvising with the imagined mouse or dragon. Karen remained standing very passively in the role of the “door”. Vera, in her pair, looked tired and confused. The light energy in the space disappeared. The task seemed meaningless; it made no sense.

I realised that the task of imaging that you meet either a mouse or a dragon is a completely different task than the first task of opening doors. The first task circled around opening bodies (doors) and developing a listening relationship between two dancers. The second task does not work concretely on the body, but it involved imagination and thereby became more abstract. What was clear is that the Dance Laboratory was not ready yet to work with imagination. This was especially true for Vera and Karen. At this point, in the beginning of the project, Karen’s and Vera’s dance experience needed to be grounded in their own moving bodies and not in imaginative ideas. I suggest that this was the case not because they are disabled, but because this was their first meeting with dance as an experimental and creative art form. They needed to develop a movement vocabulary.

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510 van Manen (1997, p. 143)

511 This task is inspired by an exercise I have learnt from Benjamin. He calls it Gateways. Benjamin (2002, p. 50)

I deeply lived the energy drop during this process. Frankly, I felt terrible. While it was happening I asked myself how I could come up with such a bad idea. Instead of lessening the distance between the different dancers, this task increased it.

I wondered whether anybody would actually turn up for the next class, because I experienced the task as such a failure.

Luckily, the dancers in the Dance Laboratory did turn up for the next class, and the project could go on. Probably none of them experienced the task so strongly as a mistake as I did. This is, I suggest, is because this was a *teaching* mistake, not a problem that arose between any of those involved. The problem was the task itself.

This situation also gave me new insights, which difficult teaching situations always do if they are dealt with. This task failed because it was completely out of context. It was a break in the dramaturgy of the class. Also, it was out of context, because I suddenly shifted from a task working concretely on the body, to an imaginative task. I had not built up to that through a process during the term. Working with the body, using a vocabulary anchored in the concrete movement elements, is a good place to start improvisation. But, having worked with the Dance Laboratory for several years now, I also have learnt that the possibilities to connect imaginative ideas to movement exploration develop as the different dancers develop a richer movement vocabulary.

In the next section I will develop the interpretative tool for this research process by adding all the dimensions and knowledge hooks collected from the interpretation of the video material.

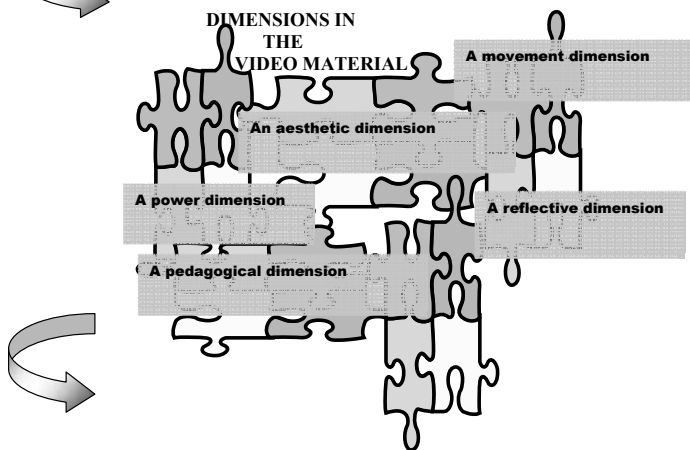
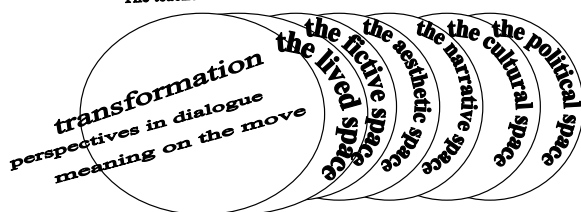
#### **4.1.3. A developing interpretative tool**

Through the theoretical lenses of my different perspectives on space, in this section I have looked at and interpreted the video material. Through the creation and interpretation of three body-poetical stories based on the video material, I have constructed and discussed different dimensions in the stories.

From all the dimensions in the different stories I have collected knowledge hooks which are of importance for the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory. These are concepts which dance improvisation can be spun around. I will discuss this further in Chapter 5.

In Figure 3 I visualise a developing interpretative tool for this research process. The figure shows the connection between the teacher's and researcher's perspectives on space in dance, the different dimensions based on the video material and the different knowledge hooks which dance improvisation can be spun around.

The teacher-researcher's different perspectives on space in dance



**KNOWLEDGE HOOKS FOR DANCE IMPROVISATION**

investigate movement	create space	transform	relate	timing	listen
attention	body memories	reflect			
dialogue	subjectivity	go beyond categories		make choices	
opportunity to influence		create similarities		explore form	
work like choreographers	solve problems		freedom		
music as partner	touch	confirmation	trust		
movement qualities	allow	own action	slow down		
connect	explore identity	solidarity	awareness		
voice	silence	one step to the side	flow of attention		
rhythm	sense	communication	initiate and respond	challenge	
zoom in and out	suggest	a real interest			

**Knowledge hooks for the dramaturgy of teaching:**

- develop teaching strategies
- a teaching style open for improvisation in teaching
  - develop listening skills as teacher
- build a good dramaturgic curve through the lesson

- dare to “go with the flow”
- use positive confirmation for all dancers
- view disability as an unique possibility for movement exploration
  - encourage and give space for reflective discussions
  - balance own participation
- empower different participants by demonstrating with them
  - develop own pedagogical tact
- understand the teacher as both vulnerable and powerful

Figure 3 (Østern): The developing interpretative tool, including different perspectives on space in dance, dimensions in the video material and knowledge hooks to spin dance improvisation around.

As Briginshaw<sup>512</sup> I ask *what* and *how* space means in dance. With the interpretation of the video material in this section I have described some of those “whats” and “hows”. I have collected a number of knowledge hooks from the interpretation of the video material filmed in the Dance Laboratory. All these concepts tell something about *what* and *how* space means in dance. The focus on moving, meeting, relating, listening, allowing, acting, exploring identity, exploring form and so on as shown in the list of the knowledge hooks – this focus is important for *what* space is in dance improvisation and *how* that space is created. This tells about what kind of knowledge dance generates.

I agree with Briginshaw<sup>513</sup> that through a focus on space in dance, dance can challenge, trouble and question fixed perceptions of subjectivity and fixed cultural narratives about the body, and about dance as an art form. In addition, the focus on different spaces in dance generates valuable pedagogical knowledge connected to the teaching of dance in postmodern, contemporary time, where multiplicity is seen as a generative and creative force.

With this, I will move on to the interpretation of the interview material collected in the Dance Laboratory.

## 4.2. Opening up and interpreting the interviews

In this section the dancers’ voices are heard through my interpretation of a series of interviews with them. As already written in Section 1.3.5. Interviews as research material in this study, I had an open attitude before the collection of the empirical material. When interviewing the dancers I had no other area of focus than simply “experiences”. I encouraged the dancers to *tell*.

Through the lenses of the different perspectives on space in dance I will in this Chapter look at the interview material. This allows me to construct meaning themes and perspectives,

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<sup>512</sup> Briginshaw (2001, p.9)

<sup>513</sup> Briginshaw (2001, p. 6)

inspired by Mezirow's<sup>514</sup> transformative meaning theory and by Giorgi's<sup>515</sup> phenomenological method for condensing the interview material as described in Section 1.3.5. Interviews as research material in this study.

In the process of creating meaning perspectives through the formulation of meaning themes, I take a somewhat more quantitative approach in this section than in the rest of the study. As I already have written, I struggled to organize the material in a way that made me see beyond traditional and recognised categories. When I tried to organize the meaning themes into categories like disabled and non-disabled, the themes simply did not fit without creating a row of exceptions. Finally, the solution was to use *the content* in the interviews, not the people divided into categories, as a starting point to look at the material. In order to do that, the creation of tables was helpful. Even if they slightly quantify the material, they still led me to an important discovery: Regarding the meaning-making processes, the experiences and reflections of the dancers spread out across traditional categories. Therefore, I find the somewhat more quantitative approach used in this section useful and valuable in order to reach the aims of this research.

#### 4.2.1. Creating meaning perspectives

– *What is your background in dance?*

– *Tell me about your relation to dance. What does dance mean to you?*

– *Tell me why you want to take part in this dance project.*

These three questions were the ones I asked in interview one. In most cases I asked only these, giving no following up questions. As a result, their answers were quite short. As I already have written in Section 1.3.5. Interviews as research material in this study, I suggest the answers are short because I did not ask any follow-up questions.

Everything the dancers bring up during the interviews belongs to their reflective dimension about dance. This is what they *think* and *verbalise* about their lived experiences in dance. When listening to and dialoguing with the dancers I have the possibility to learn about and construct the dancers' meaning perspectives and look for meaning perspective transformation.

In interview one the dancers bring up different themes. Or more precisely, they simply *tell* about their experiences and thoughts, answering my questions. Looking from my different perspectives on space in dance, I distinguish and condense different meaning themes in their stories.

Having transcribed the interviews, I shortened and concentrated everybody's answers in interview one. I tried to narrow them down to only the different contents with specific meaning. The procedures when doing this can be compared to Giorgi's<sup>516</sup> phenomenological method for

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<sup>514</sup> Mezirow (1991)

<sup>515</sup> Giorgi (1985)

<sup>516</sup> Giorgi (1985) and Kvale (1996, pp. 193–196)



meaning condensation of an interview material. I do not follow his method consistently, but I am inspired by it. Similar to what Giorgi<sup>517</sup> calls natural units, consisting of direct quotes from interviews, I concentrate meaning themes and further meaning perspectives.

In this process of meaning concentrations in interview one, I did quite little editing in the first round of concentrations, since the answers were already short. As an example, the full transcribed interview 1 with Teresa looks like this, translated from Norwegian to English by me:

- Tone: Ok, today is the third of February and you are ...
- Teresa: Teresa.
- Tone: I want to ask you a few things.
- Teresa: Mmm.
- Tone: The first thing is your background in dance. What does dance mean to you? What is your relation to dance?
- Teresa: It means quite a lot because ... because ... it is something I have been interested in for a long time. I have not actively danced for a very long time, just around three and a half years. I have always liked dancing. I have always taken part in UKM<sup>518</sup> and things like that. I have always liked to move to music and I think ... music is rather important for me ... in my life anyway, so dancing or moving to music feels very natural. And also otherwise. I find it very exciting. It becomes more and more interesting to work with movement, different movement patterns and ... nice with improvisation and to discover how many things can be created. I find that interesting.
- Tone: Mmm. Now you have made your way to the Dance Laboratory, which is an improvisation arena. And then my other question is ... why are you interested in that? What is it that has caught your attention and why did you want to join the group?
- Teresa: I want to extend my view on dance, and I want to ... experiment and see what is possible with my own body ... and what I receive in the meetings with others ... and ... it is exciting to meet new people, simply. And what can happen in the meetings between them. Yes.
- Tone: Yes. Thank you, that's great.<sup>519</sup>

When I concentrated Teresa's and everybody else's first interview, the answers to the questions asked looked like this:

#### **Teresa**

- Background in dance:* I have danced actively for 3 ½ years.<sup>520</sup>
- What does dance mean to you?* Dance means rather much because it something which I have been interested in for a long time. I have always liked to dance. I have always

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517 In Kvale (1996, p. 194)

518 UKM is a large national performance arena and contest for young people within different artistic subjects which takes place every year in Norway.

519 Full transcribed and translated interview 1 with Teresa, conducted in February 2004.

520 In the spring term of 2004 Teresa was a full-time dance student at a one-year course with Anna as one of the teachers, my comment.

liked to move to music and music is also an important part of my life. So dancing or moving to music feels very natural. To investigate movement becomes more and more exciting. It becomes more and more interesting to work with movement, different movement patterns and with improvisation and see what it can be.

*Why join this project?*

I wish to experiment with what I can do with my own body and in meetings with others. It is exciting with meetings with so many different people. I wish to extend my knowledge about what dance can be like.

## **Vera**

*Background in dance:*

I have taken part in wheelchair dance courses and the Mixed Ability Group

*What does dance mean to you?*

I like to dance very much. I like to move my body

*Why join this project?*

I like to dance very much. I like to find out what I can do with my body; I like to move with and without wheelchair. And I hope we will perform some time.

## **Anna**

*Background in dance:*

I have danced since childhood. I have a BA in dance, dance is my profession.

*What does dance mean to you?*

I have danced all my life. So dance is a very important part of who I am. Dance feels like a part of my identity. Dance is in a way everything. It is both joy and sorrow and frustration and the best in life. Dance means a lot. I think that if I did not dance, I would really have a deep longing in my life. Because dance is such a big part of who I am. I cannot really separate dance from myself.

*Why join this project?*

I want to take part in as many different dance projects as possible and extend my view on what dance can be like. I don't have any expectations but just look forward to starting and getting going.

## **Karen**

*Background in dance:*

I have no previous dance experience except some dance lessons in compulsory school, and some social dancing.

*What does dance mean to you?*

Dance stimulates to body contact. We blind people get a very good feeling for the partner, when dancing. We feel the body movements.

*Why join this project?*

To relax and do something different from the everyday, and also to become less stiff. I am afraid to make mistakes, especially to make wrong steps in the dance, so I hope you will tell me what to do when we start.

## **Mona**

*Background in dance:*

One year of contemporary technique for beginners<sup>521</sup>.

*What does dance mean to you?*

I love to dance and I notice it especially when I actually am dancing. I miss dance if there is too long a time between opportunities to dance. When I took part in the beginner's classes in contemporary dance it felt like I could have danced every day.

*Why join this project?*

I have a strong wish to dance based on improvisation. I did not think much about the fact that there are disabled people in the group when deciding to join it, but I know that you are not going to let this be a "course for the

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521 With Tone as the teacher, my comment.

disabled". It is important that different people with different bodies are not looked upon as hinderers in the project, but as interesting contributors. It is also scary to join this, mostly because of my own fear of looking or seeming stupid, but my wish to be in the dance is too big to let go of this chance.

### Ida

- Background in dance:* I have danced since youth. I am now a full time dance student on a one-year preparatory course.<sup>522</sup>
- What does dance mean to you?* Dance is something I want. I like to dance very much. Dance is often like therapy. Dance is a good way of getting to know people without words. It is good to show another way of communicating to an audience.
- Why join this project?* I love to improvise, it is more human and exciting than technique. Improvisation is collaboration, which I love. This project takes away that "status thing" between different people.

### Heidi

- Background in dance:* I have danced since youth. I am now a full time dance student on a one-year preparatory course.<sup>523</sup>
- What does dance mean to you?* Dance means a lot and I think it will always do. I did not start dancing until I was 16, but then I took part in everything that was available: jazz, ballet, swing, salsa – everything. I will always keep dancing. Dance is a big part of me, and it always will be.
- Why join this project?* It is very exciting with so many different people in the project. I love to learn about how dance can be used in different ways. I look forward to what is going to happen in the project.

### Paul

- Background in dance:* I have danced since youth, including master classes several years. I have been a dancer in a professional company for 8 years.
- What does dance mean to you?* Dance is important, but music and theatre are equally important. All art forms are important, the arts are a way of investigating life. Through dance I look for me in me.
- Why join this project?* Maybe because I would like everybody to dance. Dance is important for everybody, it is of no importance with different bodies. And then the project is an important and different experience for me.

Already in interview one all of the dancers show an eagerness to start and a true interest in the dance improvisation and this project. It is clear that the dancers join this project simply because they want to. They have all chosen to attend the project by themselves: it is, for example, not part of a compulsory school programme. In their answers the dancers connect dance to different feelings, experiences, states of being, to identity and community. They sense, feel and think about dance – at least the interview situation creates an opportunity for them to create and formulate thoughts about dance. Still, they do not feel or think the same things about dance, and dance has different meanings for them.

From this first round of a slight concentration I condense further and create different meaning

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<sup>522</sup> With Anna as one of the teachers, my comment.

<sup>523</sup> With Anna as one of the teachers, my comment.

themes. I then go on to connect meaning themes belonging together in order to construct meaning perspectives, from which the different dancers talk. These meaning perspectives intervene with the dancers' lifeworlds.

Having constructed these meaning perspectives in interview one, I will follow them through interview two and three to see what happens to them. Do they stay the same, disappear, change, expand, transform or are new meaning themes and perspectives created altogether?

The following figure shows my procedure for constructing a meaning perspective through a number of meaning themes based on different quotes. All the meaning perspectives and themes are constructed in the same manner.

**Examples from interview one making up meaning themes:**

*I like to dance very much* (Vera)  
*I love to dance and I notice it especially when I am dancing* (Mona)

*Dance stimulates body contact* (Karen)  
*I like to find out what I can do with my body* (Vera)  
*I wish to become less stiff* (Karen)

**Meaning themes:**

The experience of dance.

My body

**Meaning perspectives:**

A bodily-somatic perspective



Figure 4 (Østern). Examples from the procedure of condensing bodily-somatic meaning themes and constructing the bodily-somatic meaning perspective based on the answers in interview one.

I will look at each of the three questions asked in interview one. The first question was *What is your background in dance?* Creating a continuum from “low degree of previous dance experience” to “high degree of previous dance experience”, a positioning of the dancers looks like this:

		<b>previous dance experience:</b>						
<b>low degree</b>							<b>high degree</b>	
	Karen	Mona	Ida	Paul	Anna			
	Vera		Heidi					
			Teresa					

Figure 5 (Østern). Creating a continuum from low to high degree of previous dance experience among the dancers in the Dance Laboratory.

When I create tables to organise meaning themes and perspectives, I arrange the dancers according to their previous experience in dance.

The following table helps me in organising meaning themes and creating meaning perspectives based on the dancers' answer to question two in interview one: *What does dance mean to you?*

Table 2 (Østern). Organising meaning themes and meaning perspectives based on the dancers' responses to question two/interview one: *What does dance mean to you?*

Meaning themes making up meaning perspectives on what dance means for the dancers when they start the project	Karen	Mona	Vera	Ida	Heidi	Teresa	Paul	Anna
<b>A bodily-somatic meaning perspective</b>								
The experience of dance		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
My body	x		x			x		
<b>An intrapersonal meaning perspective</b>								
Dance allows me to find about myself and my identity				x	x		x	x
I cannot separate dance from who I am								x
<b>An existential meaning perspective</b>								
Dance is everything								x
Without dance I would have a deep longing in my life								x
<b>A community meaning perspective</b>								
A social aspect in dance	x			x				
<b>An aesthetic meaning perspective</b>								
A communicative aspect with an audience				x				
Dance has a close relation to music or other art forms						x	x	
Dance improvisation as research, a way of exploring dance						x	x	

Based on the dancers' descriptions of what dance means to them before they start the project, I create five different meaning perspectives which they talk from. In response to the question *What does dance mean to you?* meaning themes belonging to the bodily-somatic, intrapersonal and aesthetic perspectives are most commonly brought up.

- I love to dance and I notice it especially when I am dancing (Mona)
- It feels like dance is ... part of my identity. Who I am. (Anna)
- I like dance very much. Because then I get to move my body. (Vera)
- It is difficult to tell about what dance means to me ... Maybe I am looking for me in me. (Paul)

In other words, when the dancers talk about what dance means to them before the project starts, they take a personal stand, based on their own, bodily experience of dance. They like to dance. They love dance. Dance is important for them. Anna brings in an existential meaning perspective when giving dance a very central place in terms of who she is. She tells about how dance connects to her feelings and that she has a deep longing for dance.

Some of the dancers are also interested in the aesthetics of dance, and bring up different themes under an aesthetic meaning perspective. Dance improvisation is mentioned as important by many. They are interested in dance as a way of exploring movement, life or themselves.

- It is not just dance ... it is ... all arts. I am looking for expressions inside. ... (Paul)

– It becomes more and more interesting to work with movement, different movement patterns and ... nice with improvisation and to discover how many things can be created. (Teresa)

Karen does not tell about dance as a joyful experience, but emphasises that dance is a way of getting in body contact with others. In this, she brings in a community meaning perspective, which also Ida talks from within.

– Well ... it is a stimulation to body contact ... and we blind people, for example, we develop a very good feeling of the partner, you know, when we are dancing. We notice the body movements.

– I more and more feel that it is great to get to know people in another way than through talking. (Ida)

What seems clear is that when the different dancers join the Dance Laboratory, dance already means a lot to them. Now, I will look at the last question in interview one: *Why do you want to join this project?*

In Table 3, I organise meaning themes and meaning perspectives which the dancers talk from within when they explain why they want to join the Dance Laboratory.

Table 3 (Østern). Organising meaning themes and meaning perspectives based on the dancers' responses to question three/interview one: *Why do you want to join this project?*

Meaning themes and meaning perspectives as reasons to join the Dance Laboratory	Karen	Mona	Vera	Ida	Heidi	Teresa	Paul	Anna
<b>A bodily-somatic meaning perspective</b>								
The experience of dance as relaxation	x							
The experience of dance as joyful		x	x	x				
The experience of dance as something frightening	x	x						
Dance as a way of training the body	x							
The experience of dance as exciting		x		x		x	x	
<b>An intrapersonal meaning perspective</b>								
The project is an important experience for me							x	
<b>A community meaning perspective</b>								
A social aspect				x				
A social-political aspect		x		x	x	x	x	
<b>An aesthetic meaning perspective</b>								
A communicative aspect in dance			x					
Dance as aesthetic discourse. What can dance be like?					x	x		x
Dance improvisation as research, a way of exploring		x	x	x		x		
<b>A methodological meaning perspective</b>								
Expectations to the teacher	x	x						

When telling about the reasons to join this project in comparison to the question of what dance means to them, the meaning themes that the dancers emphasise change slightly. When the dancers talk about what dance means to them in general, they take a personal stand and tell

about how dance connects to their feelings, experiences or lives. Community themes are only mentioned by two of them.

When explaining why they wish for this project, though, they talk more also about other people and dance as discourse. They mostly talk from within a bodily-somatic, community and an aesthetic meaning perspective when explaining why they want to join the Dance Laboratory. They want to learn more about what dance can be, investigate improvisation and ways of using their body, and they are curious about the fact that there are differently bodied people in the project. It seems that when choosing to take part in this project, many of the dancers do it especially to learn and find out something new, which they connect to other people and to dance as discourse.

– It is great to take away that status thing between different people ... because it is so easy to become introvert and I actually love to collaborate (Ida)

– I had a strong wish to dance contemporary dance in a setting where improvisation is prioritised. When that is said, I also knew that you would not turn this into a disability course. And the more I think about it, the more I like the fact that somebody can be different but still not looked on as a hindrance. (Mona)

A new meaning perspective, which is a methodological meaning perspective, is created when Karen and Mona express (quite different) expectations towards the teacher.

– If necessary, you know, it is great if you tell me how things should be done and ... Because I am very scared to make mistakes and fall out of it. (Karen)

– When that is said, I also knew that you would not turn this into a disability course. (Mona)

It is only Vera who gives the same answer to what dance means to her and why she wants to join this project. Vera says that she likes to dance very much (dance is a joyful experience) and that is also the reason why she wants to join the project. Paul emphasises that the project is an important and different experience for him. One reason why Ida and Teresa want to join the project is because they find improvisation exciting. Karen joins the project even though she is also frightened of it. Mona says she has a strong wish to improvise, but also that she is afraid of the improvisation: that she will seem or look stupid. Karen is afraid of not knowing what to do and making the wrong steps. But in addition, Karen also says she wants to join the project to relax from everyday life. She wants a relaxing experience.

