

## **Open discussion with Eva Karzcag, Jane Carr and Kate Brown as part of Winlab 2006 Festival**

### **Part 1 – Eva Karzcag - Improvisational beginnings and Somatic Practice**

Jane and Eva and I have talked about some questions that we thought might provoke interesting discussion.

The reason for this event is that Gill and Fiona thought it would be nice to reflect and have the chance to share thoughts about improvisation.

Question:

Asking Eva – why do you feel drawn to improvisation – how did you come to improvisation?

Eva - Well, the first improvised performance I saw – I was very lucky to see Steve Paxton - pretty much blew my mind, because it was so immediate, there was such a present-ness in it.

You know how it is when you see something you really love and you think that's what I want to do. And that's really when my interest started.

I come from a very straight background. Jane and I were talking yesterday about having to improvise in RAD ballet exams. I remember my teacher saying 'well, if you can't think of anything else to do then waltz or run.'

And what I saw Paxton do was completely different, it was so human, he was so there. One could feel a present-ness that I hadn't quite felt in set work before.

And then not long after that I saw my first bit of Contact Improv, which again was extraordinary because of its human-ness, and because of its immediacy, and its organic-ness. But I think its human-ness was what really struck me most, how these people were in such close physical contact with each other, being themselves. And that's how my interest began.

And then it continued, as I got more and more involved with release-work, because there's a lot of improvisation inherent in every release class, as you begin to explore images, and start to play with them.... I can remember that horrible moment when you don't know what to do, because everything you want to do is something that someone else has put into your body, rather than something that's really coming out of you.

It took time, patience and discipline for me to undo those patterns, just being with my body, myself, ...before other things started happening.

Questions:

- Just to elaborate about that kind of present-ness that you mentioned.

Eva - Well it's not that you're not present with set work, because you are, you need to be. When I really get involved watching choreographed work that's set ..... it's as if people are doing it at that moment There is present-ness. But with improvisation there's something else going on.

In the workshop we've been talking quite a bit about play, and somehow that intensity of children playing, getting completely drawn in to what it is that they're doing, the world they are creating. Something ordinary, but also extra-ordinary in its ordinary-ness is happening.

Kate – I was wondering also about being available. So that you don't know, you need to be available for something that you're not expecting. It feels like a different mind set?

Eva - Yes it's a different mind set, and it's also a different body set because if your muscles are too bound and your body 'knows' and is fixed in too many patterns then it's very difficult to step out of those patterns. Not that we don't all have patterns, we all play out of our own patterns all the time, but yeah, one needs to cultivate availability. I guess perhaps one other thing that fed into my constantly growing interest in improvisation was doing the Alexander Technique. Becoming more and more familiar with that state where I felt so poised and so balanced that I could move in any direction began to really excite me. That so many possibilities existed within that moment.

Kate – How does the bodywork, Alexander or Experiential Anatomy, how you find that relates to making performance? What the relationship is or the use of it in performance. Its value, as well as teaching, carrying on with those practices ....but also for making work.

Eva – For me, the value of it is to get to know my instrument, and the way I use it when I make work is to forget it. Which is something I've been talking about in the workshop, that it's at the moment of forgetting it, when it all falls together and makes sense in your body. That's what we're looking for. So its not that I make work *out* of the bodywork, but I make work out of it because the information it gives me is there in my body and it's my body that goes into my creative work or whatever I'm performing. But in terms of thinking about the length of my spine, or what my organs are doing, I don't when I'm making work or performing, its not what my work comes out of. For me, the body work is a set up, well I think any technique is there to allow you to do what you want to do.

- It's funny what you said earlier about your search finding movement in every cell. When you said that I thought that best describes what I saw in performance on Saturday – in terms of that link between body practice and performance. I think that's very clear.

Eva – yes, I use bodywork as my training because I want to be the most articulate I can be. So ..... it's not an overt aim, it's a covert aim. I want to be able to, hopefully, put form to the thoughts or feelings that drive me to make my work, or to step out into the space to improvise with someone or alone.

Kate – Does anyone else have thoughts on that?

- It's interesting, you refer to it as a technique, like any technique preparing you for performance.

Eva – Because I came to this work so early on, 30-something years ago now, which is incredible. At that time Release and improvisational forms were not considered 'techniques'. We fought for acknowledgement because these forms *are* techniques. Perhaps what made recognition harder was that we were teaching different varieties of it, and teaching it in different ways. It's not like ballet which has a particular defined and fairly limited vocabulary...

Kate – It's taught in lots of different ways though

Eva - ... Yes, ballet is taught in many different ways, but is defined within tighter boundaries. I feel that there's more variation possible in bodywork and improvisation. In fact, my first long exposure to Release work was through Mary O'Donnell (Fulkerson) when Strider, the group I was dancing with at the time, spent a summer in Dartington with Mary's group, Tropical Fruit Company. There were, I think, 6 Tropical Fruit Company members and every day one of them gave class to us, the members of Strider, and the other members of Tropical Fruit Company. So my first introduction to