When describing what dance means to them, only Karen and Ida mention a social aspect; that dance stimulates body contact (Karen) or that dance is a good way of getting to know people without words (Ida). However, Mona, Ida, Heidi, Teresa and Paul (and this time, not Karen) say that one reason to join the project is to meet different but equal people. For their participation in this project, then, the social aspect is important for several of the dancers, but social in a slightly different way than just “being social”. It is about “being social with differently bodied people” and this is what I have called a social-political theme.

– Because maybe I want ... everybody to dance. It is of no importance ... if there are some

problems with the body. I think dance is important for everybody. And also, this is a different ... and important experience for *me*. (Paul)

Vera, Karen and Anna, on the other hand, do not talk about disability and non-disability as an issue at all.

Tables 2 and 3 look at the dancers' meaning themes and perspectives, individually and as a group. I have found it possible and fruitful to position the dancers within different meaning themes and perspectives regarding the *content* of their responses to the questions asked. However, I have found it impossible and meaningless to categorise the dancers according to traditional categories of the *persons* in the group, like disabled and non-disabled, without severe simplification. Taking account of the actual content in the dancers' answers, it simply makes no sense to make them fit into well-known categories such as "disabled" and "non-disabled", "professional" and "non-professional" or "female" and "male". Instead, regarding the question of *what dance means* to them, the dancers make up a myriad of positions which go across traditional categories. Collectively, bringing with them this myriad of expectations and pre-understandings, the dancers enter the Dance Laboratory.

Among the dancers, then, I have constructed a bodily-somatic, intrapersonal, existential, community, aesthetic and methodological meaning perspective on dance when they start the project. Dance already means a lot to them when they join the group, but dance does not mean the same thing to all dancers. Quite the opposite, dance means different things to the dancers when they start. Still, as a group, they bring with them meaning perspectives operating within many spaces in dance. As the dancers start to improvise together, their lifeworlds and meaning perspectives will come into contact with each other and start to dialogue. Thereby, the space for dance created amongst them will also change and probably expand.

I will now follow these meaning perspectives constructed in interview one through interviews two and three. The meaning perspectives have the possibilities to expand, transform or disappear during the project, and new ones may appear. Some meaning perspectives might be emphasised, while others might fall into the background of the project, depending on the lived experience in the Dance Laboratory as the project develops.

#### **4.2.2. Change**

When being interviewed for the second time, time has passed and the dancers have had quite a lot of experience with the Dance Laboratory. Every week they have met and warmed up together, explored space, run or rolled across the floor, carried and supported the weight of each other, related to the other dancers through touch, investigated the axis of gravity falling through their bodies, been led blindfold by each other, tested wheelchairs, created form, developed relationships through movement, investigated a spectrum of movement possibilities – that is, they have taken part in a variety of dance improvisation tasks.

These experiences form the base which the dancers talk from and tell about in interview two. The meaning perspective transformation that happens is connected to the bodily experience



of being in the Dance Laboratory in this period. The context that the Dance Laboratory creates is characterised by movement, touch and relations. It is not *any* kind of movement, *any* kind of touch or *any* kind of relation, but a *specific* kind. In the Dance Laboratory movement is used to explore, investigate, create and communicate the body's different possibilities to move and relate. Touch is used to connect and relate to others and to movement; touch is used to support others, invite others, lift and carry others, share weight with others, massage, stroke and smooth others, press towards and investigate strength with others. Movement, touch and relating are used to communicate with others. The Dance Laboratory is also characterised by reflexivity. The dancers and the teacher take their time to talk about lived experience together, both during the classes and in the interview situations. Interview two in itself offers an opportunity for the dancers to create reflections about their danced experiences.

One aspect connected to how this study was carried out and which needs to be kept in mind is that Vera and Anna were interviewed for their second time in the autumn of 2003. At that time they were the only two participants. All the other participants were interviewed during the spring of 2004. That means that when telling about their experiences in interview two, Anna and Vera talked about quite different experiences than the rest of the group. The group was very different with only two participants and I was also less confident as the teacher-choreographer, having less experience than half a year later.

In the following I will create slightly shortened research stories of interview two with all eight dancers. These stories are only slightly edited and concentrated: I have taken away the "Eee" and "Hmm" and other utterances when the dancers think and choose words. I have also taken away the beginning and end of the interview when I say hello, ask them to tell and say thank you. These slightly shortened research stories are short, but the actual interviews were very short. Again, I suggest this is because I did not ask any follow-up questions. In interview two the dancers were asked simply to tell about their experiences and they were given no further questions.

**Vera** (autumn 2003)

– I think it is a lot of fun. I think it is fun to move my body. I like very much to move together with other people. I feel that I manage to dance, that is a good feeling. I get tired in my body after each class because I move so much. I am very happy that this group exists.

**Anna** (autumn 2003)

– I am not sure if the right thing to do is to create short sequences and choreographies. Maybe we should just improvise more, because there are so many things which Vera hasn't tried before. We are being very much "like teachers"; we explain to her how to do things, like physically. I think she could do much more; it is just that she has never tried those things. I think it is important to develop some kind of technical training, like how to roll, how to turn, and so on. I feel this is going to take some time. We need to take the time it takes, and it is a big job to find the method. Maybe we should find 4–5 elements in each class and repeat them over and over again. And start from those things that Vera can manage to do. I think it is difficult, but also very interesting and exciting.

**Karen** (spring 2004)

– In the lessons with the Dance Laboratory I have learnt a lot. I have developed better body control, better balance, my general condition has improved and I have learnt to have greater trust in other people. But also, like today when I did not manage to get up from the floor, because I am too weak in my muscles, I felt almost set aside. When I feel that I do not manage to do something physically, I feel dissatisfied and I almost want to quit the project. Because all my life my teachers and parents have been nagging about

me getting stronger. So feedback about that is really uncomfortable. But that is just how I felt today. Otherwise I think it is fun being creative and meeting different people. And also, what we do here influences my every day life.

**Mona** (spring 2004)

– I think it has been so very exciting. It is also very demanding. I wanted the creative part, but it is also the creative part which I find really difficult. Sometimes I feel I can't do anything. Sometimes it really works! I get a sense of flow and great dynamics. I feel great trust in the group, and that is important. It is important for me that every class starts and ends with an opportunity to talk together. I have become happier generally because of the dance. I feel that in the Dance Laboratory I create something which is important, and that feeling I take with me out in everyday life. It is very frustrating that I don't seem to be able to explain to other people about this project. As soon as I mention that there are two disabled dancers in the group, the disability aspect immediately takes focus. People ask me if this group is some kind of special activity for the disabled. And it's not. I think it is uninteresting that they are disabled. What works best is that we create something together. I mean, I also have my limitations. I haven't danced so much, and Anna, for example, is very professional. Still we can create great moments together. And that's what is so fascinating.

**Ida** (spring 2004)

– I expected improvisation but soon discovered that this offers much more. I have learnt incredibly much about the people in the group. I have really become enlightened. We get to know each other in a completely different way because of the physical contact. I have learnt a lot about myself in relation to people with other physical starting points. I have really underestimated them. It is important not to underestimate. We are all reflected and unique. One can communicate with everybody. Karen is open and she makes me feel safe and happy. Dance and improvisation has become so much more through this project. Energy and impulses can actually be felt with your eyes closed. I think it is so interesting to work with my eyes closed and use the surfaces of the skin to listen with. The trust within the group is important. The safety comes from the fact that we all are given the same value in the group. That feels safe. The fact that we talk before and after each class is very important. That makes us more understanding and reflected about each other. I always become so calm after each class. I learn to cross my own limits. The teacher leads the group in a calm and comfortable way. She has a calm but playful energy which gets on to all of us. She sees each and every one of us and pays attention. We have developed our ability to watch and observe each other, instead of being so focused on our own achievements. The project has opened my eyes for different ways of working with dance.

**Heidi** (spring 2004)

– I have had such a great feeling after each class. That is a really strong experience I have. Sometimes I am tired when I come here, but I always get new energy from the group. And even if this is physical work it is good for the head, too. I notice that when we started I was very careful with Vera and Karen. I was too careful. Now I am like more normal towards them. That is great to experience. I feel that I really show who I am in the improvisation. That feels good on the one hand, vulnerable and difficult on the other. I have noticed that I really love to observe. It's like ... wow! I could watch forever. And then I get inspired to just improvise more and more.

**Teresa** (spring 2004)

– I was quite tense before the project started. I wondered what it would be like to work with people with different starting points and with improvisation. But already after the first class I understood that this was going to be great fun. I felt safe from the first class. I have great trust in everybody in the group. It is a very good sense of community in the group. The tasks we are given by the teacher are very exciting and challenging. Also, what we create is very exciting. The group affects all of us in a positive way. When I am tired after a long day and come here, I always receive new energy. It is so interesting and fun to dance together.

**Paul** (spring 2004)

– It has been very, very special for me to take part in the Dance Laboratory. I cannot communicate well verbally in this country, but in the Dance Laboratory I can communicate through movement. I feel

different now than when we started the project. It is a good feeling. I think movement is important for communication. It is important for everybody to communicate through movement. Movement is an important language for communication between people.

In their stories the dancers tell about new experiences, excitement, joy, quite a lot of wondering, and some difficulties. Embedded in their stories is also a story of change. Their thoughts change, their dance changes, their experiences change. More, and also more nuanced, meaning themes are brought up by the different dancers and some of the dancers create new meaning perspectives. The dancers' movement experiences have affected them. They are in a process of moving, wondering and changing.

Still, the dancers do not go through the same kind of process. And still, the dancers do not follow each other according to traditional categories. Instead, their meaning themes and meaning perspectives keep splitting traditional categories. Paul, Karen and Anna bring up their own special focus, which I suggest is of individual interest for them and which has to do with their life situations. Paul establishes a special focus on dance as communication, Karen on dance as a way of training the body and Anna dwells around the question on how to develop a methodology for this project. I will come back to this in a while.

Because the number of meaning themes has increased, I will look at one meaning perspective at a time. I will still create tables in order to show the construction of meaning themes and meaning perspectives and how meaning themes spread out among the different dancers. First, I will look at the bodily-somatic meaning perspective.

Table 4 (Østern). The bodily-somatic meaning perspective constructed through the dancers' answers in interview two.

<b>Bodily-somatic meaning themes making up a bodily-somatic meaning perspective</b>	<b>Karen</b>	<b>Mona</b>	<b>Vera</b>	<b>Ida</b>	<b>Heidi</b>	<b>Teresa</b>	<b>Paul</b>	<b>Anna</b>
Positive experiences	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Negative experiences	x	x						x
Training the body	x							
Body contact in dance				x				
The experience of the dynamic elements in dance		x		x				
The experience of communicating through movement				x			x	
Bodily sensations		x	x	x	x			

The meaning themes expressed within the bodily-somatic meaning perspective deepen and new ones are added to it. Everybody has positive experiences of the project, described with words ranging from *interesting* to *great* and *very special*. Also nuances like *calm* and *safe* are brought in to describe the experiences in the Dance Laboratory.

Three of the dancers also have negative experiences. They say the project is difficult, physically tiring or demanding. For those who had some expectations of difficulties before the project started – Mona was scared of the improvisation, Karen was afraid to make mistakes – this aspect is still there or has deepened. In addition, Anna has developed a feeling of difficulty.

Karen has negative experiences where she is reminded of her own physical weakness. This is connected to this one lesson after which she was interviewed for the second time, but still, this negative experience makes her wonder if she should quit the whole project. Training the body is an important theme for Karen, which she keeps developing in all the interviews. Through the project it becomes clear to me that Karen has a deep and sincere longing to get to know, develop and control her body. She has always experienced difficulties connected to the body and she has always been reminded about this by parents and teachers. They have wanted her to improve her body in different ways. She notices that the dance experiences in the Dance Laboratory allow her to do so. This is an important experience for her, but she also clearly expresses that she does not like to be reminded about the things she cannot do with her body. From a methodological point of view, I would say then that it is better to just go through new and positive movement experiences, than to break down and point out the difficulties that somebody is experiencing .

Paul has one theme which foregrounds his meaning-making process: that movement as communication is important. The theme of communication and lack of communication is crucial for him during this period of his life. He has just moved to Norway and in a drastic way notices how he changes because of lack of language. He could not express this very well in the interviews during spring 2004, but later he has talked a lot about this with me. In an interview in 2008 he told me that:

When I moved to Norway, I felt in my body how important it is for me to be able to communicate with others. When you can't communicate you die, in a way. That hurts. I was not myself because I had few possibilities to express myself. I became completely clear about the fact that communication is one of the most important aspects in life.<sup>524</sup>

In this personal life context, the Dance Laboratory becomes very important for Paul as a place where he can communicate as himself, through movement instead of through words. This is similar to Vera's experience of "being able to show who I am in a better way"<sup>525</sup> in dance. For both Vera and Paul, the space which is created in the Dance Laboratory offers them a richer opportunity to show who they are and communicate with others. Regarding Vera, the Dance Laboratory offers her a space where other people discover her as the woman Vera, instead of "a girl in a wheelchair". For Paul, it offers a space where he can leave the struggle with the new language behind and communicate fully, as he knows himself, in movement. In this, the experience of being in the Dance Laboratory gives Vera and Paul a feeling of wholeness.

Some dancers also talk about how their experiences in the Dance Laboratory influence them outside of the dance studio. In very close connection to the bodily-somatic meaning perspective, then, I keep constructing an *existential meaning perspective*. With this I mean how the dancers connect the project to a feeling of existential meaning which goes beyond the dance studio itself.

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524 Quote from interview with Paul for an article about his debut as a choreographer in 2008 in the Norwegian dance magazine På Spissen 2, 2008. Østern (2008b, p. 13).

525 Quote by Vera in the evaluation sheet after the first semester with the Mixed Ability group in 2001.

Table 5 (Østern). The existential meaning perspective constructed through the dancers' answers in interview two.

Existential meaning themes making up an existential meaning perspective	Karen	Mona	Vera	Ida	Heidi	Teresa	Paul	Anna
The project influences my every day	x	x						
The project affects my mood		x		x	x			
I get new energy from the group					x	x		
I have become enlightened				x				

In interview two there are now more dancers who talk from within an existential meaning perspective than before they started the project. The experiences in the Dance Laboratory have allowed some of the dancers to get in touch with an existential dimension. In interview one, before the project had started, only Anna talked from within an existential meaning perspective when telling about what dance means to her.

All meaning themes developed under this meaning perspective in interview two are new. They tell about how the project affects the dancers' mood, level of energy, knowledge or everyday life in a way that feeds into the existence of their lives. I define the existential meaning perspective as belonging tightly together with the bodily-somatic meaning perspective. I have distinguished them as two different perspectives, but I wish to underline that they connect deeply. The feeling of existential meaning and the experience of learning for life is felt and lived, located in our bodies.

The opposite thing though, seems to have happened to Anna. Instead of developing her existential meaning perspective regarding how dance is meaningful for her, it disappears altogether. Actually, Anna seems quite troubled in interview two. She does not talk about her own experiences at all, but reflects about and is rather critical towards the methodology being developed in the group. The experiences in the project do not feed into her joy of dance and it does not give her a feeling of existential connectedness. I suggest that this tells that during the autumn of 2003, with only Vera and Anna as participators, the dance improvisation in the Dance Laboratory did not manage to create the same kind of dynamics and excitement as during the spring of 2004. I was less clear as the teacher-choreographer about how to work with the group – a group with only two dancers. Anna did not come in contact with an existential dimension in dance in the Dance Laboratory during that autumn. She did not experience that flow, joy and excitement which she usually feels in dance.

I also distinguish an intrapersonal meaning perspective in interview two, but experiences connected to “myself” and “my identity” as such are not being emphasised. The following themes I have defined as belonging to an intrapersonal meaning perspective, and again it is important to underline that this meaning perspective connects closely to the bodily-somatic and existential meaning perspectives.

Table 6 (Østern). The intrapersonal meaning perspective constructed through the dancers' responses in interview two.

Intrapersonal meaning themes making up an intrapersonal meaning perspective	Karen	Mona	Vera	Ida	Heidi	Teresa	Paul	Anna
I manage to do the dance			x					
I have learnt a lot about myself in relation to people with disabilities.				x				
I have learnt to cross my own limits.				x				
I really show who I am in the improvisation					x			
I feel different now, which is a good feeling							x	

Through an intrapersonal meaning perspective, Vera, Ida, Heidi and Paul express a feeling of things they have learnt about themselves. Vera has experienced a feeling of “I can” in her body while dancing: she manages to do the dance. The dance opens up a new sense of self for her. Regarding Ida, the meetings with differently bodied people in dance open up for new insights about herself. And she is challenged to cross her limits. Heidi experiences showing who she is in the improvisation – which again is both good and difficult and makes her feel vulnerable. Paul says that he feels different now, and that this is a good feeling. In this, these dancers express how their experiences in dance improvisation influence them personally and closely. The improvisation affects their sense of “I”: who I am and what I learn.

To an even larger extent, the dancers' experiences in the Dance Laboratory affect their sense of “us”: who *we are together* and what we have in common. The community meaning perspective which I investigate next has expanded considerably and changed character in interview two. It has transformed as a meaning perspective altogether, and many more community meaning themes are expressed. To organize the answers, I have divided the community meaning perspective itself into three sub-perspectives: meaning themes regarding *this* group, a social meaning perspective *in general* and a *social-political* perspective.

Table 7 (Østern). The community meaning perspective constructed through the dancers' responses in interview two.

Community meaning themes making up a community meaning perspective	Karen	Mona	Vera	Ida	Heidi	Teresa	Paul	Anna
<b>sub-perspective 1: this group</b>								
Happiness that the group exists			x					
Learning about the people in the group				x				
Learning in the group	x							
Interesting and fun to dance together						x		
Trusting the group		x		x		x		
A sense of community						x		
The group affects everybody						x		
Receiving from others				x				
Admiring others		x						
Communicating with others in the group							x	
<b>sub-perspective 2: a social perspective in general</b>								
Meeting other people	x							
Dancing with other people			x					
Trusting other people	x							
<b>sub-perspective 3: a social-political perspective</b>								
Not finding words about dancing with differently bodied dancers		x						
Creating together despite differences		x						
We all have our limitations		x						
Not underestimating disabled people				x				
One can communicate with everybody				x				
Seeing nuances in everybody				x				
The same value seen in everybody gives safety				x				
I act more normally towards the dancers with disabilities now					x	x		
Communication through movement is important for everybody							x	

The experience of being in the context of the Dance Laboratory has changed many of the dancers' community meaning perspective. The community meaning perspective has grown, expanded and changed character compared to interview one. The sub-perspectives which have grown considerably are "this group" (this is a new sub-perspective altogether) and "a social-political perspective" (which I have changed from being a meaning theme to a sub-perspective on its own). The sub-perspective "a social perspective in general" is shrinking.

Looking at the group as a whole, there is a real feeling of community developing. With *community* I mean a connectedness: a sense of belonging to something which extends past the individual, but of which each individual is an important part. This feeling of community in the group, including a developing social-political perspective, is clearly expressed by Mona, Ida, Heidi and Teresa. These four (and especially Mona and Ida) dancers in a fundamental way change their perspective on community and on differently bodied people through their experiences in the Dance Laboratory between interviews one and two.

Karen does not transform her community meaning perspective, but she adds meaning themes to it (*trusting* people and *learning* in the group in addition to *meeting* other people). Vera's and Paul's community meaning perspective stays similar to the one that they had before starting the

project. Vera emphasises that it is good to dance with other people and Paul that communication through movement is important for everybody. Still, I am aware that they both might have more nuanced experiences or thoughts which I do not manage to get hold of or understand. They both, in quite different ways, experience problems with spoken language. I have discussed this in detail in Section 1.3.5. Interviews as research material in this study.

Anna does not express a community meaning perspective at all in interview two. As a matter of fact, she hardly talks about her *own* experiences in interview two. Instead, she takes the position of a teacher, who together with me observes the students (in this case, during the autumn term of 2003, Vera only) and discusses what kind of methodology should be used. In this way, Anna brings up a methodological meaning perspective, which I will come back to in a while. Again, it is important to remember that in interview two Anna was talking about experiences during the autumn of 2003, when the project was struggling more than in the spring of 2004. So Anna's experiences were different, but also, I suggest, her identification with me as the teacher made her try to take a teacher's, instead of a participant's position when reflecting about the project.

Looking at the fact that many of the dancers' community meaning perspective deepened and transformed from interview one to two, it is possible to say that the Dance Laboratory offered clear meaning-making possibilities connected to "the other" and to what *community* is about. This seems to be a strong meaning offer in the Dance Laboratory: to find out more about community, or connectedness to other – also differently bodied – people. I suggest this meaning offer is there because the Dance Laboratory is not *any* kind of movement activity, but because it is a *specific aesthetic* and *art pedagogical* activity. The Dance Laboratory uses, develops and promotes movement and touch in *specific* ways, with focus on meeting, listening, exploring, relating, dialoguing and communicating between dancers across traditional categories.

Rouhiainen<sup>526</sup> argues that in an ethical relation with another we ourselves are transformed as well. She suggests that from a communicative perspective ethicality means that I acknowledge the difference of the other and avoid subsuming the other under some reductive category or taking for granted that the other is like me. Clearly, Rouhiainen says, the listening between different people needs to be done in a dialogical manner by identifying bodily experiences without prejudice as well as acknowledging the difference of another in an open and welcoming manner. This is similar to Sullivan's<sup>527</sup> argument that we need to remind ourselves that other bodies do not speak to me in a straightforward manner that needs no interpretation by my (different) body. She also writes that when I open up to the foreignness of the other and rid myself of the assumption that, in an anonymous way, I already know what an other tells me, then I can start understanding another human not as a projection of my own body-subject, but as a construction which takes place in the meeting between two different individuals.

Cooper Albright<sup>528</sup> highlights the importance of people getting in touch with each other in saying that *the act of touching does change you*. Shotter<sup>529</sup> writes that living moments can move us

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526 Rouhiainen (2008, p. 249)

527 Sullivan (1997, download p. 8)

528 Cooper Albright (2007, paper at the conference Re-thinking Practice and Theory. International Symposium on Dance Research. Centre National de la Danse, Paris)

529 Shotter (1999a, download p. 5)



ontologically. When we shake hands, he argues, I can feel “you” in your responsive movements to my hand movements, while you can feel “me” in mine. We can both feel something of our relationship. Something of deep importance happens in these living moments, he argues. They often make the kind of difference in our lives that matter to us.

Being aware of the fact that this claim is actually categorical, I still suggest that the possibility of broadening and transforming the meaning perspective on “the other” is there, especially for the non-disabled dancers in the Dance Laboratory. It is only Vera and Karen who bring up meaning themes belonging to what I see as a more general social perspective. They say that it is good to meet other people, dance with other people, and trust other people. Neither Vera nor Karen brings up a meaning theme belonging to the social-political perspective.

I suggest that this is because they have this social-political awareness already. They already know that neither disabled nor non-disabled people should be underestimated. They already behave “normally” (that is, in the same way as with everybody) towards both disabled and non-disabled people, and they know that relations with non-disabled (and disabled) people are dialogical, not monological. This might not be an “aware” social-political awareness, but a lived awareness, and therefore they do not talk about it. There is no need, because they know it deeply already. For many of the non-disabled dancers, on the other hand, this is a real discovery which changes their community meaning perspective. As I already have pointed out, Mona, Ida, Heidi and Teresa in a fundamental way change their perspective on community and on differently bodied people through their experiences in the Dance Laboratory between interviews one and two.

The possibilities for community meaning perspective transformation seem to be huge in the specific setting which the Dance Laboratory creates. Another meaning perspective which is also starting to develop and to some extent transform in interview two, is the aesthetic meaning perspective. Within this perspective I distinguish different meaning themes about what dance is or can be.

Table 8 (Østern). The aesthetic meaning perspective constructed through the dancers’ responses in interview two.

Aesthetic meaning themes making up an aesthetic meaning perspective	Karen	Mona	Vera	Ida	Heidi	Teresa	Paul	Anna
Dance is creative	x							
It is fascinating to create together		x				x		
Dance and improvisation has become much more				x				
What we create is very exciting						x		
Communication in movement is for everybody				x			x	
Observation is an important part of dancing				x	x			

The aesthetic meaning perspective does not change fundamentally for the dancers as a group between interviews one and two, but some rather large individual changes can be noticed. Ida is the one dancer who has really transformed her aesthetic meaning perspective. Dance and improvisation have opened up for her and have become “much more” through the project.

Karen adds a new meaning theme to her aesthetic meaning perspective: that dance is creative. I suggest this is a rather big discovery for her, which changes her experience and understanding of dance altogether. Her space for dance broadens.

Paul stays with his foregrounding meaning theme: communication through movement is important for everybody. This is a statement that has a community dimension, but it also affects the aesthetic meaning perspective on dance. It raises questions like: who can dance, with whom, in which ways and where? Ida and Heidi have included *observation* in dance as a meaning theme. They have discovered observation as an interesting aspect of dance. Vera and Anna, who were interviewed during autumn term 2003, do not talk from an aesthetic meaning perspective. The project does not raise aesthetic meaning themes for them.

Finally, the methodological meaning perspective has expanded, as the dancers now have experience of the teaching. This meaning perspective is made up by meaning themes concerning the teacher or the teaching. I have divided these themes into critical and positive feedback on the teaching. With critical I mean themes which bring up what is *not* there, and which should be there to improve the teaching. With positive I mean themes which point to the importance of what is already there in the teaching.

Table 9 (Østern). The methodological meaning perspective constructed through the dancers' responses in interview two.

Methodological meaning themes making up a methodological meaning perspective	Karen	Mona	Vera	Ida	Heidi	Teresa	Paul	Anna
<b>Negative meaning themes</b>								
Too little improvisation, too much choreography								x
Too little technical training								x
Too little time used on each aspect								x
The methods still not found								x
Too little time spent on repetition								x
Feedback on my bodily weakness is uncomfortable	x							
When I do not manage a task I want to quit the project	x							
<b>Positive meaning themes</b>								
The importance of the discussions to release tension		x		x				
All in the class are given the same value, which creates safety				x				
The teacher's calm and playful energy				x				
Everybody is seen by the teacher				x				
The tasks given by the teacher are exciting						x		

Most of the critical feedback came during autumn term 2003 and was given by Anna. Again, I suggest this shows that the experience of the project during the autumn term and the spring term differs a lot. As the dance teacher for the project, I struggled during the autumn term of 2003 to find out how to work in this group. Some important critical feedback also comes from Karen in spring 2004, who is not comfortable with being corrected and working with aspects that she experience as her weaknesses.

Ida also talks from within a methodological meaning perspective in interview two. This perspective was not there for her in interview one, but has opened up through her experiences

in the project. In other words, Ida has become observant on how the teacher teaches and she has become conscious about how the pedagogical choices are important for the context created in the Dance Laboratory.

To conclude, the interpretation of interview two shows how the meaning perspectives which the dancers talk from open up, deepen and change. Some dancers lose meaning perspectives, but looking at the dancers as a group, all the meaning perspectives constructed based on interview one stay within the group.

Again, it is important to notice and underline that the dancers keep developing and changing through the project as individuals, not as categories. The meaning perspective transformation does not happen in a categorical way. In other words, it is not possible to say that disabled dancers learn this and non-disabled dancers learn that, or that professional dancers learn something special and other than non-professionals. On the contrary, the interpretation of this empirical material forcefully rejects the thought that learning and meaning-making is connected to pre-divided categories of people. If anything categorical is to be said about the meaning possibilities in this group at all, it is that the non-disabled dancers have a special opportunity to discover “the other” in new ways. The discovery of a more power symmetric and dialogical instead of monological way of relating to the disabled dancers in a fundamental way changes many of the non-disabled dancers in this study. Their community meaning perspective broadens. This is a strong meaning offer in the Dance Laboratory, which seems to be there especially for the non-disabled dancers.

In the Dance Laboratory, then, all individuals feed into the group, as the group also feeds back to each individual. Or, in other words, as an individual dancer touches the group, she is being touched back by the group. The dancers start taking part in each other’s lifeworld, and there is an exchange between lifeworlds. The group leaves imprints on the individual dancer and each individual dancer on the group. This happens in a bodily way. Reminiscent of the choreographer Lesgart’s<sup>330</sup> description of the skin as a map including all the meetings he has had with different dancers, the dancers in the Dance Laboratory also leave traces on each other’s skin and minds. This happens because they have touched and been touched by each other. The act of communicating through touching, rolling over each other’s body surfaces, supporting each other’s weight, carrying the other through a glide or jump, lifting the other off the ground with the help of one’s own body strength, exploring movement and identity and reflecting about improvisation together are processes through which *dancers change*.

#### **4.2.3. Meaning perspective transformation**

Interview three was conducted differently as it took the form of a discussion between myself and the interviewed dancer. I used interview three to develop, adjust and deepen the meaning themes and perspectives already brought up by the dancer in the previous interviews.

In the process of interpreting interviews one and two I have constructed meaning themes and

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<sup>330</sup> Lesgart interviewed by Østern in Pà Spissen (2005, 1 pp.10–11)

meaning perspectives which the dancers talk about and from within. I have done that through a system of creating tables where I condense and organize the dancers' different meaning themes and perspectives. This system has helped me to get hold of what the dancers actually talk about and which perspectives the different dancers hold.

The answers to interview three explode this system. For most dancers the answers are much longer. The answers are complex and contain much information, thoughts, opinions and reflections. In this section I will interpret interview three through looking at the meaning perspectives one by one.

The meaning perspectives constructed based on interview one and two are:

- *a bodily-somatic meaning perspective*
- *an existential meaning perspective*
- *an intrapersonal meaning perspective*
- *a community meaning perspective*
- *an aesthetic meaning perspective*
- *a methodological meaning perspective*

These are the meaning perspectives, constructed by me, that merge into the awareness of the dancers' experience. These perspectives are expressed and transformed because there is a dynamic movement between the dancers' lived experiences in the Dance Laboratory and the dancers' meaning perspectives. The meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory happen as a constant flow between lived experience and conscious thought. The interview situation for this research is an important additional opportunity for the dancers to develop their awareness of the process they take part in. In this way, the research project in itself offers an opportunity to create connections between lived experience in dance and conscious thought.

The meaning perspectives of the dancers expand and deepen through new meaning themes during their period in the Dance Laboratory. The meaning perspectives also transform in a way that fundamentally changes the way the dancers look at, for example, dance as aesthetic discourse or "the other". The dancers walk as individuals, not as categories, through the project. They have their personal meaning projects, but they all change. In that way, the whole group also changes collectively. I would say that the space for dance created between them expands. As a group, *the dancers know more* and they know different things when they end the project compared with when they started. What they know, they know in their bodies – and in their minds.

There was one question which I asked both in interview one and in interview three, and that was the question of what dance means to them.

In interview three I asked the dancers the following question:

*You described what dance means to you before you started this project.  
Can you do that again? What is dance to you?*

This question was given to everybody in interview three, but the answer from Anna is lost due to technical problems.<sup>531</sup>

The dancers answered like this when asked what dance means to them in interview one and interview three. The answers are only slightly edited, taking away sounds like “ee” and “hmmm” when the dancers think and pause between sentences or words:

**Karen**

Dance stimulates body contact. We blind people get a very good feeling for the partner, when dancing. We feel the body movements. (*interview one*)

After I have started the Dance Laboratory I more and more think that dance can be defined in many different ways. I all the way thought that dance is dance, that is movement to music, movement in rhythm with the music and according to different patterns. In a way, the bird dance is the bird dance and the ketchup dance is the ketchup dance in a way that you do different movements which the dance expects, that is what the dance expresses. But it is not like that, really. I mean, when I am in the Dance Laboratory, I could, for example, do the ketchup dance and I could move in a quite different way than I should move. That would be possible, I could allow myself to do that. So I define dance more like ... it can be defined in a broader way, in different ways, you know. You know, just to do different movements, to go up and down from the floor, that can be dance too. That is why the Dance Laboratory means so much to me. I have come into a bigger space for dance. Before, dance had one meaning, now it has multiple meanings. (*interview three*)

**Mona**

I love to dance and I notice it especially when I dance. I notice that I miss the dance when there is a long time between opportunities to dance. When I took part in the beginner's classes in contemporary dance it felt like I could have danced every day. (*interview one*)

Dance is a lot about freedom. The feeling of freedom. Dance is a possibility to close the world around out at the same time as you open up for the inner world. Together with others this becomes a world where you communicate a whole lot, but without words. In dance I can experience everything from a story to being in the music. Dance can be experienced very differently for all participants. There is a joint, invisible link between everybody which makes the experience very close to everybody, without that fellowship being verbalised. The art in it is in a way the state when I sense a special flow in everything I do. Dance easily gives birth to that experience, but I can also experience it in other situations in life. (*interview three*)

**Vera**

I like to dance very much. I like to move my body. (*interview one*)

I like to dance very much. (*interview three*)

**Ida**

Dance is something I want. I like to dance very much. Dance is often like therapy. Dance is a good way of getting to know people without words. It is good to show another way of communicating to an audience. (*interview one*)

Dance has become much more after this semester. Dance is an expression for giving a message: everything from just existing or to feeling in a special way. Dance gives emotions to the audience without being explicit. It is much more exciting with this kind

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<sup>531</sup> The video tape was full, and as the camera was filming by itself, I did not notice that it had stopped filming during interview three.

of dance, or contemporary dance, than jazz or musicals. It feels much more important, and deeper. Dance is personal. It is much more interesting when it is a personal expression. (*interview three*)

### **Heidi**

Dance means a lot and I think it will always do. I did not start dancing until I was 16, but then I took part in everything that was available; jazz, ballet, swing, salsa – everything. I will always keep dancing. Dance is a big part of me, and it always will be. (*interview one*)

It is difficult to answer the question of what dance is to me. It means a lot to me and it is frightening to think about the fact that I won't study dance full time next year. You are able to express so much in dance, whether it is positive or negative energy. When you dance you are there and then and you don't need to think about everything else. Dance is very important for me and it can be used in many different ways. (*interview three*)

### **Teresa**

Dance means rather much because it something which I have been interested in for a long time. I have always liked to dance. I have always liked to move to music and music is also an important part of my life. So dancing or moving to music feels very natural. To investigate movement becomes more and more exciting. It becomes more and more interesting to work with movement, different movement patterns and with improvisation and see what it can be. (*interview one*)

Dance is one of those things I like to do the most. But I don't like all of dance. Regular patterns and determined forms are not as much fun as the kind of dance we are doing, like improvisation, and just looking what happens. That is what I like the most with dance, to ... not knowing where it takes you. There are many new and exciting things which happen. (*interview three*)

### **Paul**

Dance is important, but music and theatre are equally important. All art forms are important, the arts are a way of investigating life. Through dance I look for me in me. (*interview one*)

Dance is a language which ... for example, when I see a dance performance, then I am not always so happy to comment on it afterwards with words. Because dance and music and all art forms are very different languages. You cannot tell with words what dance or music means, but I think it is a very important language to communicate with each other. Sometimes you can know a person much better in dance. And dance is a very good way of getting to know *me*, of communicating with me. (*interview three*)

### **Anna**

I have danced all my life. So dance is a very important part of who I am. My education is in dance and I have dance as a profession. So dance feels like a part of my identity. Dance is in a way everything. It is both joy and sorrow and frustration and the best in life. Dance means a lot. I think that if I did not dance, I would really have a deep longing in my life. Because dance is such a big part of who I am. I cannot really separate dance from myself, you know. (*interview one*)

(*Anna's answer in interview three is missing*)

Undoubtedly, the dancers have broadened, deepened and transformed their view of dance in the period between interview one and three. The lived experiences in dance that they have had in the meeting with different dancers have changed their meaning perspectives on dance, for

many of them in a fundamental way. Thus, coming back to Briginshaw's<sup>532</sup> questions about space in dance, *what* and *how* space means in the Dance Laboratory has changed and expanded. By now, the space for dance in the group is a rather spacious one: allowing, curious and generous.

In the following, I will describe and interpret transformation within each constructed meaning perspective one by one. I do this by first creating a story describing each meaning perspective, written with the dancers' words. These are direct quotations from interview three with each dancer. I have only edited away sounds and utterances like "mmm" and "eee" occurring when the dancers think or pause and corrected, for example, Paul's sentences to correct language.

I write all the dancers' voices together to form one longer story, thereby narrating each meaning perspective. Still, the individual dancer's name is marked in parenthesis after quotes by them. Interview three with Vera and Anna are different and the result of them can to a greater extent be considered a joint construction between them and me as the researcher. This is described in Section 1.3.5. Interviews as research material in this study. Regarding these two dancers I therefore write (Vera/Tone) and (Anna/Tone) in parenthesis to show my higher involvement in the construction of these answers.

I want to underline that the meaning perspectives expressed and constructed have resonance in the lived experience of the dancers. The dancers' meaning perspective transformation is anchored in the lived, bodily processes of improvisation which the dancers have taken part in. I will discuss the bodily-somatic, existential and intrapersonal meaning perspectives at once, since I believe that they connect together very closely, with only small nuances distinguishing them. By saying this, I suggest that it is the bodily, lived experiences in the dance improvisation which allow for the feeling of existential connection and intrapersonal insights. Therefore, in the following I first create stories from the dancer's voices about being a moving body (a bodily-somatic meaning perspective), about improvising and connecting to life (an existential meaning perspective) and about a sense of self in the improvisation (an intrapersonal meaning perspective), and then go on to discuss them.

#### *The dancers' stories about being a moving body – a bodily-somatic meaning perspective*

The physical contact is very, very important. Improvisation is hard to describe. When it works, there is a flow in it. The distance between when it works and when it fails is extremely small. That balance is fragile. In the dance I have experienced that when I try the most, I fail the most. But if I dare, manage, to just be in it, then it becomes easier. Dance is a lot about freedom. The feeling of freedom. Dance is a possibility to close the world around out at the same time as you open up for the inner world. Together with others this becomes a world where you communicate a whole lot, but without words. The art in it is in a way the state when I sense a special flow in everything I do. Dance easily gives birth to that experience, but I can also experience it in other situations in life. (*Mona*) I want to emphasise the importance of trusting oneself and trusting the fact that somebody is going to catch you when you fall. I have experience with falling from before – "now I fall, now I fall" – and then I just fall, and I fall very heavily. So there I need some practise, because there is a difference between falling and falling. It is heavy and you can injure yourself, but you can also learn to fall in an easier way. (*Karen*) When I am actually quite tired and then come to the Dance Laboratory, then everything is very comfortable and feels so good, and we start

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532 Briginshaw, (2001, p. 9)

easily and the structure is so good. Even if we work physically it is just so relaxing for the head. Even if there are a lot of things to watch and there are a lot of thoughts, it is still just such good brain input. I get such a good feeling after the classes because I feel rinsed from top to toe. That thing with improvising when other people watch you, it has to do with your own mood and feeling that day. Some days you feel just great and other days you don't want to. When you dance you are there and then and you don't need to think about everything else. (*Heidi*) When we are leading and following, then it is really difficult to listen to what the leader wants. Then you cannot think about yourself, you must only listen to the other. You need to be very open for that. (*Paul*) I like to investigate a wide spectrum of movement. I find it interesting to use different body parts to create movement. I have discovered different possibilities to initiate movement from different body parts, like from the head and the back. I have discovered that I have a lot of strength and can more easily direct that strength through the use of my spine or head, than through my arms and legs. I can also more easily direct movement in relation with a partner than on my own. It is also easier to keep attention and remember the task when working with a partner than when working alone. (*Vera/Tone*)

### *The dancers' stories about improvising and connecting to life— an existential meaning perspective*

When improvisation works, it is like in other aspects of life, too: when it works there is a special flow in it. You fit together with the others. As in many other situations in life. In an everyday existence which is rather tough I have looked forward to coming here. It has been a space to breathe. When I dance and it works, then I more easily go into a state of flow. I can experience that in other situations in life, too. There is something there, but you don't know exactly what it is. In a way, that is the art in it. When it really works. And like that it can be between people in different situations. (*Mona*) The Dance Laboratory adds on to the other things I do everyday, and it is a relaxation from the usual things. It is true that it affects me. (*Karen*)

### *The dancers' stories about my sense of self in the improvisation – an intrapersonal meaning perspective*

I grow a lot when I dare improvisation. But improvisation also makes me very vulnerable. I have learnt to be in the not-achievement. Learnt to dare to be frightened. I have been obsessed with the thought that I should do a lot and that it should be nice. Then instead, it can take the time it takes. (*Mona*) I have really learnt a lot about myself. How moved I become by watching. I have learnt a lot about my own limits. I have learnt how much the dance gets in touch with my feelings. I have learnt not to be so introvert in the dance and instead see the others. I have learnt a lot about trusting other people. (*Ida*) I have more belief in myself after this semester and also more self-knowledge. Especially when it comes to body control and daring to let go. (*Karen*) Dance is a very good way of getting to know *me*, of communicating with me. When I started the Dance Laboratory I think I felt a bit closed. And then I have become more open afterwards. I think that is quite usual. I have learnt a lot of things about myself, but it is difficult to say what I have learnt. It is difficult to say in Spanish too, because it is difficult to say with words. When I have seen, for example, Vera be so happy when she is dancing, then I think that sometimes I experience a lot of problems because of unimportant things. And she was so happy just to dance. So I think I have learnt that. You don't need a lot of things to be happy in life. (*Paul*) I think that from the start I have entered this as a teacher, with the thought that this should become choreography. I haven't gone into it just like me, here and now, there and then, and experience. I think it can be a bit like that when I take yoga classes, too. Because I am so used to having the teacher role in that situation. And also a bit because there are students of mine that have been in the group. That I have that role towards them. But over time, and while we have been talking about it, I have been able to relax and let go of that. (*Anna/Tone*) The others learn to know me more truly in dance. (*Vera/Tone*)



The dancers' voices tell me that the experiences in the Dance Laboratory have meaning as *lived*. These are bodily, somatic meanings which quite literally are meaningful in the bodies: they are meaningful in the bodies' ways. The dancers mention words like flow, freedom, the inner world, everything in the room is dance, falling, trust, relaxing, a good feeling, rinsed, it is a space to breathe, listening, following, leading, initiate movement, different body parts, strength, attention and partner work. All these words and sentences have a strong bodily-somatic meaning. They are sensed meanings, felt meanings. For many of the dancers these bodily, lived meanings come together with new intrapersonal understanding; a new understanding about "I"; a sensuous, bodily "I". For some of them, these bodily meanings have an existential character: they extend beyond the dance studio and connect to life.

The interpretation of how the dancers' bodily-somatic, intrapersonal and existential meaning perspectives develop and transform tells me that there is knowledge of aesthetic and pedagogical value to generate about how dance improvisation affects the dancers in a bodily, somatic, intrapersonal and possibly existential way in this study. Still, I have a feeling that there is more bodily-somatic, intrapersonal and existential experiences embedded in this project than I manage to get hold of. Somehow, regarding the fact that this is a dance improvisation project, the dancers tell surprisingly little about their actual lived, sensed, moving experiences.

In order to understand this feeling that I have, I turn to study Anttila's<sup>533</sup> research about the affiliation between the conscious body and the reflective mind. In her research Anttila has investigated what kind of mental reflections bodily presence generates, in an attempt to open a window on what dancers know. She reports on a project where she asked four female professional dancers to combine physical activity with introspection. Very shortly, introspection is about replacing a "natural" attitude with a phenomenological attitude towards our experiences.

Anttila's<sup>534</sup> informants are different from the ones in this study, as Anttila's informants are all professional dancers. The dancers in the Dance Laboratory were not asked to use introspection and they were not encouraged to talk about anything special in the interviews. Anttila specifically encouraged her informants to pay attention to bodily experience and inner sensations. Introspection is a written form, whereas I used interviews individually with each dancer. Still, I find it interesting to study the kind of topics Anttila's informants brought up. For her analysis, Anttila categorized the answers she received in the following four groups, consisting of in total 11 topics:

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533 Anttila (2007, pp. 79–99)

534 Anttila (2007, pp. 79–99)

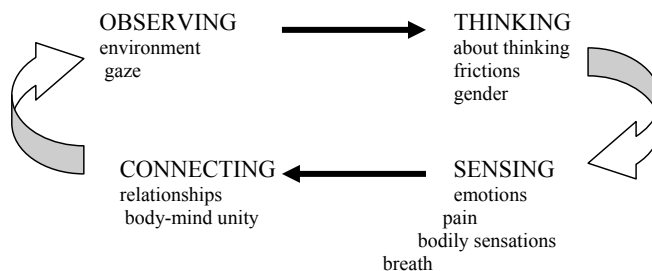


Figure 6 (Anttila, 2007, p. 86). Eeva Anttila's groups of topics in her analysis of introspection by four female professional dancers.

What strikes me when interpreting the interview material from the Dance Laboratory is that quite few of the meaning themes, the different topics that the dancers bring up, can be positioned under Anttila's group *sensing*. There are quite few quotes by the dancers that tell about the actual bodily act of dancing, moving and sensing. There are no comments at all about breath or pain, and few about bodily sensations. There are quite a few statements about emotions, but seldom described bodily: how the emotion is actually a bodily state.

Mostly the dancers bring up themes that could be positioned in Anttila's group *thinking*, *observing* and *connecting*. They reflect about dance, about the phenomenon of being in the Dance Laboratory and about other and differently bodied people. Mostly they do this in way which easily slips away from a description of the actual movements and bodily sensations themselves. Of course, and even more importantly, the same is true for me as the interviewer, and also as a teacher. As a teacher during this period I direct some, but not enough, attention to the actual quality of the movements and the sensations of the moving body, and as a researcher I – surprisingly and sadly – do not focus on this at all. This, I suggest, explains why the dancers tell fairly little about bodily-somatic experiences and sensations. The limitations of my own bodily-somatic meaning perspective influences and limits what the dancers will develop.

A higher focus directed to bodily-somatic experiences could have increased an awareness of how the meaning perspective transformation happens *because of* the dancers' lived processes like moving, touching, relating and communicating in dance improvisation. This insight still is there in the material, but difficult to get hold off because of lack of attention during the interviews directed to how dance is a bodily-somatic experience which has meaning as *lived*.

Today (2008), when I read the interviews conducted in 2004 I wish I had asked more and other follow up questions. If I had done that, I suggest that more themes could have been defined and described within the bodily-somatic, existential and intrapersonal meaning perspectives. It is fair to say that I show what Johansson<sup>535</sup> calls discourse domination over the dancers and the material, at that time being more interested in the conceptual than the bodily aspects in their stories. I was still too much of a child of dualism: splitting, instead of connecting body and mind. Since I did not clearly see the importance of making connections between bodily

535 Johansson (2005, p. 307)

processes and conscious thought, I did not follow the dancers' reflections into the more bodily parts of it. Still, the threads were there for me to follow. Looking at the meaning themes the dancers brought up, today I wish I had asked, for example:

*What is flow?*

*How do you experience flow? And when? In which situations?*

*You say there is a thin line between succeeding and failing in improvisation. How do you feel that you fail?*

*When everything that happens in the room is dance, how do you sense that?*

*What is the difference between falling and falling?*

*How do you feel rinsed from top to toe?*

*Why is it important to listen?*

*What is listening in improvisation about?*

*How do you feel that you fit together with others?*

*In what way has this been a space to breathe?*

*Why is dance relaxation from other situations?*

*In what way have you received more self knowledge?*

*In what way can you control your body better now?*

*When you felt happy in the dance improvisation, how could you notice that feeling in your body?*

*Was it in your stomach? Or in the chest?*

When I examine myself as interviewer in the interview material, I notice my own discourse domination happening especially towards Karen. Karen is the one participant who talks the most about actual bodily experiences and longings. When interviewing her, I do not seem to be very interested in these experiences. Instead of following and asking her to deepen the themes she brings up, I seem to want to move on from her themes to other, more conceptual ones. The following quote from the third interview with Karen reveals such a situation:

Tone: – What do you think has been the most important thing with this course? When you think back, which impression is the most important and lasting for you?

Karen thinks for a while and then says:

– Yes, the aspect which I want to emphasise the most, is this with having trust in yourself, and trusting the fact that somebody will catch you ... if you have to fall. Because I know, I have previous experience with that, that "now I fall, now I fall" and then I just fall because ... when I fall I fall very heavily, then. So it is this ... I feel I need some training in falling, because there is a difference between falling and falling. It is. It is hard and you can hurt yourself a lot, but at the same time you can fall in an easier way, and there I see in a way a need for me to practise.

Tone: – But first of all it seems you have important and positive experiences in the Dance Laboratory?

Karen: – Yes.<sup>536</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> Quote from interview 3 with Karen, May 2004.

By asking Karen “but first of all it seems you have important and positive experiences in the Dance Laboratory” after her story about her experiences with falling, I neglect her interest in falling. It is as if I tacitly tell her that these reflections of hers are not important and not positive, by telling her that “it seems you mostly have important and positive experiences”. Had I interviewed her today, I would have asked her quite other follow-up questions.

*You say there is a difference between falling and falling.*

*Can you describe how?*

*What is falling heavily like?*

*Why do you fall heavily?*

*Can you locate the heaviness in your body?*

*Where do you hurt yourself when you fall heavily?*

*Can you tell about an occasion when you fell heavily?*

*What is it like to fall in an easier way?*

*How do you feel about falling easily?*

*How would you like to practise that?*

What is being neglected during the interviews, because I did not ask questions anchored in the bodily experience, is the link between what is going on in terms of movement and sensations and the meaning perspective transformation among the dancers. As my awareness grows and my own bodily-somatic meaning perspective transforms through the research process I try to verbalise this connection, but a reflective discussion between the dancers and myself about bodily-somatic meaning themes is being left out to an unnecessary extent in this material.

Anttila<sup>537</sup> writes that there is “heavy traffic” going on between our conscious thought and bodily experience. This study confirms this, in illuminating that the meaning themes and meaning perspectives by the dancers in the Dance Laboratory expand and transform considerably as they take part in dance improvisation with differently bodied dancers. However, there is a lack of attention towards the connection between the dancers’ bodily experiences and the conscious reflections they developed. In this, there is the risk of losing out of sight *the specificity* of the lived, moving environment created in dance improvisation with differently bodied dancers.

Anttila<sup>538</sup> describes that she received a very rich material where the dancers connected physical experience to conscious thought. She suggests that dancers might have a special ability to distinguish and give meaning to bodily sensations. This is not confirmed by this study, as the professional dancers do not tell about their experiences in a richer way than the others. However, Anttila might be right if attention is directed towards it in the instructions, which I did not. In any case, I think that the link between bodily experience and conscious thought is all too often made invisible through lack of language and attention towards the actual bodily sensations. As Anttila, I mean that increased awareness of this is of critical importance in order to understand more fully how we make meaning as bodily and minded beings. Dance improvisation is a rich

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537 Anttila (2007, p. 95)

538 Anttila (2007)

arena to study and develop an understanding about this.

To conclude, an interpretation of the interview material tells me that the bodily-somatic, existential and intrapersonal meaning perspectives have changed and transformed among the dancers in the Dance Laboratory. This change is not similar for everybody, and the change is not categorical. An interpretation of the material also tells that a more thorough connection between bodily processes and conscious thought could have happened through directing more attention towards bodily-somatic themes during the interviews. As a researcher, awareness about this has grown slowly in me through this research process. Thereby, my own bodily-somatic meaning perspective has transformed in a fundamental way.

In addition to the knowledge hooks already collected I add the following ones which dance improvisation can be spun around, based on the dancers' bodily-somatic, existential and intrapersonal meaning perspectives:

flow	meet	dare	feelings	moods
initiate movement		investigate movement		
breathe	moving and moved	meet	being vulnerable	

In the following, I describe and interpret the community meaning perspective transformation among the dancers. Again, I start with creating a story from the dancer's voices about community and connecting to other people. Direct quotations (with very little editing from my part) by the different dancers are woven together into one long story, still with the different dancers' names in parenthesis after their sentences.

*The dancers' stories about community and connecting to other people*  
— a community meaning perspective

Dance can be experienced very differently for all participants. There is a joint, invisible link between everybody, which makes the experience very close to everybody, without that fellowship being verbalised. When I want to tell about my experiences, the disability thing immediately receives a lot of focus. If I hadn't been part of this group I probably would have reacted the same way. But now my experience is different. This project is not about disability, this is about dance. Now I find it easier to tell to others than before because I have understood that I must get through the joy I experience. Then it becomes easier. It is fascinating that we are equal in the dance. It is not the way that some dancers are more valuable than others. I have become less careful with disabled people. (*Mona*) It is exciting to try other people's starting point, like testing wheelchairs and working with your eyes closed. I have been very afraid to do something wrong with the disabled participants. To turn them around, for example. That they would fall and injure themselves. But I have learnt that it is ok to mess around a bit with them. I have learnt to rely on people who I don't know. Now, I have got to know the person Vera – who happens to use a wheelchair. Karen completely freaks out during improvisations, she says "Allah, Allah" and things like that. I have much more restrictions. We learn a lot from them, Vera and Karen, and then afterwards maybe we others learn, too. That is something you maybe did not expect. It is very nice to discuss and talk with Karen and Vera, because they see things a bit differently. We are so used to thinking about technique. (*Ida*) Not just with the dancing, but also otherwise, you think you need to pay so much respect to disabled people. And you think that you always need to be so careful with somebody who is disabled. And I was in the beginning, but now in the end I don't think

about it at all. I have just tried to think “how can we make them join this?” and tried to make it work. I never think like “No, I don’t think we can make this work”. The new relation I have received towards disabled people has been a great “wow!” experience. (*Heidi*) I have learnt a lot. I have developed in relation to other people. I have learnt to express myself in a new way, among new people. In the beginning I was a bit anxious whether the disabled participants would be a hindrance, but I have learnt that they are not at all. And I have seen very many different meetings. And that has given me experience which has made me develop as a dancer. A feeling of trust has developed in the group. I feel that I have got new friends. The feeling of trust in the group makes us dare to produce many things which maybe otherwise would be a bit uncomfortable to do together with other people. It has become a nice bunch of people. I don’t think about the fact that Vera, for example, has a disability. That is not a hindrance at all. And that is so great, I like that very much. That is maybe one of the nicest things, to see how she has opened up. That is great. (*Teresa*) The Dance Laboratory is very important for me because there I can communicate with others. Without using words, just through the language of dance. (*Paul*) In dance, it seems I change position from being “a girl in a wheelchair” to being the person Vera. In everyday life, it is a problem for me that people in general seem to see just a girl in wheelchair, instead of seeing me. That changes in the dance improvisation. The others learn to know me more truly in dance. (*Vera/Tone*)

The change and the learning that takes place within the community meaning perspective is a real wow-factor in the Dance Laboratory. The “*I*” and “*the other person*” relationship is under powerful transformation during the project. This is especially true for Mona, Ida, Heidi and Teresa. Their main meaning theme within the community meaning perspective is their changed view of disabled people. This happens as a complete deconstruction of previous narratives about people with disabilities. As the dancers reach out to touch each other, literally and metaphorically, the cultural and disempowering narratives about disability which many of the non-disabled dancers tacitly bring with them immediately collapse. This affects the way the dancers act towards and think about each other, expressed well by Ida:

– I have been very afraid to do something wrong with the disabled participants. To turn them around, for example. That they would fall and injure themselves. But I have learnt that it is ok to mess around a bit with them. I have learnt to rely on people who I don’t know. Now, I have got to know the person Vera – who happens to use a wheelchair. Karen completely freaks out during improvisations, she says “Allah, Allah” and things like that. I have much more restrictions.<sup>539</sup> quote interview

This is a really important change which empowers the disabled dancers in the project. This change of narrative about people with disabilities lays the ground for new ways of relating across differences and traditional categories. On this ground, it is possible to negotiate about a new and more generous space for dance. Here it is worthwhile reminding about Sandahl and Auslander<sup>540</sup>, who argue that the patient-like role which is often given to people with disabilities is infantilizing and disempowering. This is a real problem for many people with disabilities, even much bigger than the disability itself. In interview three, it seems like Mona, Ida, Heidi and Teresa have understood this deeply and fundamentally, in a way which changes their view

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539 Quote from interview three with Ida, May 2004.

540 Sandahl and Auslander (2005, p. 129)

of people with disabilities forever. This is also what Mezirow<sup>541</sup> says about meaning perspective transformation: once an individual has moved on to a new meaning perspective, she can never go back to the old one. In this, the disabled dancers become not invisible nor hyper-visible<sup>542</sup>, but simply visible in the Dance Laboratory.

The bodily processes of meeting, listening, touching, being touched by, investigating movement, and exploring form and dynamics with differently bodied dancers has brought up a new relation between the non-disabled and disabled dancers. This relation is going towards one which is dialogical and power symmetrical, instead of monological and power asymmetrical. This is a new relation to investigate and it seems to be an overwhelming discovery for especially Mona, Ida, Heidi and Teresa. The act of touching, relating, listening and moving in a context of diversity has changed their sense of community.

But again, the meaning perspective transformation in the Dance Laboratory is not similar for everybody. Vera, Karen, Paul and Anna do not show much community meaning perspective transformation, and none of them bring up disability as a meaning theme in their interviews.

Regarding Vera and Karen, the reason for this is, I suggest, that there is simply no discovery to do. It has always been obvious to them that they are in a dialogue with non-disabled people. The fact that it is about a dialogue going *in two directions* is only a new and surprising experience for the non-disabled dancers. Vera and Karen already have an open gaze on non-disabled people (and each other) and they do not view them as, for example, passive receivers of help. The project does not offer much change in the sense of community to Vera and Karen. I suggest that this is because they already have a broad community meaning perspective. However, Vera points out that it feels good that people learn to know her through dance, instead of in everyday situations. In this, Vera confirms an experience of dance as a space where people can manage to see beyond traditional cultural narratives and she might become more visible as just *Vera*, instead of a girl in a wheelchair.

Regarding Paul, his community meaning perspective does not transform during the project. Already in the first interview he states that dance is important for everybody, regardless of body. He sticks to the same opinion throughout the project. I suggest this is because his community meaning perspective is already broad when entering the project. He already holds the opinion that communication through movement is important for every *body*. Perhaps an explanation for this is that Paul comes from Buenos Aires, a much more multicultural society than Trondheim. It does not surprise him that differently bodied people are active communicators. He thereby easily includes disabled people as possible dancers in his definition of community when he enters the project.

Regarding Anna, she does not mention community meaning themes in the interviews and she shows no community meaning perspective transformation. My understanding of this is that for Anna, the project provokes other questions which need to be sorted out first. Throughout the project, the questions of what dance is and how dance should be taught take her focus and energy. That is why she first of all shows aesthetic and methodological meaning perspective transformation.

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541 in Di Biase (2000, download p. 6)

542 This expression is borrowed from Koppers (2001, p. 26)

*The dancers' stories about the art of dance improvisation*  
– an aesthetic meaning perspective

It is about daring, about going for it. The creative part of it is frightening but extremely exciting. This project is not about disability, it is about dance. The aesthetic aspect of it does not necessarily have to do with how much you move. It is more about the inner restriction. It is more about using everybody's possibilities. That fascinates me. Not seeing people's limitations, but possibilities. And the fact that I use my possibilities to dance and don't try to be anybody else other than the one I am. (*Mona*) Dance has become much more after this semester. Dance is an expression for giving a message; everything from just existing or to feel in a special way. Dance gives emotions to the audience without being explicit. Dance is personal. It is much more interesting when it is a personal expression. I have learnt very many new aspects of dance. Dance is much more than I learn at my dance school. Improvisation is much more than I believed. Dance does not have to be so much movement, but quite simple movements where something actually happens. A lot of things can take place outside the core of a happening, in the periphery. For once I have learnt that dancing feels good, instead of being a competition. It is very interesting to observe dance. To observe is to see quite different things than you feel when you are dancing yourself. It is also nice not being looked at, because we are looked at every day. It's good just to observe and enjoy the dance. It feels very good to observe such things that we dance here, which are not so much based on form. Even if you sit down and observe, you take part in the dance in a way. In this room, everything that happens is dance. (*Ida*) After I have started the Dance Laboratory I more and more think that dance can be defined in many different ways. All the time I thought that dance is dance that is movement to music, movement in rhythm with the music and according to different patterns. But it is not like that, really. I define dance more like ... it can be defined in a broader way, in different ways. You know, just to do different movements, to go up and down from the floor – that can be dance, too. That is why the Dance Laboratory means so much to me. I have come into a bigger space for dance. Before, dance had one meaning, now it has multiple meanings. (*Karen*) I like to observe. Then I see quite accidental dialogues between two persons. It is so nice and suddenly they maybe do something, not synchronous, but something which connects to each other. I think it is great both to be on the dance floor and improvise and to watch. The improvisation gives so much movement and other aspects and it is very, very nice to watch. The most important thing with the Dance Laboratory is that it is just improvisation. To be able just to be there and get out of you whatever you have inside, and work with different people. Dance is very important for me and it can be used in many different ways. (*Heidi*) I have become completely fascinated. Actually, the last times I have rather observed. I haven't been so keen to get involved in the dance myself. I think it is gorgeous to just sit and watch. It is so interesting. It is the meetings between different people which I find interesting. You never know where they lead. There is so much nice material that has been created. Dance is one of those things I like to do the most. But I don't like all of dance. Regular patterns and determined forms are not as fun as the kind of dance we are doing, like improvisation, and just looking what happens. That is what I like the most with dance, to ... not knowing where it takes you. There are many new and exciting things which happen. (*Teresa*) Dance is a very different language. And I think it is a much better language because you can communicate with every body ... in the world. And there is loads more information. When improvising, it is better to wait if you don't get an impulse. Then it is better to do nothing. Also on stage I think it is great when you do nothing. I think it is very strong. You cannot tell with words what dance or music means, but I think it is a very important language to communicate with each other. Sometimes you can know a person much better in dance. The Dance Laboratory is a bit like a [contact improvisation] jam. Sometimes when you take a technique class it is quite cold. Sometimes the focus is just on technique and you think about if the movements are good, if you learn the choreography well, if you learn well. When you have a group just to improvise dance then it is quite different. For improvisation it is also very important what kind of group you have, which persons are in the group. And we are a really great group, with



a lot of desire to improvise. (*Paul*) It is a bit like the dance world has in a way advanced with focusing on what kind of physical things you manage to do or not. And dancers are being trained in doing more and more advanced physical things. So that is what you have in you, in a way. But I feel that I have started to think about these things because of the things we do. Precisely ... what is it that we do with the dance, what is it that we want with the dance? For me it has just been logical to think that you should train bodies to become professional dancers. And not just focus on the things you are doing there and then. But I feel that I have learnt and understood and seen that. Maybe it is about focusing on something other than further achievements, because that is precisely how it often is. Because you should all the time get better, get better, move on. There is that perspective on everything in dance. That it is time maybe you know ... to kill it. (*Anna/Tone*)

The changes that take place within the dancers' understanding of the dance aesthetics, of what dance can be like, is another real huge wow-factor in this study. The aesthetic meaning perspective is the one that changes the most among most dancers in the Dance Laboratory. Many of the dancers show a huge change in their understanding of what dance can be. A vivid re-negotiation about new aesthetic space takes place among the dancers. This in a fundamental way changes their understanding of what dance can be: what is interesting, valuable and fascinating in dance. Ida tells about how her aesthetic meaning perspective has changed in saying that:

– Improvisation is much more than I believed. <sup>543</sup> quote interview

The dancers are passionate when telling about this and without doubt this aesthetic meaning perspective transformation energizes them. They enjoy the new and more spacious aesthetic space for dance they have created in the meetings between them. Karen articulates this feeling in one core sentence:

– That is why the Dance Laboratory means so much to me. I have come into a bigger space for dance. Before, dance had one meaning, now it has multiple meanings. <sup>544</sup> quote interview

Anna, Mona, Ida, Karen, Heidi and Teresa show fundamental change in their aesthetic meaning perspective. Paul deepens his aesthetic meaning perspective, but it does not change fundamentally. Vera does not touch an aesthetic meaning perspective during the project, but she did in the Mixed Ability group in 2001. Then she said:

– I have learnt to dance in a completely new way. I have attended mixed dance groups before, called wheelchair dance, so this was not new for me. The new thing was the way we have danced. This was completely new to me. <sup>545</sup> quote evaluation sheet

I suggest Vera's aesthetic meaning transformation happened already during the first semester with the Mixed Ability group. When this research material was collected, she does not bring up meaning themes connected to aesthetics in the interviews. I suggest this is partly because a more nuanced language is unavailable for her and partly because her understanding of this way of dancing through improvisation already is incorporated.

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543 Quote from interview three with Ida, May 2004.

544 Quote from interview three with Karen, May 2004.

545 Quote from evaluation sheet by Vera when she took part in the Mixed Ability Group in 2001.

As for Paul, he brings with him a deep and keen interest in improvisation when he enters the project and he has already for many years worked on investigating improvisation. The project does not fundamentally change his view on dance improvisation, but it deepens it. For Paul, the most important aspect of the project at this time in his life is that it offers a space to be seen without having to struggle with words. In the improvisation he recognises himself, as he is about to lose sight of who he is because of problems with verbal communication and learning a new language in Norway.

When I say that the aesthetic meaning perspective does not seem to have changed in a fundamental way regarding Vera and Paul, I also acknowledge that I might have this impression because they both, in their own ways, struggled with verbal communication when I interviewed them. Both Paul and Vera might have more nuanced experiences than I manage to interpret, simply because I did not understand them well enough.

Anna formulates the question *What do we want with the dance?* which she asks herself. I suggest that this is a question which cannot be generalised in to a “we”, but has to be asked and continuously re-answered in the I-form. What do I want with the dance? Anna is in the midst of this question throughout this project, but also the other dancers in a less explicit way. Aesthetic meaning perspective transformation is a sign of that question being treated. The question is being raised in this context *because of* the group consisting of differently bodied dancers. The possible, individual answers are created through lived experience in reflective dialogue with the group.

The dancers add many important aesthetic principles to the list of how the space for dance is created in the Dance Laboratory. I will formulate and comment on these aesthetic principles here.

- “This project is not about disability, it is about dance.”

This is a really important and central aesthetic principle which is formulated by Mona. The dancers manage to see beyond established and disempowering cultural narratives about disability. The disabled dancers are included into a community of adults, treating each other like adults. In this community, the disabilities themselves are not central and they are not in focus. Instead, the focus in the group is firmly on the dance: on moving, sensing, giving and taking weight, giving and receiving impulses, exploring form, touching, communicating, and so on. As Paul points out, in this group there is a lot of desire to improvise. For a project like this to succeed and become anything other than a special needs activity for the disabled, the main focus must remain firmly on the dance, on the aesthetics. The Dance Laboratory is a dance project.

- “The aesthetics is about using everybody’s possibilities.”

At the core of the aesthetics, the how the movement material is created, there is the belief in seeing different people’s possibilities, not limitations. This creates an aesthetics of possibilities and hope, instead of a formalised aesthetics which some people simply do not fit into. Reminiscent

of Lomas<sup>546</sup>, when people within the Western worldview become entrenched in terms of “them” and “us”, they also suffer a loss of hope for self and society. An aesthetics that does not start from an established aesthetics, but instead creates its own aesthetic through what Marques<sup>547</sup> calls a context-based pedagogy, lessens the distance between “them” and “us”. This happens by using multiplicity and difference as a generative force. Embedded in this aesthetics, there is also the possibility for a pedagogy of hope, a concept which goes back to Freire<sup>548</sup>.

- “I don’t try to be anybody else than the one I am.”

The use of a context-based, transformative pedagogy brings authenticity to the aesthetics. The dancers get involved in a dialogue, where there is a real interest in hearing about the other person’s point of view. An aesthetics and a pedagogy which manages to create a feeling of authenticity – that I can be myself – is empowering. In this way, the dance becomes more personal than formalised, or more correctly, the dance is formalised in new and personal ways, agreed about in the meetings between the different dancers involved.

- “Less is more.”

Dance does not have to be so much movement, but rather quite simple movements where something actually happens. Where something actually happens has to do with “doing” and “listening” in balance. If a dancer only listens, she becomes passive. If a dancer only does, she becomes hyperactive and listening becomes difficult. This is often true for dancers: they are more likely to behave as “doers” than as “listeners”, because “doing” and “staying active” are implicit in the traditional cultural narrative of what dance is. But doing too much is a bit like talking too much: a real connection between dance partners fails because there is a lack of listening. Also, as Paul argues, doing less or even doing nothing is better if you don’t have an impulse or idea. This is also powerful on stage.

- “Dance gives emotions to the audience without being explicit.”

This quotation by Ida adds straight to a description about how dance functions, how dance is transmitted between persons. Dance does not have to have an explicit meaning which can be narrated in a linear story. Instead, dance has a somatic, bodily, sensuous, moving, ever-changing, fleshy character which is transmitted and communicated between bodies. Dance is understandable in the bodies’ ways.

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546 Lomas (1998, p. 152)

547 Marques (1998, p. 181)

548 Freire (1970)

- “For once I have learnt that dancing feels good, instead of being a competition.”

Embedded in this statement lies a real challenge for the field of dance pedagogy. How did we reach that place where dancing does not feel good to so many people? How could dance not feel good? Dance is so much more than competition; most importantly, it is not competition, but a human way of communicating in a sensuous, bodily way. This competitive atmosphere which is often found in the dance field comes out of a master pedagogy where the focus is on copying and mastering movements. Because as Anna ponders, all the time you should get better and better when you are training to become a dancer. But as Anna asks herself, what is it that we do with the dance when treating it like that? What consequences does it have? In a context-based dance context the focus instead is on the possibilities of creating new form and new movements, based in the meetings between the dancers in that context. In this, the focus shifts from competition to communication.

- “Observing others is an important part of dancing.”

The discovery of observation as an important part of dancing comes together with the understanding of “less is more”. It is actually possible to take part in a dance situation when doing nothing. Or more correctly, when observing, you are not doing “nothing”. When listening, you are not doing “nothing”. Instead, observing and listening are active processes, and they demand an active involvement and dialogue with those moving. Also, observing is a great opportunity to learn, enjoy, and also, as Ida points out, to relax from being looked at.

- “Dance has multiple meanings and I am in charge of my dance.”

Dance is not a flat concept, meaning only one thing. Instead, dance is a multi-spacious concept and it can give meaning in many ways. Through the project, the dancers have come into a bigger space for dance. This is true for all the dancers. Karen is very articulate about this. She has gone from a position where she thought of dance as something which demands something from her – different patterns and steps she needs to learn – to a position where she instead experiences that the dance invites her to new (bodily) discoveries. She has discovered that she is the one who can create those steps and patterns. She is in charge of the dance, instead of the opposite.

- “Dance contains loads of bodily information and knowledge.”

Paul introduces the word information and I want to hold on to that concept. There is a lot of information passing through the dancers’ bodies in improvisation. This information goes in a flow within their bodies, passing through the spine from the brains to the different parts of the body and back again in a continuous flow. Further, the information transgresses the limits of the individual body and through touch gets in contact with other dancers. The act of touching informs you about another body, and when you touch somebody, you are being touched right back. When the bodies turn, twist, rotate, roll, run, jump, glide in all directions through, with,

against or around the other dancers, information passes through their bodies, finds shape in movement, creates expression in dance and is communicated to the other dancers. In dance improvisation there is a complex exchange of information, which turns into knowledge and experience, and further into stories and conscious thoughts.

- “The meetings between different dancers are so interesting.”

The meetings between different dancers function as a generative force within the aesthetics created in the Dance Laboratory. In these meetings, movement material is created and form and identity are explored as well. And as Teresa says, you never know where these meetings lead to. You never work within a fixed aesthetic form. Instead, the aesthetics itself is characterised by an ever-changing form and appreciation of multiplicity. Thereby, this is also an aesthetics of curiosity and surprise. Dancers in groups where differently bodied dancers work and create together can expect to be surprised more than once. This is also true for dance improvisation teachers.

Through the aesthetic meaning perspective transformation the dancers show, verbalise and add really important aesthetics principles in terms of *how* the work in the Dance Laboratory is done. The project has been a true aesthetic learning arena during this period of time, and when the semester is over the dancers’ (and the teacher’s) understanding of what dance can be has changed in a fundamental way. In this, they have also helped in generating knowledge of aesthetic and pedagogical value. This feeds into knowledge about the teaching of dance improvisation in general and in settings with differently bodied dancers specifically.

*The dancers’ stories about teaching dance improvisation and being a dance teacher  
– a methodological meaning perspective*

I have really appreciated the chat in the circle in the beginning of class, especially those days when I have been tired and exhausted when I have come to dance. Then I have been able to verbalise it and it has become easier. We meet as equals. There are no expectations towards me about helping the disabled dancers or that I should do anything more than them. (*Mona*) I would like to work the way you [the teacher] work with dance, instead of dancing the way I have done until now. Usually in the dance class you look at other people all the time, but you only see the movement in order to do the same thing. To be asked to close your eyes and just take in, that is something completely different. I have learnt a lot about how important it is with feedback. I have received positive feedback from others, which has surprised me. Then I have realised that not only is this group nice, because I have known that, but I am nice as part of the group. That I remember very well. If we hadn’t talked together it would have been different. Then you would have been much more tense and it would have become more an achievement. (*Ida*) I have felt that the Dance Laboratory has paid attention to my needs. (*Karen*) As long as I understand the task, I could go on forever. If I don’t understand the task, I easily get tired. To work concretely on the body and with bodily concepts works better for me than imaginative concepts and metaphors. (*Vera/Tone*) I don’t think that these thoughts would have developed if I had worked with one choreographer here and one choreographer there ... if you had not had the chance to stay and develop something. Because ... the first project we started [in Inclusive Dance Company] was “on Feet, on Wheels” and I feel that I have, in parallel with you having developed what you want with it, then I have understood

what you want with it. I have in a way entered this with “what?”, I have never heard about something like this before, but... I think that in a way I understand aspects that you have understood. I see it when you have understood it, in a way. Because when things become clearer to you, then it becomes clearer to me, in a way. Community Dance was never a subject in Danshögskolan [Danshögskolan University College of Dance]. And there has never been anybody who has talked about CandoCo or anything. So that was my starting point when I moved here. It was all very new to me. (*Anna/Tone*)

Through this research process it has become clear to me that the teacher is the single most important resource in any class room. The dance teacher in the dance class is no exception. This was not explicitly clear to me when I started this project, but it is something that I have learnt on the way. Gough<sup>549</sup> writes that in the dance class, the teacher constitutes the major resource. She points out that the way in which somebody teaches is strongly influenced by a set of personal philosophies, which may be implicit rather than explicit. I would say that these philosophies are not only personal but also cultural and tacitly inherited through the teacher’s own dance training and teacher training. An important part of maturing as a teacher, then, is to develop a pedagogic thoughtfulness or tact. Van Manen<sup>550</sup> explains this as a hermeneutic type of competence which develops through learning to understand the essence of pedagogy as it manifests itself in particular circumstances. Pedagogy is something that animates our being with our students, van Manen writes.

Pedagogy has an enormous impact on the students affected by it, and dance education has a huge impact on the bodies, identities and lives of those dancing. The dance teacher has a big responsibility. Through this research process, where I have studied my own lived teaching practice, I have developed a genuinely reflexive attitude to my own teaching and I have understood the importance of developing a pedagogical thoughtfulness. In this, my own methodological meaning perspective has been transformed.

But also many of the dancers have created an awareness about the importance of the teacher and the “how” of the teaching. In this way, they talk from within a methodological meaning perspective. This is particularly true for Anna and Ida, but also Mona. First of all Anna, but also Ida, and to some extent Mona, have changed their view on how dance improvisation can be taught in a fundamental way. The dancers point out important methodological aspects in the Dance Laboratory. I will formulate and comment on these methodological aspects here:

- “To discuss in dance class releases tension.”

The chat in the beginning and end of the classes, and the time allowed for feedback and discussion during classes, are emphasised as important. This confirms Hämäläinen’s<sup>551</sup> findings among dance students, showing that they experienced reflecting discussions as a very positive aspect of the dance class. In her study, the dance students had a hunger to talk about their experiences in

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549 Gough (1993, p.28)

550 van Manen (1997, p. 143)

551 Hämäläinen, (1999, pp. 255–260)

the dance class. As Ida says, to talk and share thoughts and observations makes the dance class a less individualistic project. Through the sharing of thoughts a stronger feeling of community, of connectedness with the others, is created among the dancers. Understanding and tolerance for each other can more easily be created. Tension is released and the dancers dare to investigate dance more thoroughly. In addition, the discussions invite a more active involvement in the question of what dance is.

- “To understand the task fully is important.”

Vera is explicit about this, but this is important for everybody. An understanding of the tasks is created through clear bodily and verbal demonstration, instruction and encouragement by the teacher. This understanding increases when the tasks are anchored concretely in the body, and not instructed only in imaginative terms and metaphors. Demonstrating and showing increases this clarity. An understanding of the tasks in this context also includes an understanding of the fact that there are similar expectations to all participants in the class. The non-disabled dancers are not there to help or activate the disabled dancers, but to investigate movement on equal terms with everybody else.

- “The dancers’ learning processes depend tightly on the teacher.”

Anna points to the fact that when things become clearer to the teacher, then they become clearer to her. This tells about the fact that the dancers’ experiences and learning processes are tightly connected to the teacher and her awareness. Learning in dance improvisation happens as a shared and dialogical process between the teacher and the dancers. The teacher needs to be willing to teach from within the same problem-solving ethos that she tries to develop amongst the dancers through the use of improvisation. That means that the teacher’s problem-solving takes place there and then, during class, right in front of the dancers. During the autumn term in the Dance Laboratory, Anna struggled to get hold of the project just as I was struggling to find out how to teach. As I learnt, grew more confident and became clearer, so was Anna’s meaning-making processes released. My growth as a teacher allowed Anna’s development.

- “Dance improvisation teaching can be a process of de-constructing conventional ways of teaching dance and constructing new ones.”

Anna is in the process of de-constructing methodology for the teaching of dance as she has inherited and learnt it. Instead, she is about to create a more personal platform for herself as a dance teacher. She is finding her own answers to the question about what she wants with dance. In this, she is developing her own pedagogical thoughtfulness or tact. This is, I suggest, an important process to go through for anyone who wishes to teach dance in a way that really can make a change.

-Through the methodological meaning perspective transformation that Anna, Ida and Mona show in this project, they point out important methodological aspects of teaching dance improvisation. When I started this project, I was more oriented towards the experiential and aesthetic sides of it, but on the way I have deeply understood the importance of the Dance Laboratory as a pedagogical arena. The Dance Laboratory *is* pedagogy. It is a massive learning arena where dancers learn in many different and important spaces. The Dance Laboratory also *is* change. To take part in the Dance Laboratory is to take part in a process of change. The dancers in the Dance Laboratory change the group, as the group also changes the dancers. There is reciprocity, since the individual dancers and the group really reach out to touch each other.

Again I collect knowledge hooks with me to spin dance improvisation around. In addition to the methodological aspects already stated, from the community, aesthetic and methodological meaning perspectives, I collect the following concepts:

<b>flow</b>	<b>dare</b>	<b>feelings</b>	<b>moods</b>
<b>initiate</b>		<b>investigate</b>	<b>breathe</b>
<b>moving and moved</b>		<b>meet</b>	<b>being vulnerable</b>
<b>I – the other relationship</b>	<b>power symmetry</b>	<b>“less is more”</b>	
	<b>de-constructing and re-constructing</b>		<b>observing</b>
<b>information</b>	<b>knowledge</b>	<b>question</b>	<b>seeing possibilities</b>
<b>being myself</b>	<b>in charge of my dance</b>		
	<b>feedback</b>	<b>reflective discussions</b>	<b>share</b>

The conclusion is, then, that during the spring term of 2004 the Dance Laboratory changes. The dancers go through meaning perspective transformation, their lifeworlds are affected, the teacher grows and changes, the group changes as such and the dance improvisation created develops all the time. All these aspects feed into each other. The dancers de-construct and re-construct the spaces which dance operates in. In other words, they negotiate about space in dance, and the space they negotiate for is a more generous one.

As a group, the Dance Laboratory experiences most transformation within the aesthetic meaning perspective, followed by the community meaning perspective. Most meaning offers in the project can be formulated within these meaning perspectives. The aesthetic meaning perspective is the one single meaning perspective which has changed the most, affecting almost all the dancers. Through the bodily processes which the dancers in the Dance Laboratory go through together, the dancers in a fundamental way change their view on the aesthetics of dance, and on community. In other words, they make new discoveries concerning the questions *What is dance?* and *What is community and connectedness?* It is interesting to note that meaning themes connected to an aesthetic and community meaning perspective were also the most important when the dancers told about why they wanted to join the Dance Laboratory in interview one. Most of the dancers’ reasons to join the project were to learn more about what dance can be, to improvise and investigate movement and to meet new and differently bodied people in dance. It seems, then, that there was openness already in the beginning of the project towards finding



out about aesthetics and community in dance, which has resulted in most meaning perspective transformation in these perspectives.

The interpretation made in this chapter tells about the kind of knowledge that dance improvisation generates. The dancers know more and different things about dance than when they started the project. Still, they do not know the same things. The dancers do not walk as a group or as categories through the project. Instead, the ways in which they make meaning of the project are individual and connected to their life situation and previous experience of dance. When it comes to meaning-making, it does not make any sense to me to divide the dancers into traditional categories like “disabled” and “non-disabled” or “professional” or “non-professional”. Therefore, I will not divide the group into any categories. Instead, I will illustrate the individual meaning perspective transformation of all eight dancers, highlighting those perspectives which have changed the most for each individual dancer.

*“Before dance had one meaning, now it has multiple meanings.”*

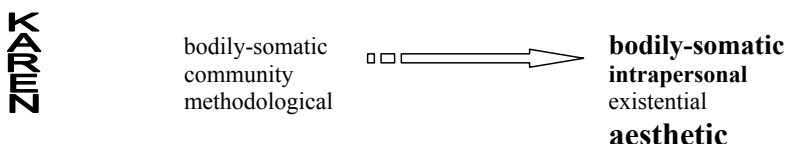


Figure 7 (Østern). Karen's meaning perspectives deepen and transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.

Karen has fundamentally changed her definition on the aesthetics of dance: of what dance is, through the project. She has also experienced intrapersonal and bodily-somatic change. She could probably have developed her bodily-somatic meaning perspective further if I as the researcher had not dominated her with my own discourses of interest, not really appreciating bodily-somatic meaning themes when interviewing her. Still, she has experienced better body control and discovered the joy of falling. A main quote which describes Karen's meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory is: *“Before dance had one meaning, now it has multiple meanings.”*

*“This project is not about disability, this is about dance. The art in dance is in a way the state when I sense a special flow in everything I do.”*

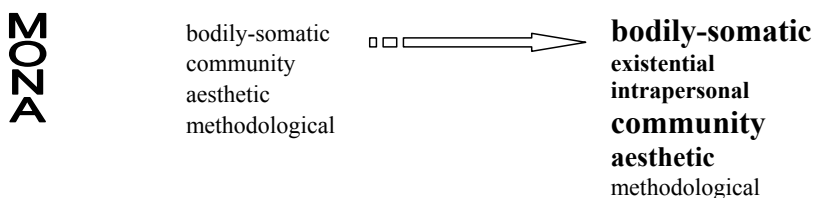


Figure 8 (Østern). Mona's meaning perspectives deepen and transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.

During the project, Mona has fundamentally changed her bodily-somatic meaning perspective, her view on community and connectedness with differently bodied people and on dance as aesthetic discourse. She has also experienced intrapersonal change. Mona is the dancer who to the highest extent connects her bodily experiences to her reflective thought through the way she really tries to tell about movement and sensations. She is about to develop a language which describes the bodily processes she goes through. Especially, she emphasises flow as an element which she has discovered in dance. The dance has also had an existential meaning for her, and she connects the dance project to other parts of her life. A main quote describing Mona's meaning-making processes is: *“This project is not about disability, this is about dance. The art in dance is in a way the state when I sense a special flow in everything I do.”*

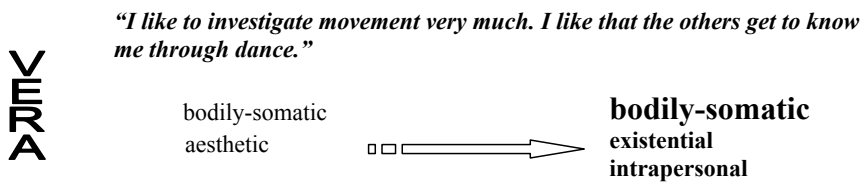


Figure 9 (Østern). Vera's meaning perspectives deepen or transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.

Vera's most important changes have happened within the bodily-somatic meaning perspective, connecting closely to the intrapersonal and existential meaning perspectives. The dance improvisation offers her a completely new way of learning to know her own body, learning to know herself through movement. What she learns and knows, she learns in a bodily way. She is not always able to conceptualize what she knows, but when dancing and performing, she shows what she knows. She also experiences that the dance offers her an opportunity to show other people who she is in a better way than in every day life. A main quote describing Vera's meaning making processes is: *“I like to investigate movement very much. I like that the others get to know me through dance.”*

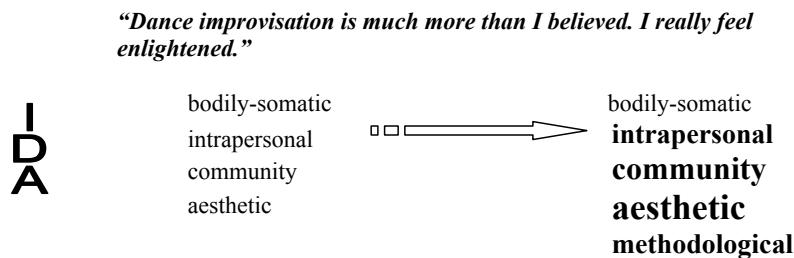


Figure 10 (Østern). Ida's meaning perspectives deepen and transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.

Ida is the dancer who shows the most transformation within several meaning perspectives. She is a reflected and verbal dancer and it is easy for her to express her thoughts about dance. She

experiences a huge change within her aesthetic meaning perspective, but she also experiences fundamental change within the intrapersonal, community and methodological meaning perspectives. She makes many new discoveries about herself, about connectedness to other and different people, about dance and about how dance can be used and taught. A main quote describing Ida's meaning making processes is: *"Dance improvisation is much more than I believed. I really feel enlightened."*

*"Improvisation gives so much movement and other aspects and it is very, very nice to watch."*

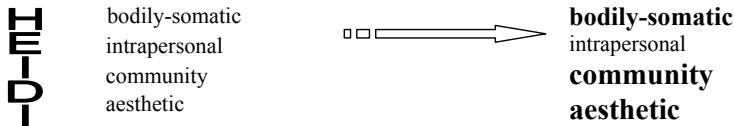


Figure 11 (Østern). Heidi's meaning perspectives deepen and transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.

Heidi fundamentally changes her community meaning perspective, and she also experiences change in the bodily-somatic and aesthetic meaning perspective. She has become aware that the dance improvisation connects her body and mind; it connects her from top to toe. She has discovered observation as an important part of dance. She describes the new relation she has received towards disabled people as a "wow!" experience. A main quote describing Heidi's meaning making processes is: *"Improvisation gives so much movement and other aspects and it is very, very nice to watch."*

*"It is the meetings between different people which I find interesting. You never know where they lead."*

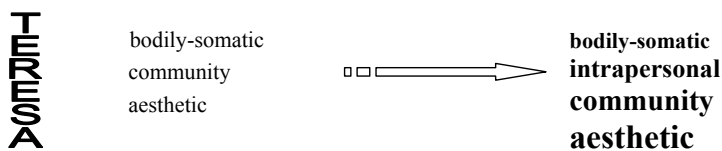


Figure 12 (Østern). Teresa's meaning perspectives deepen and transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.

Teresa has fundamentally changed her community and aesthetic meaning perspective on dance. She has also developed a bodily-somatic and an intrapersonal meaning perspective: she says that the meetings she has experienced have made her develop as a dancer. She has developed her understanding of dance improvisation and concludes that it is the genre of dance which interests her the most. She emphasises how she has learnt about herself in relation to other people. A main quote describing Teresa's meaning making processes is: *"It is the meetings between different people which I find interesting. You never know where they lead."*

*“Dance is a much better language because you can communicate with every body. And there is much more information.”*



Figure 13 (Østern). Paul’s meaning perspectives deepen or transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.

Paul has not changed his meaning perspectives on dance in a fundamental way, but he has deepened it, especially his intrapersonal perspective. I want to underline that this interpretation might also be due to problems with verbal communication between myself as the interviewer and Paul, since Paul spoke little Norwegian at the time when he was being interviewed. What seems clear is that the Dance Laboratory has offered him a space to be himself and communicate as himself. This is important for Paul at a time in his life where he is struggling to learn a new language and culture. In the dance improvisation he feels at home, he learns new things about himself in contact with the others and he deepens his existing view on dance as aesthetic discourse. A main quote describing Paul’s meaning making processes is: *“Dance is a much better language because you can communicate with every body. And there is much more information.”*

*“What is it that we do with the dance? What is it that we want with the dance?”*

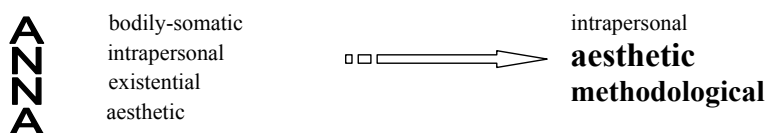


Figure 14 (Østern). Anna’s meaning perspectives deepen and transform in the Dance Laboratory during the spring term of 2004.

Anna has fundamentally changed her aesthetic and methodological meaning-making perspective during the project. The project has not been easy for her. She has struggled with quite big and important questions: What is dance? What can dance be like? How should dance be taught and what should be the aims of dance teaching? Also, she has struggled in finding out about her relation towards me as the teacher of the group. Or more correctly, we have jointly struggled in defining our roles towards each other in the project. This was not clear until the term actually finished. In interview two, Anna takes a teacher position when telling and reflecting about the group. This changes in interview three, where she reflects more like a participant. When starting the project, Anna talks about dance from within an intrapersonal and existential

meaning perspective. Dance has a deep and existential meaning for her, closely connected to her identity. In the Dance Laboratory, Anna does not come into contact with these meanings in dance, especially not during the autumn term. The project does not raise an existential feeling for her and the existential meaning perspective disappears during the project. Instead, Anna is busy feeling and thinking about what dance is and how it should be taught. A main quote describing Anna's meaning making process is: "*What is it that we do with the dance? What is it that we want with the dance?*"

I will let this question of Anna – *What is that we want with dance?* – end this chapter about the meaning potential in the Dance Laboratory and let it lead me to the next and last chapter. In that chapter I feed back the knowledge that has emerged through a description and interpretation of the dancers' meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory into a broader aesthetic, societal and pedagogical discussion.





*Photo 5.  
Dancers from the Dance Laboratory and the Dance Theatre 55+ in their joint performance  
Kropp a'long, spring 2009.*

## 5. Difference as a generative force in dance

– suggesting a poetic, dialogical and transformative dance pedagogy

If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance.

*George Bernard Shaw*

Dance is a very different language. You can communicate with anyone.

And it contains much more information.<sup>552</sup>

*Paul, participant in the Dance Laboratory*

Difference is not an additional ingredient in the artistic and educational work done in the Dance Laboratory. Difference is nothing put on top of the activity; multiplicity in the group does not mean that somebody different is invited as much as possible into the work created and defined by those less different.

Instead, difference is defined as the most important generative force in the project. Difference is seen as valuable, not additional. Everything that is done in the Dance Laboratory is done with an interest in what difference can give rise to in terms of aesthetic, artistic and educational outcome. The question of in which terms difference is defined and who has the power to make that definition is constantly on the agenda. Difference is part of the outcome of the project, visible in an ever-changing aesthetics which tries to be present in *what is already there* in terms of different bodies, life-experience, dreams and visions. The aesthetics is based on a listening into the kind of somatic and relational information which is present in the bodies: the way the dancers move, roll, jump, turn towards and away from each other, the way they give and take each other's weight, use touch to relate and communicate. The space created in the dance improvisation is lived by the dancers; it develops an aesthetic and moves into a world of fiction and still unimagined possibilities; it breathes living (dance) culture and it is highly political. Within this space there is an ongoing flow between lived experience and conscious thought which can be conceptualised, narrated and shared.

When I started this research process, a wondering about dance in contemporary time had buzzed in the background of my awareness for some years. While moving and dancing with differently bodied dancers, I sensed a feeling of something. There was something there, which I eventually recognized as an opportunity to investigate and learn. That feeling led me to this research. When I entered the deep learning opportunity which this research offered me I wanted to take part in an aesthetic and pedagogical discussion about dance. What is dance – when looking from a context of diversity? What can dance be – when feeding in perspectives on dance from differently bodied dancers? Who is dance for and who is the stage and the dance class open for – reading dance as part of the wider society? How can dance be taught – drawing on experiences from a mixed ability dance setting? Based on the totality of this research project, as presented

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<sup>552</sup> Quote from interview three with Paul, August 2004.



in the four previous chapters, I will in this last chapter deal with these questions and feed into an aesthetic and pedagogical discussion about dance. In doing this, I am suggesting a poetic, dialogical and transformative dance pedagogy which is not only ready, but *eager* to meet the diversity of tomorrow's dancers.

In this study I have investigated how differently bodied dancers make meaning in the Dance Laboratory. I have investigated their meaning-making processes as part of a more comprehensive reading of body, identity, disability and dance in contemporary time. I have illuminated the tension between cultural and individual narratives about disability and how the local community which the Dance Laboratory creates is able to ease much of that tension. In a context like the Dance Laboratory, individual narratives have an impact on established cultural narratives about body, identity, disability and dance. The struggle with living in a stretch between what Koppers<sup>553</sup> identifies as hypervisibility and invisibility has the possibility to diminish in this context. Instead of being stretched between the experience of being both invisible and hypervisible, the disabled dancers in the Dance Laboratory experience becoming just visible. To be visible means to be viewed as a whole person and “not just as a person in a wheelchair”. To be viewed as a whole person means that your ideas are listened to and tried out, that you are seen as an active and important contributor to the dance being created, that you are not helped with unnecessary things, that you are not credited for things that are obvious and everyday routines for you, and that you have a possibility to affect the content and condition of what is being created.

I suggest that the tension between hypervisibility and invisibility experienced by the disabled dancers lessens because the more comprehensive cultural tension between body-as-object and body-as-subject lessens in a community like the Dance Laboratory. In a dance improvisation context, where different people reach out to touch each other, explore dance through dialogue and create new aesthetic form, there is space for individual narratives about body and identity. In this, the individual narratives start to affect the more comprehensive cultural narratives within the group. This gives rise to a necessary destabilization and criticism of prevailing assumptions about dance, body and identity, which Koppers also emphasises<sup>554</sup>. It also gives rise to new poetry being created in the meetings between different dancers.

## 5.1. Discussing the validity of this research project

Validity has to do with the truth-value of the findings of a study, and, in my opinion also with the relevance of the study. With this study I have not attempted to uncover a pre-existing or objective reality. Nor do I make knowledge claims about accurate representations of the real. Instead, I view this research as a meaning-making dialogue about body, identity, disability, dance and dance education in a specific cultural context and historical moment. This research project is an example of what dance *maybe* like and how dance may make meaning for different dancers. To participate in the Dance Laboratory has had individual relevance for the dancers who

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553 Koppers (2001, p. 26)

554 Koppers (2006, p. 25)

participated in this study. To learn about how the different dancers made meaning in the project is a way of generating knowledge about what dance can be, who dance is for, how dance can be taught and – I add – what dance can mean and do for dancers. This study feeds this knowledge into a broader aesthetic and pedagogical discussion about dance. In this way I claim that this study has aesthetic, pedagogical and societal relevance, which gives validity to the research.

Within a comprehensive hermeneutic-phenomenological approach, I have used a mixed-methodological approach to interpret the rich and complex material of this study. I have not used any theory or method in a consequent manner, but allowed the aims of this research to influence the design of the study. The interpretation of the interviews takes a somewhat more quantitative approach than the rest of the study, using tables to organize the meaning themes and see how they spread out among the different dancers. This was necessary for me in order to manage to see beyond traditional categories and turn away from an urge to create categories of the dancers as a starting point for the interpretation. In doing this, I am able to challenge the notion of traditional categories, instead of re-producing them. Through the use of this mixed-methodological approach, the interpretation of the research material shows rich, individual and shared meaning-making processes by the different dancers. The dancers deepen their meaning perspectives or go through meaning perspective transformation which changes their view of different aspects in dance in a fundamental way. This happens especially regarding the aesthetic and community meaning perspective.

I am aware that most – but not all – of the experiences that the dancers tell about have a positive character. They also show great willingness to talk and reflect. This might give the impression that I have looked uncritically at the project. However, I have tried to look critically at the material, especially at myself and my double role as teacher and researcher in the project. I suggest that the main reason why the experiences told about are mainly positive is because the material was collected from those dancers who chose to stay. There are also some dancers who quit. I have not managed to get hold of them to hear about their experiences. The Dance Laboratory is a fully voluntarily project which people take part in just because they want to. Therefore, I argue that even though the interpretation of this project shows mainly positive experiences, the interpretation of the dancers' meaning-making processes have been committed with a critical eye. I claim they have truth-value, but they do reflect the fact that the investigation is made among those dancers who chose to stay in the Dance Laboratory. They have been willing and eager to tell and discuss, and this openness can be connected to the rather large amount of meaning perspective transformation that they show. The research project itself has also had an important impact on the degree of meaning-making transformation shown. The fact that it was set up as a research project opened up for great opportunities for the development of reflective thought about improvisation. Each interview situation with the dancers can be seen as a meaning perspective transformation opportunity in itself. During these interviews the dancers had the opportunity to connect their lived experience with conscious thought and reflect in dialogue with me. In this way these interview situations increased the dancers' awareness of their own experiences and learning in the project.

I have by no means experienced the project of teaching and carrying out research on the Dance Laboratory as easy. It has been exciting and fun, but also but hard and often very difficult. I have

experienced the Dance Laboratory as a real challenge. Especially during the first years with the group, I sometimes felt like a complete failure after the classes. This tells about the vulnerability I had as a learning dance improvisation teacher. During the autumn term of 2003 I felt like that often, almost after every class. I was uncertain, and I was searching. This uncertainty of mine is also reflected in Anna's experiences during this term. She shows the same uncertainty as I felt and she is rather critical about the methodology. I can only be thankful that she and the other dancers stuck with me, because, frankly, after some classes I wondered whether people were ever going to turn up again. Surprisingly – for me – they always did and the project could go on. As the years have passed, this situation has changed. Today I feel much more in charge when teaching the Dance Laboratory and I find the group ever more interesting. It is clear to me that the Dance Laboratory has been a most important challenge for me as a dance artist and teacher. I have been deeply challenged in my ways of teaching, talking about, creating and thinking about dance. As a result of the artistic, pedagogical and research work with the Dance Laboratory I have developed my movement vocabulary, my ability to relate to others in dance, my language for dance, my thinking about dance, my teaching of dance, and generally my knowledge in and about dance.

I am critical towards the interview guide developed for this study. All the interviews, not only the last one, would have needed to be more dialogical with the dancers. It is too narrow to just ask the dancers to *Tell!*, which I did in the second interview. If I had directed their attention to different possible experiences, like bodily or emotional experiences, and also asked follow-up questions, they probably would have told more. As the interviewer I also show discourse domination in favouring reflections about conceptual aspects more than bodily aspects like sensations and movements. Awareness about this discourse domination and my lack of attention towards and language for somatic, bodily experiences has grown tremendously in me during this research process. This has affected my language as a teacher and researcher, and today when I teach my language is more based in the body; in movements and sensations.

I view the identification of different perspectives on space in dance, made through a reading of the body as a lived and constructed phenomenon, as an important tool to open up the video and interview material. I have used the different perspectives on space in dance as theoretical lenses to look at the video and interview material, which has allowed me to distinguish different dimensions in the video material and meaning themes and perspectives in the interview material.

The development of the interpretative tool throughout the research process has hugely helped me in seeing the complexity of the research material. The development of this interpretative tool was started when I first tried to start the interpretation of the video material. As I looked at the hours of video tape over and over again, I found that my gaze was rather flat. I did not see anything other than what I had seen before. I did not know what to look for and I had the feeling that the importance of the video material went straight past me. It was a bit like reaching out for a stone under water – the stone was farther away than I calculated and I had to make an effort in order to get hold of it. Frankly, I had to *stretch out* a bit more and extend my gaze in order to open up the video material. Consequently, I turned to the literature and allowed it to dialogue with my own lived experience. In this way I started my reading of the body as a lived and constructed phenomenon. Slowly, allowing the theoretical work in dialogue with my own lived experience to work on me, my old horizon of understanding extended into a new one. I

started to distinguish different spaces which dance operates in. This gave me the necessary tools to look at the video material with, and I started to see different dimensions in the material. Through an interpretation of the video material I could now articulate what kind of knowledge dance generates.

To conclude this discussion about validity, I argue that this study has been made in accordance with good research standards within qualitative research, and that the knowledge claims made in this project are defensible and valuable. The study has both validity and relevance and makes a contribution to the field of dance and dance education. Especially important, it feeds into the field of dance and dance education the experiences and voices of disabled dancers, who represent a minority which is oppressed both within the field of dance and in society in general.

## 5.2. Seeing beyond

The development of methodology to open up the research material in this study has been a true meaning-making process for me as a developing dance researcher. To develop methodology has been of huge importance in order to avoid seeing only what I already saw. I have had to challenge my ways of seeing. This seeing beyond my existing categories and understanding came about much through my reading of Rouhiainen's doctoral thesis<sup>555</sup>. My dialogue with her research about Finnish freelance dancers brought into dialogue with Merleu-Ponty's phenomenology changed my attitude to my research material. In a new way I started to allow a flow between my lived experience, bodily (e)motions and cognitive awareness about my research issues. I allowed *all of me*, including bodily stored experience and cognitive awareness about that experience, to work on the research questions. I experienced this as a turning point for the whole research process. I could now act and live my research process. The research process was under my skin – and in my awareness. This helped me to *see beyond* the things I already saw.

There are many discoveries which I have been able to make as I have managed to *see beyond*. I have identified different perspectives on space in dance; acknowledged the tension between hypervisibility and invisibility in the stories of disabled dancers; understood the uselessness of traditional categories to organize the research material and the need for a language about dance improvisation which can show the exchange between the dancers' lived experience and conscious, reflective thought. I will discuss these discoveries, since they all are important parts of the meaning-making processes which this research tells about.

In this study, a reading of the body as a lived and constructed phenomenon has made me aware of different perspectives on space in dance. The choice of using space as a theoretical tool is inspired especially by Briginshaw's<sup>556</sup> investigations of space. As dancers know, space is an element that can be re-negotiated and changed. Space is a hugely important concept in dance. Dance is, in many ways, about space. And the space which dance operates in is multi-spacious.

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555 Rouhiainen (2003)

556 Briginshaw (2001)

It has many different aspects attached to it. I agree with Briginshaw<sup>557</sup> that through a focus on space in dance, dance can challenge, trouble and question fixed perceptions of subjectivity and fixed cultural narratives about different bodies.

The different spaces in dance cling tightly together and affect each other in a constant flow, going back and forth in all directions. I suggest that the fictive space in dance is made up by the investigations and leaps that take place in the stretch between the lived and the aesthetic space. The aesthetic space, again, is depending on the cultural space. In many ways, aesthetics is lived culture. Any dance aesthetics develops in dialogue with its surrounding culture and society. In a way, the historical time when an aesthetic develops is “trapped culture” within the aesthetics. Thereby, the cultural space heavily depends on the political space, and the cultural space heavily affects the aesthetics. Contact improvisation, for example, as it developed from the beginning of the 70s in the US clearly reflects and treats the political and cultural situation of that time. In the narrative space in dance, there is place for conscious thought, shared stories and reflective discussions about dance. This again influences the dance itself.

Dance improvisation is a fast and complex situation which the dancers live in one movement and one moment. I suggest that a lived, fictive, aesthetic, cultural and political (and also narrative) space are at work in the dancer’s lifeworld, the world of immediate experience, and that these spaces affect the dancers’ choices and experiences as they improvise. These spaces feed into the narrative space – the space where language and stories about dance is created – *and vice versa*. In other words, lived experience in and through lifeworld, and the meaning perspectives developed, affect each other in a constant flow going in both directions. It is the bodily processes of moving-touching-relating that lead to the meaning perspective transformation. But then, language and conscious thought about dance also affect the dancing itself. It is like Cooper Albright says about writing dance:

Sure, my experience of improvisation will change as I write about it, but then again, my experience of writing and thinking will also change as I engage my embodied knowledge from an intellectual perspective.<sup>558</sup>

In the video and interview material a pedagogical dimension and methodological meaning perspective were identified. The pedagogical knowledge embedded in this research was much larger than I expected. It is clear that the teacher and the methodology are of crucial importance for the dancers’ experiences and meaning-making processes. Indeed, the teacher is, as Gough<sup>559</sup> claims, the major resource in the dance class. I suggest that the dance teacher needs to take into account all the perspectives on space in dance when teaching. It takes awareness to teach dance in contemporary time. The awareness of the dance teacher – and the choreographer – is the key to releasing the power that is embedded in dance. This power embedded in dance is explosive precisely because dance operates in many spaces. Dance as an art form offers information about these different spaces. When dancing, the dancers can create knowledge about these different

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557 Briginshaw (2001, p. 6)

558 Cooper Albright (2003, p. 260–261)

559 Gough (1993, p. 28)

spaces in dance. As the interpretation of the empirical material collected in the Dance Laboratory shows, dance improvisation opens up for meaning perspective transformation *about* and *within* these different spaces in dance.

As a result of this research process, I wish to highlight dance as an arena for change and the dance teacher's possibility of acting as an agent of change. On the one hand, dance can be a conservative arena, where stereotype and often tacit conventions about the body, movement, aesthetics, identity, gender, ethnicity, ability, power, dance pedagogy and choreography are re-established. This is so because the cultural conventions of a specific time are, in a way, "trapped" within the aesthetics and pedagogical methods of that genre. As the dance heritage is transferred from body to body, through conservative teaching methods, it also fosters a specific body which suits the aesthetics. In this, many bodies fall off the track. The dance bodies that make their way to the stage can be surprisingly similar to each other.

But then, dance also holds the opposite opportunity. Dance can be a transformative arena, where narratives about body, movement, aesthetics, identity, gender, ethnicity, ability, power, dance pedagogy and choreography are constantly challenged, de-constructed and re-negotiated. For that to happen, I suggest that the field of theatredance needs to be faced with disorientation. I quite like to borrow the concept *ostranenie* from the Russian writer Viktor Sklóvskij<sup>560</sup>. In English, *ostranenie* means "to estrange the familiar" or "to dis-automatize". Sklóvskij used the word *ostranenie* to describe what happens when language becomes art. Disorientation, or meeting with the unknown, is what *really* invites you to improvise.

Disorientation happens quite literally in dance improvisation: dancers are training to fall, be turned upside down and move from known to unknown movement material. This concrete and bodily disorientation connects to and feeds the thinking of new thoughts. So there is disorientation in meaning perspectives, too, which again can lead to change. For me, this research process has been one of disorientation, which again has made it possible for me to *see beyond* what I already saw. I greatly appreciate the element of disorientation in the dance improvisation class. Also, I give dance improvisation as a disorientating phenomenon an important position within the dance world. I suggest that dance improvisation as a phenomenon gives the larger dance world an important aspect of dis-automatization and estranging of the familiar.

Important elements in dance like the body, time, space, dynamics and relations remain important in a class with both disabled and non-disabled dancers, but the interpretation and use of them are challenged and changed. In other words, the elements of dance are there, but in new and extended ways. It is like imagining the still unimagined. The elements of dance look different in different bodies, but can be trained and developed in all bodies. To be able to see how the elements can look and feel anew and different in different bodies, dance artists and teachers must manage to see beyond existing narratives, pre-assumptions, traditional categories and inherited knowledge about dance. In a way, I would like to say that a phenomenological-hermeneutical mode of philosophizing needs to be present in the contemporary dance teacher and choreographer. This is similar to what van Manen<sup>561</sup> describes as a more hermeneutic type of

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560 Sklóvskij (1914/2001, download p. 1)

561 van Manen (1997, p. 143)

competence: a pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact. To me, this means that a constant wondering about what dance can be needs to exist in my experiences as a dance teacher and choreographer and this mode needs to guide me when faced with different dancers. I can then constantly expand my understanding of what dance can be, instead of knowing it already.

Faced with *ostranenie*<sup>562</sup> or dis-automatization, the dance improvisation class and choreography can change and re-write narratives about dance, body, disability, movement and identity. Dis-automatization forces dancers to pause in their scripts. In this pause, there is the time and the possibility to work on releasing the tension between cultural and individual narratives about the body and identity. This can be a rather overwhelming situation to experience, which, as this research shows, can lead to meaning perspective transformation, which changes the view on body, identity, disability, dance and community in a fundamental way.

However, this transformation happens *within* a local community like the Dance Laboratory. I want return to Koppers<sup>563</sup>, who stresses that even if a destabilization of cultural narratives of disability seems to happen in local communities where disabled and non-disabled people meet to create together, these communities still have difficulties informing and transforming narratives in a wider community. I must agree that this is true. Disability awareness is part of this historical moment, but still it seems to be a tremendously slow and tardy process to change in any major way the infantilizing and disempowering dominant cultural narratives of disability. Choreography is one important way of informing a wider community, and internationally touring companies like CandoCo<sup>564</sup> are managing to have an impact that goes across the local community. Another way of informing and influencing a broader community is to write about the experiences in local communities, which this research is an example of.

An important methodological choice which I finally made was to avoid traditional categories in order to organize the interview material. Surprisingly, it took me some years to figure out that there was no way I could use traditional categories as a starting point to open up and describe the interviews. Early in the research process I gave a presentation at the conference Dance and Human Rights in Montreal<sup>565</sup>. A man in the audience asked me why I organized the dancers into disabled and non-disabled dancers, when that was what I was trying to get away from. That was an important question for me to have. I brought the question with me as I continued the research process and it was a real breakthrough for my understanding of the interview material that I had to see *beyond* these existing categories. Instead of starting from traditional categories, I understood that I must take the content in the interviews as a starting point and create meaning themes and meaning perspectives based on that. When doing that, it became clear that the meaning themes and meaning categories by far spread out across traditional categories like disabled and non-disabled or professional and non-professional dancers. I ended up with a complex web of meaning perspectives showing that there are no easy ways of categorizing the dancers. Put very simply: just because you are disabled, you do not necessarily experience and learn the same things as another disabled dancer. What you learn and experience

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562 Sklóvskij (1914/2001)

563 Koppers (2006, p. 22–25)

564 [www.candoco.co.uk](http://www.candoco.co.uk)

565 CORD conference on Dance and Human Rights, November 2005, in Montreal, Canada.

has to do with your individual life experience. And also, of course, “disabled dancers” are a very heterogeneous group. Being a blind dancer, for example, is very different from being a dancer with cerebral palsy. This way of avoiding traditional categories has been a complex way to go for me as a researcher, as it has challenged me more deeply than I could expect. In retrospect, it is easy to say that obviously, there is no other way to go. When I was in the process, it was not that easy, and I had to make an effort to do it. In a way, I suggest I was in the process of resisting dominating cultural narratives, including a Western urge to categorise. What now seems clear is that the avoidance of traditional categories as a starting point made it possible for me to avoid simplification of the research material. Instead of following the dancers’ meaning-making processes as categories, the complex web I ended up with encouraged me to follow them as individuals. In the end, to follow them as individuals made it possible for me to see the dancers as *individuals-creating-community* instead of splintered categories existing side by side in a group. Thus, the result of this research is also not another set of nice and clean categories, with a lot of exceptions attached to them. Instead, the “exceptions”, the individual narratives of how meaning-making takes place in deep connection to the community, are the actual result of this study. It is not a tidy result, since a dance improvisation context is also not a clean and tidy context. Instead, the context which the Dance Laboratory creates and which this research tells about is a messy, complex, fleshy, bodily, sweaty, creative, aesthetic environment which is full of individuality, movement, power-issues, community and possibilities.

These findings are a result of a hermeneutic-phenomenological mode of philosophizing, where one of the most important aspects has been to manage to see beyond existing categories and dominating cultural narratives. Instead of seeing what I thought I already saw (divided categories), I ended up seeing *individuals-creating-community*. What the individual dancers in this community learn, they learn *from* the community, in dialogue with each other. The dancers learn in individual, and not categorical, ways. However, the individual dancers are deeply connected in their learning processes. They affect each other and as the individuals learn and change, so does the group. The learning processes taking place in the Dance Laboratory are dependent on every single individual who contributes to that community. Remove one, and the meaning potential changes.

Awareness about the importance of language has matured slowly in me through the whole research process. This is especially true with respect to the importance of developing a language to describe the actual bodily processes which the dancers went through in the Dance Laboratory. The awareness of a language describing the actual, bodily processes of dance improvisation did not resonate in me before I entered the process of opening up the interview material. As I then realised that the bodily-somatic meaning perspective transformation in my interpretation of the material was smaller than the aesthetic and community meaning perspective transformation, I had a feeling that there was something there which I did not see. Again – this understanding that something was missing started with a feeling, which led me into a new process of wondering. I realised that in the research process there is a lack of attention towards a language which can story the bodily processes in the improvisation. In short, it seemed easier to slip over to conceptual interpretations of the dance improvisation than to describe the bodily processes.

Now, as an outcome of this research process, I suggest that to develop a language to describe



the lived experience in dance is of central importance in order to connect lifeworld and meaning perspective transformation in dance improvisation. The meaning perspective transformation takes place because of the specific bodily processes in dance improvisation. These specific bodily processes which are characteristic of dance improvisation need to be constructed through language. Otherwise, the special qualities in dance improvisation easily go missing. Instead, it might seem that any kind of bodily activity, like for example gymnastics or playing football, give the same experiences and meaning-making processes. But again, dance improvisation is not *any* kind of moving: it is a *specific* kind of moving, which holds and constantly develops its specific aesthetics. It is by no means irrelevant what kind of bodily activity a person chooses to engage in. As Horton Fraleigh<sup>566</sup> and Parvainen<sup>567</sup> point out, all body techniques shape not only the body but also contribute to an experience-based transformation of the body-subject. Parvainen<sup>568</sup> emphasises that any body technique which goes on over time influences not only a person's outer shape, but also the person's body memories, body image and even world view. The consequences of body techniques project not only aesthetics, but also existence, Parvainen concludes. This is so because the body does not function dualistically. There is no way of training the body in a way that is "simply physical", since the body is not a piece of material like other objects. The body is physical and concrete, but also as Horton Fraleigh<sup>569</sup> says, *beminded*, *bespirited* and *besouled*. And indeed, this research tells about dance improvisation as a body technique which *shapes not only the body but also contributes to an experience-based transformation of the body-subject*.

So who is dance for, then? My clear and loud response to this question is that dance is for every *body*. I strongly suggest that dance in contemporary time will become more relevant if more and different bodies are allowed into the dance field. I suggest that the dance field needs a de-construction of the conventional cultural narratives, which right from the start tell about the dancer as able-bodied. I also suggest that this is one main responsibility for contemporary dance artists, choreographers and teachers: to make dance as an art relevant to the world as the world is today through embracing differently bodied dancers. Dance must not only mirror power structures in society but actively challenge traditional conventions and dare to turn narratives about body, identity and dance upsidedown. Dance must not be distanced from large groups of people. The dance field fails to communicate its importance if it creates a distance from groups of bodies, thus tacitly saying that dance is only for special bodies.

I want to resist this way of positioning dance at a distance from many bodies. This is – dare I say it – a wrong way of using space. Space should not be used to create distanced positions within the field of dance. Instead, space should be used to make different body-subjects reach out and touch each other, communicate and find out what dance can be in their bodies. Every *body* can find ways of dancing and dance offers important meaning-making possibilities for different body-subjects. But to open up dance for every *body* does not happen by itself. It takes much more than mere inclusion. It takes an active and conscious effort, it demands problem-solving and it needs the full meaning of the concept integration: to really touch each other and create

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566 Horton Fraleigh (1987, p. 11)

567 Parvainen (1998, p. 59)

568 Parvainen (1998, p. 59)

569 Horton Fraleigh (1987, p. 11)

a new whole – a new interpretation of what dance can be like. It needs recognition of dancers as body-subjects-of-culture, who need to actively work on understanding each other. In this way, a new integrity can be created within a local dance community and, hopefully, eventually within the broader dance field and society as well.

So, the dancers walk as individuals, not as categories, through this project. When saying that, it might seem I that I mean that it is of no importance whether a dancer is disabled or not. This is not what I mean. As I wrote in the beginning of this thesis, my intention is not to minimize the experience of being disabled, as I know that this is deeply lived. My point is, that being a body is *subjectively* lived. Every *body* lives in the tension between the cultural narratives about the body you are (female, young, elderly, disabled and so on) and the individual stories of being that body. Different bodies hold different cultural narratives and we all exercise expectations, influence and power on each other as bodies. Body-identity-life experience cannot be separated.

It is never enough to categorise people and know already who they are, how they will move or what they will learn. On the contrary, the often tacit feeling of “I know already what a boy in wheelchair is like” should function as a warning sign. This feeling of “knowing already” is rooted in conventional and cultural assumptions about people using wheelchairs. People are bodies, yes, but they are not a body-category which holds certain fixed characteristics of how they experience, learn, create, think, relate, dream and contribute. It seems very easy to create categories based on the body, but this means pushing people together in simplistic and fixed ways. History tells me that this is both devastating and dangerous. Lives are lived subjectively, not categorically. In seeing each other as categories, we continue living dualistic lives.

One important insight about the meaning potential in the Dance Laboratory is that the meaning possibilities in the group are individual, but at the same time completely dependent on the kind of community which is developed among the individuals. The meaning potential is not categorical, it is not fixed and it demands an effort of both teacher and dancers to be released. The meaning potential both for the individual dancers and for the group as a developing community is also completely dependent on the dancers as body-subjects-of-culture. What they bring with them as dancers and human beings will affect what they learn and what they contribute to the group.

The two professional dancers, Anna and Paul, in this research project can serve as an example. Both being professional dancers, they still show very different meaning perspective transformation in the Dance Laboratory. Anna’s view on the aesthetics of dance improvisation and on the methodology of how to teach dance improvisation changed in a fundamental way through her participation in the project. As a dancer and dance teacher, she was concerned with what dance should be like, and how dance should be taught. As the group, including myself as the teacher, developed and changed, so did her view on what dance can be and how dance can be taught. This was an individual meaning offer which was there for her as she entered the project, met the other dancers, myself as the teacher and took part in the development of the project. Looking at Paul, who also is a professional dancer, this meaning offer was not there for him as he entered the Dance Laboratory. As a matter of fact, Paul hardly experienced any meaning perspective transformation during the project. Instead, his meaning perspectives merely deepened. In the Dance Laboratory he was not confronted with completely new movements or meanings about dance, he merely deepened what he already knew.

I have emphasised that the meaning potential in the Dance Laboratory is individual, and that it depends on what the dancers as body-subjects-of-culture bring with them from previous dance and life experience into the group. At the same time, I have emphasised that the individual meaning possibilities are completely dependent on *the kind of community* which is developed among the dancers. “The kind of community” which is being developed is a pedagogical concern. It is the responsibility of the teacher to create a community and learning environment where the meaning offers which are there for the different dancers can be realised. In other words, for a rich meaning potential to develop, on both an individual and community level, the teacher in a dance improvisation project with differently bodied dancers has a key role. She is the major resource in the dance class.

### **5.3. The learning space within a poetic, dialogical and transformative dance pedagogy**

Dance improvisation holds the possibility for change: individual change and also change of a more shared character within a local community. Based on my interpretation of how the dancers make meaning in this project, I argue that contemporary dance improvisation needs to be taught within both a poetic, dialogical and transformative pedagogy.

I use the concept *poetic* pedagogy to emphasise that the teaching of dance takes place in a spacious space, which opens up for multi-layered and open-ended movement elaboration. Dance is a body-poetical art, and the dancing body exists in and creates many spaces.

The concept dialogical can be referred to Bakhtin<sup>570</sup> who writes that only dialogue makes the human being responsible and enriched. In line with this, dialogue is a key concept which the building of the dance improvisation class spins around. In a real dialogue there is no right answer in advance, but a serious interest in hearing the other person’s point of view. This *point of view* can be both in movement as well as in reflective discussions. Shotter<sup>571</sup> writes about how a dialogically structured activity constitutes a third realm of activity, which cannot be explained either as behaviour or as action. Instead, this dialogical activity is lived: it constitutes living moments. We are in these living moments, Shotter<sup>572</sup> says, as living, wide-awake human beings.

The concept transformative shows the link to a context-based<sup>573</sup>, critical pedagogy. Freire’s<sup>574</sup> pedagogy of hope reveals itself in this transformative pedagogy, which sees education as an arena for change with an emancipatory aim. This possibility of transformative learning is connected to the fact that, as Shotter<sup>575</sup> writes, dialogical and living moments, can move us ontologically. Living moments provide us with reorientation, which is essential for change.

I suggest that a poetic, dialogical and transformative dance pedagogy is important with any

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570 In epilogue by Öberg in Bakhtin (1991, p. 282)

571 Shotter (1999b, download p. 1)

572 Shotter (1999a, download p. 1–2)

573 See Marques (1998)

574 Freire (1970)

575 Shotter (1999a, download p. 5)

group of dancers, but it is crucial for groups which invite differently bodied dancers to take part. In groups with a high degree of diversity, the different spaces which dance operates within clearly show themselves. Through this study I have identified a lived, fictive, aesthetic, cultural, political and narrative space in dance. These spaces need to be dealt with in a dance improvisation class with differently bodied dancers. In this, the dance improvisation class holds rich meaning-making possibilities for all the different dancers, for the dance teacher and for the development of dance as an art form itself. In order to open up for these meaning offers, I suggest a dance teaching which is firmly based in the poetic and lived experience of dance, with a heightened phenomenological awareness, but also in critical and conscious pedagogical considerations.

*Transformative, aesthetic learning* in my opinion is the main goal in dance improvisation class. Dance tasks spun around the elements of meeting, moving, relating, listening, touching, connecting, creating, exploring form, sensing-timing, observing, reflecting and sharing lead towards learning in a transformative, and not reproductive, way. In this way everybody involved, both dancers and the dance teacher, can learn and change. Dancers and dance teachers go through both lived experience, where they expand their *knowing dance in movement*, and meaning perspective transformation, where they expand what they *know and verbalise about dance*. Through taking part in and reflecting about dance as a multi-spacious art form, the dancers learn about these very spaces. They can become negotiators for a more generous space in dance.

*Development of language about dance* happens through transformative learning in dance. The transformative learning gives new information, generates new knowledge and creates new understanding. This gives birth to new stories about dance, anchored in the actual bodily and lived experiences in dance. These stories again feed into the development of a more specific language about dance. This language can come closer to the bodily, somatic, communicative processes in dance improvisation. Eventually, the development of language feeds back into the dancing itself. Dance and reflective thought about dance influence each other in a constant exchange.

*The dance aesthetics and pedagogy transform* as dance teachers, dancers and choreographers engage in a dialogue and transform their understanding about what dance can be. The aesthetics of dance keep developing, really daring to break old conventions about dance and look for still unseen possibilities. New choreography by different dancers and choreographers can make its way onto a larger stage and meet a broader audience. This transformative aesthetics, new choreography, transformative learning and development of pedagogy are ways of negotiating about space for differently bodied dancers, choreographers, dance teachers, researchers, dance development workers and artistic leaders in the dance field.

*A widening of dance as art* happens when the space for dance is created between dancers in a way that shows its full, spacious and generous potential. In this dance space, doors are opened for different dancers with different life experiences. They are invited to take part, influence and contribute in a way that dares to break with conventions and allow a real broadening of dance as art. The aim is to develop dance based in a broad understanding of what it means to be human, and what it means to be a body.

### 5.3.1. Knowledge hooks telling about *what* and *how* in dance improvisation class

Inspired by Briginshaw's<sup>576</sup> questions about *what* and *how* space is in dance, I have identified different perspectives on space in dance. Through this research process, I have identified these spaces as a *space for learning* in dance improvisation. In dance improvisation, dancers learn *about* and *within* a lived, fictive, aesthetic, narrative, cultural and political space. These spaces are broad concepts and the meaning of them needs to be constantly re-negotiated, both within and beyond local dance communities.

When studying the video material collected in the Dance Laboratory with these perspectives on different spaces in dance as lenses, I distinguished different dimensions. These dimensions tell about how dance contains and creates information, knowledge and communication.

Within a *movement dimension*, connected to an *aesthetic dimension*, this study tells about how dance improvisation allows dancers to investigate:

- how the body uses space, creates space and transforms space through movement.
- how the body can transform through the use of time.
- the concept of timing and the ability to make choices.
- a range of dynamic aspects.
- listening skills in movement including the use of touch.
- increasing and decreasing attention.
- the flow of attention between dancers.
- how space is created and transformed in relations between different dancers.
- different ways of using touch in order to explore and communicate with others.
- how the use of touch is an opportunity to investigate the relation between “I” and “the other”.
- how connections can be made across differences.
- how form and identity can be explored.

These aspects all tell about how dance contains information and meaning possibilities within a lived, bodily space. This lived space in dance is directly connected to the aesthetic space. The aesthetic principles worked with define the experiences in the dance. Within an *aesthetic dimension* distinguished in this study, the dancers investigate different aesthetic choices about how, when, what, who in dance and how those choices are present in all aspects of the movement material explored and created.

When looking from the perspective of a cultural and political space in dance, this study also identifies a *power dimension* in dance improvisation. Within this dimension dancers have the possibility of creating awareness of

- how they bring with them tacitly inherited and often disempowering cultural narratives about other and different bodies and how this is present in the way they act towards each other

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<sup>576</sup> Briginshaw (2001, p. 9)

- how they take a dominant or passive position in the improvisation
- to what degree they view the other and different dancers as active contributors in class
- how they might show preference for dancers more like themselves
- how the possibility of making choices is distributed among different dancers
- whether the possibility to influence the condition of the dance is balanced among the different dancers
- if the different dancers are given space to voice their ideas, suggestions and visions for the dance
- whether stereotyped cultural narratives about difference are reproduced or challenged and re-written.

The awareness that can be created about both a movement, an aesthetic and a power dimension in dance improvisation holds important knowledge which needs to have influence beyond the local community and into a broader societal and cultural context. In this, a real political explosive is embedded in dance improvisation. The act of reaching out to touch, move, create and communicate with each other across differences and traditional categories is a highly political act. In this, dance operates in a vibrating cultural and political space.

In this, there is an important pedagogical and reflective dimension in dance improvisation. It is in the hands of the dance teacher to teach in a way where the lived, fictive, aesthetic, cultural and political space in dance is used and broadened. In this work, reflective discussions and the development of a language to talk about the different spaces in dance are necessary, valuable and informative. I will discuss the pedagogical and reflective dimension in dance improvisation more closely shortly.

Now I will turn my attention to the knowledge hooks I have collected throughout this study. These are hooks which dance improvisation can be spun around. By that I mean that these hooks can be used as methodological devices, suggesting actual themes to investigate in the dance improvisation class. In addition, these hooks can be understood as analytical devices which serve as answers to Briginshaw's<sup>577</sup> questions of *what* and *how* space is created in dance.

I propose that all these concepts collected on my journey through this research material can serve as hooks to build knowledge around. Any of these concepts can be used as the focus of a task or a class, a theme, or a starting point. It is possible and valuable to work with, for example, timing, listening, touching, breathing, or an active, own contribution during a dance improvisation class. Also, all of these concepts can be seen from the different perspectives on space in dance. For example, the concept *touch* operates in and creates all the different spaces identified in this study. Touching is a bodily, lived act. The way touch is used is an aesthetic choice. In dance, the use of touch can be improvised with like in a play room, thereby entering the space of fiction and still unseen possibilities. The way touch is used is living culture, and embedded in culture is a political space. The experience of touching can be storied and verbalised through reflective discussion.

All knowledge hooks collected can be opened up and reflected about like this from the different

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<sup>577</sup> Briginshaw (2001, p. 9)

perspectives on space in dance. Some of them to a high extent, some to a lesser, but definitely none of these knowledge hooks collected are to be viewed as flat, one-dimensional concepts. When these concepts are explored and reflected about in dance improvisation, they open up for experiences and insight within many spaces. In the following, I arrange the hook one after the other, as a bank of possibilities for the dance improvisation class. (To open up each concept and create concrete tasks for improvisation and reflective discussions is material for another, more methodological book which I plan as a post-doctoral project.)

- investigate movement
  - create space
  - transform
  - relate
  - timing
  - listen
  - attention
- body memories
  - reflect
  - dialogue
  - subjectivity
- go beyond categories
  - make choices
- opportunity to influence
  - explore form
- work like choreographers
  - solve problems
  - freedom
  - music as partner
  - touch
  - confirmation
  - trust
- movement qualities
  - allow
  - own action
  - slow down
  - connect
- explore identity
  - solidarity
  - awareness
  - voice
  - silence
- one step to the side
  - flow of attention
  - rhythm

sense  
 communication  
 initiate and respond  
 challenge  
 zoom in and out  
 suggest  
 a real interest  
 flow  
 dare  
 feelings  
 moods  
 initiate  
 investigate  
 breathe  
 moving and moved  
 meet  
 be vulnerable  
 I – the other relationship  
 power symmetry  
 “less is more”  
 de-construct and re-construct  
 observe  
 information  
 knowledge  
 question  
 see possibilities  
 be myself  
 in charge of my dance  
 feedback  
 reflective discussions  
 share

*Figure 15 (Østern). Knowledge hooks that dance improvisation can be spun around, forming a bank of possibilities for the dance teacher.*

The meaning themes forming meaning perspectives constructed in this study can be related to these knowledge hooks. The meaning perspective transformation that has been shown is based on the lived, bodily exploration of these knowledge hooks. The bodily, lived act of daring, falling, breathing, meeting, relating, touching, connecting, moving and being moved and so on forms the base for the dancers' experiences, learning and meaning perspective transformation shown in this study. I have identified and described bodily-somatic, intrapersonal, existential, aesthetic, community and methodological meaning perspective transformation. This transformation is based in the dancers' lived experience in dance improvisation.



### 5.3.2. Aesthetic-pedagogical principles

In Chapter 3. Dance improvisation as a spacious discourse filtered through the Dance Laboratory, I defined a set of aesthetic principles which the Dance Laboratory works through and develops. The principles described connect the Dance Laboratory to a broader dance field, as the principles show inspiration from different parts of the dance field, especially contact improvisation. In Section 4.2.3. Meaning perspective transformation, I constructed and added several more aesthetic principles based on aesthetic meaning themes brought up by the dancers.

As I read the list of aesthetic principles that I – with the help of the dancers’ voices – have distinguished as being at work in the Dance Laboratory, I realise that this is not only a list of aesthetic principles. It is also a list of pedagogical principles at work in the Dance Laboratory. I now understand that the aesthetics worked with and towards also defines the pedagogy being developed in the dance class. In other words, the aesthetics give birth to the dance pedagogy. In saying that, I also, conversely, define the act of teaching dance a most aesthetic activity.

Sometimes, there are voices who try to point to a dichotomy between art and education. I disagree with that. Quite on the contrary, I propose that *the aesthetics opens up the pedagogy*. And to teach dance is to be in the middle of an aesthetic activity. I would like then, to re-name the aesthetic principles at work in the Dance Laboratory. These are *the aesthetic-pedagogical principles* at work in the group. This set of principles – which develops all the time – forms the aesthetics and directs the dance pedagogical work in the Dance Laboratory:

1. Dance improvisation is seen as a space for meaning-making – a world of possibilities.
2. Dance has multiple meanings. The meanings are both individual and shared, and they are constantly under re-negotiation.
3. The meetings between different dancers are viewed as most interesting. The meetings in the group are starting points for what is being created.
4. Difference is used as a generative force. The aesthetics and the pedagogy develop from using everybody’s possibilities.
5. The relations between the different participants are of central focus for movement exploration.
6. Movement is created by relating the body to the physical forces in and of the world, like gravity and friction.
7. Less is more. Dance does not have to be so much movement, but rather quite simple movements where something actually happens: where there is a flow of attention.
8. The project is not about disability, it is about dance. Disability is stretched away from being “a disability” into a unique opportunity for choreographic research.
9. There is training in disorientation.
10. A problem-solving ethos leads the work.
11. A range of different dynamic possibilities is investigated.
12. Form and identity are investigated.
13. The ability to listen is developed.
14. Touch is used as a way of relating, creating and communicating.

15. Observing is seen as an important part of dancing.
16. Reflective discussions are frequently used.
17. There is a real interest in hearing about the other person's point of view: in movement and in discussions.
18. I don't try to be anybody else than the one I am. As a body-subject, I am constantly in becoming.
19. Dance is understood as containing and creating bodily information and knowledge. Dance has a somatic, sensuous, fleshy character which is communicated between bodies in bodies' ways.
20. I feel good in dance because I am in charge of my body and dance while dancing. I have a real possibility to influence the condition and content of the dance explored.

This set of aesthetic-pedagogical principles at work in the Dance Laboratory shows a project which is taught within a critical, but also somatic, dance pedagogy. It works based on the belief that, as Rouhiainen<sup>578</sup> argues, there is a connection between bodily awareness of the self and embodied ethical relationships with others. The pedagogy developed can be compared to Marques'<sup>579</sup>context-based education. In context-based dance education the material developed is connected with contemporary society. The educational standpoint is, as Marques<sup>580</sup> writes, more about working with multiplicity as a value and not as something to be overcome, tolerated or ignored. The influence from contact improvisation is clear in the aesthetic-pedagogical principles in the Dance Laboratory and the influence of many contemporary dance (improvisation) teachers who I have studied with is also embedded in the principles, for example Adam Benjamin.

Dewey's<sup>581</sup> belief in learning through experience can be traced in the aesthetic-pedagogical principles presented. Also Bakhtin's<sup>582</sup> emphasis on dialogue in order to develop knowledge and his appreciation of different voices is clearly there. The presence of Freire's<sup>583</sup> pedagogy of hope is also visible through a strong emancipatory perspective. The aesthetic-pedagogical principles hold the possibility for transformative learning, influenced by Mezirow's<sup>584</sup> transformative learning theory. Comprehensively, and leaning on Merleau-Ponty's<sup>585</sup> phenomenology, the dancers are seen as body-subjects-of-culture, who move, sense, feel, think, relate and communicate themselves through the dance classes. The dancers are believed to learn in the process of dancing, as well as influencing the condition of the dance and dance pedagogy they take part in.

I suggest that through the use and continuous development of these aesthetic-pedagogical principles, integrity can be created in the dance improvisation class with differently bodied dancers. All participating dancers are viewed as active contributors to the exploration going on in

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578 Rouhiainen (2008, p. 241)

579 Marques (1998)

580 Marques (1998, p. 181)

581 Dewey (1934/1980)

582 Bakhtin (1991)

583 Freire (1970)

584 Mezirow (1991)

585 Merleau-Ponty, for example (1945/1994)

the class. The dance teacher and the dancers share a serious interest in finding out what dance can be in the meeting between them. They make up the way as they go along. In this, the participants create dance which is loaded with the meaning constructed in the meetings between them.

### 5.3.3. The dramaturgy of teaching dance improvisation

The dramaturgy of teaching dance improvisation has to do with how the teacher teaches, how the classes are built up, which pedagogical principles are built into the teaching and which philosophies and worldview are revealed in every move the teacher makes.

As an outcome of this research I have understood that the teacher is the major resource in the dance class. She is the most important parameter for how and what the dancers will experience and learn. When she teaches, she also operates within the different spaces identified in this study. Her power over and possibility to influence the dancer's body and identity is huge. In front of the dance teacher, the dancers – entering the dance class as body-subjects-of-culture – are vulnerable. In the dance class, the dancers are going to work with nothing less than themselves.

This situation calls for reflexivity on part of the teacher. One highly important aspect of the job which the dance teacher needs to do is to continuously reflect on her own position as authority: to show her agenda and to deconstruct the “truths” about body, identity and dance that she might hold. To develop what van Manen<sup>586</sup> calls a hermeneutic type of competence through a pedagogical thoughtfulness or tact, is essential. She must also dare to show her own vulnerability, in recognizing that her own most important learning process is taking place there and then, right in front of the dancers. As the dancers learn in the process of dancing, so also the teacher learns in the process of teaching. As this study shows, a dance improvisation teacher is a teacher *constantly on the move*.

Based in a poetic, dialogical and transformative dance pedagogy, the reflexive dance teacher has the possibility to function as a transformative dance teacher. Shapiro<sup>587</sup> argues that the transformative dance teacher has the power and possibility to teach towards a more human and reflected dance body. The dance improvisation teacher has the possibility to influence the lived experience of her students and act like an *agent of change*. As Marques<sup>588</sup> writes, in context-based dance education the teacher is autonomous in connecting her dance knowledge with the multiple voices, bodies and cultures present in the class room. In *not* sticking to an established and conventional aesthetics, there are multiple opportunities for transformative learning. At the same time, this autonomy calls for a high degree of reflexivity and awareness on the part of the teacher about her own power to influence the bodies and identities of her students.

Having backtracked my own agenda as the teacher in the Dance Laboratory, I describe myself as what Jill Green and Sue Stinson<sup>589</sup> call an emancipatory teacher with a social advocacy project. I was not explicitly aware of this when I started the project, but I had, and have, a political

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<sup>586</sup> van Manen (1997, p. 143)

<sup>587</sup> Shapiro (1998, p. 7)

<sup>588</sup> Marques (1998, p. 181)

<sup>589</sup> Green and Stinson (1999, p. 104)

compassion to support mixed-ability dance practice. Indeed, I have acted like a transformative dance teacher in the Dance Laboratory, constantly challenging both my own and the dancers' definitions of dance, body, disability and identity. And, as this study shows, transformative learning has taken place among the dancers and myself.

In the interpretation of the empirical material in this study, I have collected knowledge hooks for the dramaturgy of teaching. These knowledge hooks are constructed as a result of my reflexive process during the interpretation of the video material and as a result of listening into the voices of the dancers in the interviews. These knowledge hooks tell about important aspects for the teaching of dance improvisation for differently bodied dancers. I propose that the dance improvisation teacher should:

1. View the teaching of dance improvisation as a constant process of de-constructing conventional ways of teaching dance and re-constructing new ones.
2. Use difference as a generative force in the dance class.
3. Understand that the dancers' learning processes depend tightly on the teacher.
4. Be aware of how the position of different dancers is strengthened by receiving equal attention from the teacher.
5. Be aware of how the teacher has the power to open up or close the improvisation space for different dancers.
6. Be aware that to discuss in dance class releases tension. Allow and value reflective discussions.
7. Be aware of her own dominating status as teacher.
8. Recognize her own teaching mistakes, appreciate them, and deal with them.
9. Dare to go with the flow – do not stop ideas from evolving and developing.
10. Develop good sensing and listening skills.
11. Use positive confirmation as feedback.
12. Make sure that the task is understood fully by everybody.

These knowledge hooks can be seen as knowledge about the dramaturgy of teaching dance improvisation, generated in this study. Dance improvisation teachers, acting like agents of change, are interested in exploring, developing and transforming knowledge about dance in dialogue with their students. They are able to see their teaching in relation to the surrounding society and avoid re-producing stereotype and disempowering cultural narratives about different bodies.

When dance improvisation teachers work through a rich and reflexive understanding of the concept *dance teacher*, they can really make a difference. There are different ways of being body, of creating identity, of communicating dance, and there is space to be negotiated for these different ways within dance. The transformative dance teacher, acting like an agent of change, can function as the negotiator for this more spacious and generous space. In this, she needs to be respectful towards the different dancers she works with, but disrespectful towards conventional and traditional cultural narratives and definitions about what dance should be like. The dance improvisation teacher needs to be brave enough to teach differently in order to create integrity in the dance class.

## 5.4. Negotiating about a generous and explosive space for dance

The potential for meaning-making in this postmodern, contemporary dance improvisation setting, embracing differently bodied dancers, is tremendously rich. It offers a variety of meaning-making possibilities for the different dancers involved and for the dance teacher. The knowledge generated in this study about what kind of information dance holds, and about *what* and *how* space can be in dance, is valuable in a broader dialogue about dance, pedagogy and society. As a result of this research process, I argue for the importance of a poetic, dialogical and transformative dance pedagogy which is eager to open up for and engage with tomorrow's diversity of dancers.

A poetic, dialogical and transformative dance pedagogical classroom is an empowering place to be for differently bodied dancers. Established and stereotyped cultural narratives about the body, disability, identity and dance are challenged and re-written. But even if this happens within a local dance community, it is a tardy process to manage to have a major impact on disempowering cultural narratives in the broader society. Still, I suggest, as also Koppers<sup>590</sup> argues, that postmodern, contemporary dance is one of the most important venues for making a real impact on established cultural narratives about the body, identity and disability. This is so because, as Briginshaw<sup>591</sup> claims, dance immediately presents representations of bodies in space, their relation to space and to other bodies. Cooper Albright<sup>592</sup> identifies a double moment of representation in dance in which bodies are both producing and being produced by cultural discourses of gender, race, ability, sexuality and age. In this double moment there is a slippage between a somatic and cultural identity; between individual and cultural narratives about body and identity. When contemporary choreography and dance pedagogy is positioned precisely within this slippage, then dance can really make a change.

With this study I question and take issue with the fact that the field of theatre dance for so long has prioritized the white, young, able-bodied, non-ill, highly skilful, even machine-like body. It is in the hands of dance teachers and choreographers to treat dance in a way that opens doors for and values difference and multiplicity in the dance field. The dance field is in need of dance teachers and choreographers who have a generous aesthetic and pedagogical base. What it takes to build that base are continuous re-negotiations about a spacious space for dance to unfold in. The negotiations about this space need to be carried out by individual dance artists in their local settings, and collectively beyond the local communities, as a constant discussion about what dance can be and mean in the lives of different people and on a societal level.

A generous space for dance promotes a trust in the explosive power which lies in the meetings between different people in dance. This power is explosive precisely because dance operates in, reveals and creates many different perspectives on space.

This power is connected to empathy, ethics and aesthetics. *Empathy*, because tolerance and understanding for other people is needed in a postmodern landscape which is aware of and

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590 Koppers (2006, p. 22)

591 Briginshaw (2001, p. 5)

592 Cooper Albright (1997, p. xxiii)

sensitive towards multiplicity. *Ethics*, because dance contains a cultural and political space where doors can either be shut or opened for different bodies in the dance class and on stage. *Aesthetics*, because dance teachers and choreographers operating in postmodern, contemporary time have the possibility to allow empathic and ethical aspects to take part in shaping the aesthetic and pedagogical aspects of dance. In this, difference is valued as a generative force. Thereby, dance teachers and choreographers can teach and create dance which explodes with meetings, multiplicity and meaning.

With this, I want to negotiate about a spacious and generous space in postmodern, contemporary dance. Dance improvisation is an aesthetic learning space where dancers and dance teachers experience, learn and change. In other words, they are *constantly on the move*.



# Summary

This study investigates the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory, a dance improvisation project with differently bodied dancers in Trondheim, Norway. The investigation is interpreted within a larger framework informed by Merleau-Ponty's (for example 1945/1994) phenomenology and critical, transformative pedagogy. Based on a description and interpretation of what the different dancers experience in the project, in which ways the improvisation makes meaning for them, what they learn and how they change, the author enters a pedagogical, aesthetic and societal discussion about dance in contemporary time.

The study is practical-based, as the researcher is also the initiator of and dance teacher in the Dance Laboratory. The first part of the thesis describes how the Dance Laboratory came to be, first as an artistic group and then as a research project. The author positions herself within a wider dance context in describing how she first encountered the field of dance improvisation with differently bodied dancers at a workshop with Adam Benjamin, the previous artistic leader of the U.K. based CandoCo dance company. The author then addresses the dance developmental work connected to the setting up of the Dance Laboratory in Trondheim, the difficulties she experienced and how the group eventually became established.

The researcher scrutinizes her own research process and describes how *wonder* served as a starting point for the whole project. Her recognition of a need to re-think questions of what dance is, who dance is for and how dance can be taught, led her into the project. Within a comprehensive hermeneutic-phenomenological mode of wondering, she uses her own lived experience as the dance teacher throughout the interpretation and allows it to dialogue with relevant theory. In backtracking her own pedagogical agenda, she describes herself as an emancipatory teacher with a social advocacy project. She had a political compassion to support mixed-ability dance practice and inform the dance field and wider society with the voices of differently bodied dancers.

In 2003–2004 the researcher collected the main empirical material for this study, consisting of several hours of videotaped dance improvisation classes, in total 25 interviews with the dancers and the video artist, and field notes from her own teaching. The eight dancers in the project were all interviewed individually before, during and after the project. The dancers were differently bodied and differently verbal, with different previous dance experience, ranging from two professional dancers to a dancer with no earlier experience of dance improvisation or theatre dance.

In order to understand and interpret her empirical material, the researcher interprets the body as a lived and constructed phenomenon. With the help of literature by scholars such as Sandahl & Auslander (2005), Kupperts (2001, 2006), Cooper Albright (1997, 2007), Engelsrud (2006), Merleau-Ponty (for example 1945/1994), Lakoff & Johnson (1999), Baner (1984, 2003), Shotter (1993, 1999) and Gallagher & Zahavi (2008), she looks at the body from several different perspectives. She describes how the experiences with initiating a project like the Dance Laboratory several times has made her fall into the dualistically rooted division which seems to exist between different bodies. She discusses the body as lived, how dancers mediate information



and communication through the use of touch and the importance of discussing lived experience in the dance improvisation class. She illuminates the tension between cultural and individual narratives about disability and points to the body as an agenda for identity, pedagogy and change.

As a result of her reading of the body, the researcher peels off different aspects that she defines as different perspectives on space in dance. Inspired by Briginshaw's (2001) view on space as tightly connected to the body, the researcher uses space as a theoretical device to go on with. In doing this, she identifies a lived, aesthetic, fictive, narrative, cultural and political space in dance. These spaces form one big space for learning in dance – at its best a generous and spacious one. The study attempts to go into dialogue with Briginshaw's questions of *what* and *how* space means in dance, how it is possible to think dance differently and how dance can trouble and challenge fixed cultural narratives about different bodies.

In the next section the author filters improvisation as a spacious discourse through the Dance Laboratory. She examines the lived, aesthetic, fictive, narrative, cultural and political space in dance through her experiences in the Dance Laboratory in dialogue with existing theory. In doing so, she simultaneously defines the Dance Laboratory as part of a continuously developing field of contemporary dance and dance improvisation.

Having established an understanding of dance improvisation as a multi-spacious phenomenon, the author continues with an interpretation of the empirical material collected for the study. As she formulates the meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory, she divides her interpretation into two major parts. The first part is concerned with an interpretation of the video material.

She approaches the video material by creating body-poetical stories of three selected sequences. Each story, describing parts of the material in detail, is followed by an interpretation. With the use of her different perspectives on space in dance, the researcher identifies a movement, an aesthetic, a pedagogical, power and reflective dimension in the dance improvisation classes. She discusses what kind of bodily information dance contains, how the dancers work with making aesthetic choices, what happens in terms of teaching and how the different dancers are affected by this, how the possibilities to influence and be voiced are distributed among the different dancers and how different aspects are brought up for reflection. The researcher focuses on herself as the teacher and describes how she sees a teacher on the move, developing her methodology, language and awareness as the project goes on.

The second part of the interpretation is concerned with the interview material. In this the researcher uses Mezirow's (for example 1991) transformative learning theory as a major inspiration. She openly describes how she struggled in organizing the interview material as long as she tried to divide the dancers into well-known categories like disabled and non-disabled. The full understanding of the interview material was not released until she managed to see beyond these traditional categories and instead use the actual *content* of the interviews to organize the material. Taking a somewhat more quantitative grip around the material in this section, and creating tables where the different meaning themes that the different dancers brought up are shown, she illuminates how these spread out across traditional categories like disabled and non-disabled, professional and amateur. In terms of how the dancers make meaning in the project and what they learn, it makes no sense to organize the dancers into conventional categories.

Put very simply, and obviously: just because you are disabled, you do not necessarily learn and experience the same things as another disabled dancer. An interpretation of the interview material makes it perfectly clear that regarding the meaning-making processes, the dancers walk as individuals, not categories, through the project.

Inspired by Giorgi's (1985) method for meaning concentration and Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory, the author concentrates the content in the interview material into meaning themes. The meaning themes are collected under a number of meaning perspectives, which the dancers talk from within. These meaning perspectives can be compared to lifeworlds and the researcher seeks to connect the bodily, lived experiences in the improvisation to the meaning perspective transformation among the dancers. Through the description and interpretation of the interview material the researcher constructs a bodily-somatic, existential, intrapersonal, community, aesthetic and methodological meaning perspective which the dancers talk from within as they reflect about their experiences in the Dance Laboratory. They talk about being a moving body, about improvising and connecting to life, about a sense of myself in the improvisation, about community and connecting to other people, about the art of dance improvisation and about the importance of how improvisation is taught.

By following the different dancers' meaning perspectives through the three interviews, the researcher shows how meaning perspective transformation takes place during the project. When the dancers finish the project, they know more and different things about dance than before, but they do not know the same things as the others. They learn and change in an individual, not categorised, way. Still, what they learn is completely dependent on the kind of community that is created in the meetings between the different, individual dancers. Each individual touches and affects the group, as the group in turn touches each individual.

As a result of the study, the researcher enters a pedagogical, aesthetic and societal discussion about dance, dialoguing with among others the dance pedagogy researchers Green (1999; 2002-03; 2007), Hämäläinen (1999; 2006), Anttila (2003; 2007), Rouhiainen (2008), Marques (1998), Shapiro (1998) and Shapiro & Shapiro (2002). In this, she emphasizes the importance of managing to *see beyond* what one already knows as a dance teacher and understand body, identity and dance from new perspectives. She also underlines the importance of the capacity to use difference as a generative force in the dance class. She suggests that difference should not be seen as additional, but valuable, in dance. Difference should not be put on top of an already existing activity, but instead be defined as the most generative force, allowing this force to really influence the *what* and *how* in dance.

Throughout the interpretation of the empirical material the author collects concepts that seem to be of importance for dance improvisation. She suggests that these concepts function like knowledge hooks that dance improvisation classes can be spun around. These knowledge hooks tell about *how* and *what* in dance improvisation class and can be used as methodological devices for the dance teacher.

The author defines the teacher as the major resource in dance class and emphasizes how important the teacher's moves and awareness are for the dancers' experiences and learning. She discusses the dramaturgy of teaching dance improvisation, that is, the importance of how the classes are built up, which pedagogical principles are built into the teaching and how the

teacher's awareness and worldview appears in every move the teacher makes. She suggests that a dance teacher's awareness about how dance operates within, and also creates, different spaces in dance is crucial in order to negotiate about space for differently bodied dancers.

Feeding in the voices of the different dancers, the researcher defines a set of aesthetic-pedagogical principles at work in the Dance Laboratory. These principles reveal a project that is taught within a poetic, dialogical and transformative dance pedagogy. In this, the dance teacher has the possibility of acting like an agent of change. The author suggests that it is in the hands of the dance teachers and choreographers to treat dance in a way that opens up for and values difference in the dance field. The dance field is in need of dance teachers and choreographers who have a generous aesthetic and pedagogical base. This will make dance more meaningful for a wide range of different people, and, conversely, it will make the field of dance more relevant to the diverse world of today.

A generous space for dance promotes a trust in the explosive power that lies in the meetings between different people in dance improvisation. This power is explosive precisely because dance operates in and creates many different perspectives on space. Together, these different perspectives on space in dance hold the possibility of creating a generous space for learning in and about dance. Within this space, dancers and dance teachers experience, learn and change. In other words, they are *constantly on the move*.

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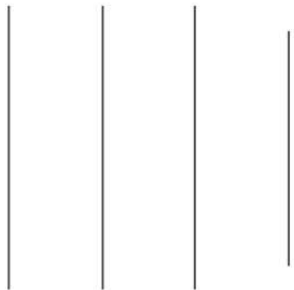
# Appendix







# danselaboratoriet



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## danselaboratoriet

- en plass for improvisasjon, eksperiment og nye oppdagelser i dans.

Danselaboratoriet er for mennesker som er nysgjerrige på dans. Det er en møteplass for forskjellige mennesker med ulik bakgrunn i dans: profesjonelle, hobbydansere og nybegynnere; funksjonshemmede og ikke-funksjonshemmede.

I Danselaboratoriet utforskes de muligheter som gruppens deltakere individuelt og kollektivt fører med seg i gruppen. Velkommen med!

Danselaboratoriet ledes av Inclusive Dance Company i samarbeid med Trondheim kommune.

Vel møtt hver onsdag kl. 18.15-19.45m, på 3T Midtbyen, sal 2., 2. etg  
Første gang onsdag 26. januar, siste gang onsdag 11. mai

Pris: 500 kroner for hele våren!

Info og påmelding: Tone Pernille Østern fra Inclusive Dance Company,  
e-post: [inclusive@dance-company.no](mailto:inclusive@dance-company.no), tlf. 97732771

Les mer på [www.dance-company.no](http://www.dance-company.no)





TRONDHEIM KOMMUNE

Den kulturelle spaserstokken 2007  
Tilrettelagt fritid



# Danseforestillingen

## *kodenavn DANS:*

*tan solita, chiffer, coop,  
ringvirkninger, labyrint*

*med de fire dansegruppene*



Danselaboratoriet  
Dansteateret55+  
dansekompani Luup Dance

Dans kan oppleves og forstås på ulike måter. Dans er som en slags kode. Med danseforestillingen kodenavn DANS ønsker vi velkommen til et møte med dans som uttrykker både lyse, mørke, alvorlige og morsomme sider ved livet. Danserne i forestillingen er fra 17 til 76 år gamle.

Kunstnerisk leder og produsent: Tone Pernille Østern.  
Koreografier av Tone Pernille Østern, Luis Della Mea, Susanne Rasmussen og Luup Dance.  
Musikkkomposisjon av bl a Luis Della Mea, Amon Tobin og Grunde Svartvatn.

Lørdag 28. april kl. 14.00  
Søndag 29. april kl. 18.00

Lademoen kirke  
Strinda kirke  
(tidl. Moholt kirke)

Billetsalg ved døra kr. 75,- inkl. kaffe

# Kropp a'long

- et kroppsshow med ulike dansere

Sanne fortellinger og rene røverhistorier om kropp og liv danses, fortelles og improviseres.

**Vert:**

Elsa, 64 år, har kjent livet på kroppen med en fortid som bodyguard.

**Dansere:**

fra Danselaboratoriet, PAS dansekompani og Danseteateret55+.

Billetter: 100,-  
bestilles på  
info@dansit.no,  
tlf. 72545700

DansiT, Svartlamon:  
Fredag 24. april kl. 19  
Lørdag 25. april kl. 13

Havstein helse- og  
velferdssenter:  
Tirsdag 28. april kl. 11

Valentinlyst helse- og  
velferdssenter:  
Tirsdag 28. april kl. 17

Kultursenteret for eldre i Strinda:  
Onsdag 29. april kl. 12.30



TRONDHEIM  
KOMMUNE

KULTURENHETEN



Kunstnerisk leder:

Tone Pernille Østern

Komponist: Luis Della Mea

DansiT

Dansekunst | Trondheim

Vi presenterer ...



StopGAP, med kunstnerisk leder Vicki Balaam, er et ungt og innovativt engelsk kompani som raskt har skapt seg en plass på den engelske dansescenen. StopGAP vibrerer av kraft, kvalitet og uttrykk. Kompaniet består av fire ulike dansere som jobber sammen på en spennende måte. I Trondheim viser StopGAP de tre koreografiene "Corpus" (kor. Filip van Huffel), "Dancer's syndrome" (kor. Adam Benjamin) og "Thank you for the eggs!" (kor. Bettina Strickler)

## BewegGrund

BewegGrund, med kunstnerisk leder Susanne Schneider, har eksistert siden 1997 og er et av svært få integrerte kompanier som fungerer på fast basis i Sveits. Gruppen kommer til Trondheim med fire dansere i koreografien "S.O.I.E." av Marc Berthon. Ideen bak "S.O.I.E." er fire ulike personligheter, fire ulike bevegelsespråk - og en reise gjennom fire forskjellige musikalske verdener (komposisjon av Simon Hostettler). Marc Berthon er også kunstnerisk leder for *danse-habile-festivalen* i Genève.

## Vertigo Dance Company

Film: "Power of Balance"

Vertigo Dance Company, under kunstnerisk ledelse av Noa Wertheim og Adi Sha'al, har base i Jerusalem. Filmen "The Power of Balance" følger kompaniet i en prosess med den britiske koreografen Adam Benjamin, tidligere kunstnerisk leder for CandoCo Company, fram mot en ferdig forestilling. I filmen snus det opp ned på hvem som er funksjonshemmet og ikke. Danserne løftes ut, inn, fra og med rullestoler, rygger, krykker, kropp... Filmen er laget av Amit Mann og Tom Barka (2002)

## INCLUSIVE

www.dancecompany.no

Film: "Danselaboratoriet"

Inclusive Dance Company, med kunstnerisk leder Tone Pernille Østern, har fast base i Trondheim og står som arrangør bak Trondheim Community Dance Festival. Filmen "Danselaboratoriet" er en dokumentasjon av kompaniet i arbeid med improvisasjon og danseeksperiment. Våren 2004 deltok to profesjonelle dansere, tre dansestudenter og tre hobbydansere, to av dem funksjonshemmede, i "Danselaboratoriet". Filmen er laget av Pekka Stokke (2004).

## FESTIVALPROGRAM

Forsnitt av festivalens onsdag 27.10.2004

20.00 "S.O.I.E." (forestilling) - BewegGrund og  
"Danselaboratoriet" (film) - Inclusive dc

Torsdag 28.10.2004

12.30 Åpning av Festivalen v/ Inclusive dc og Trondheims ordfører Rita Ottervik på Café Fönster, Teaterhuset Avant Garden

13.00 "S.O.I.E." (forestilling) - BewegGrund  
"Danselaboratoriet" (film) - Inclusive dc  
"Power of Balance" (film) - Vertigo dc  
- Følges av diskusjonsforum som innledes av Susanne Schneider

17.00 Workshop med Inclusive dc (2 timer)

20.00 "S.O.I.E." (forestilling) - BewegGrund, og  
"Danselaboratoriet" (film) - Inclusive dc

Freitag 29.10.2004

11.00 Workshop med BewegGrund (2 timer)

14.30 Diskusjonsforum som innledes av Mark Berthon

20.00 "Corpus" - "Dancer's syndrom" -

"Thank you for the eggs!" (forestilling) - StopGAP

c. 22 Festivalfest på Teaterhuset Avant Garden!

Tale v/ teaterets kunstneriske leder Elisabeth Hansen og v/ forbundsleder i NoDa (fagforbundet for norske dansekunstnere) Tone Øvrebo Johannessen  
Kunstnerisk innslag v/ Frode Eggen  
DJ Luis Della Mea

Lørdag 30.10.2004

12.00 Workshop med StopGap (2 timer)

15.30 Diskusjonsforum som innledes av Vicki Balaam

20.00 "Corpus" - "Dancer's syndrom" -

"Thank you for the eggs!" (forestilling) - StopGAP

Søndag 31.10.2004

11.00 Brunch og avrundning av festivalen på Café Fönster

Forestillingene vises på Teaterhuset Avant Garden, workshopene holdes på 3T Midtbyen

Foto: AnneStuedler

Jeg melder meg på Trondheim Community Dance Festival!

Navn: \_\_\_\_\_  
Adresse: \_\_\_\_\_  
Postnr og -sted: \_\_\_\_\_  
e-post: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telefon: \_\_\_\_\_

Gjennom å betale festivalavgiften får du et festivalpass. Festivalpasset inkluderer tilgang til forestilling med BewegGrund, film med Inclusive Dance Company og film med Vertigo Dance Company torsdag 28.10. kl.13, forestilling med StopGAP fredag 29.10 kl. 20, tre workshops, tre diskusjonsforum med innledende presentasjoner og tilgang til festivalfesten 29.10. Festivalpasset er eksklusivt mat og losji. (Det fins kun 50 festivalpass, så vær ute i god tid!)

Pris (kryss av): ordinær 350,- kr  student 250,- kr  medlem i DansIT 200,- kr

**INCLUSIVE**  
www.dance-company.no

TEATERHUSET  
**AVANT GARDEN**  
www.avantgarden.no

i samarbeid med  
Kulturenheten, Trondheim kommune og Institutt for Musikk, Program for Dansevitenskap, NTNU  
presenterer:

# MultiPlié

## Trondheim Dance & Diversity Festival

31.08 - 01.09 2006



MultiPlié dansefestival ønsker å være en møteplass, der ulike mennesker kan betrakte og debattere scenisk dans. År 2006 har festivalen spesiell fokus på dans for eldre, samt på dans for kamera. Velkommen til å se forestillinger, delta i workshop, høre forelesning og se dans på film!

MultiPlié er en videreføring av Trondheim Community Dance Festival som ble gjennomført år 2004 på Teaterhuset Avant Garden.

Vi har gitt festivalen et nytt navn: **MultiPlié.**

*Plié* som er fransk betyr "å bøye" og dette er en av dansekunstens mest kjente termer.

Med navnet MultiPlié vil vi peke på Trondheim Dance & Diversity Festival som en arena for å "bøye" dansekunsten inn i nye og ulike former.

**Billetter: Teaterhuset Avant Garden tlf. 73530898**

billetter@avantgarden.no

Festivalen er støttet av: Norsk Kulturråd, Trondheim kommune og DansiT

DansIT presenterer

# MultiPlié dansefestival

Trondheim 25.-30. april 2008



Festivalprogram: [www.dansit.no](http://www.dansit.no)

Billetter: [ida\\_rak@hotmail.com](mailto:ida_rak@hotmail.com)

*Festivalen arrangeres i samarbeid med:*

**Kulturenheten, Trondheim kommune** og

**TEATERHUSE  
AVANT GARDEN**





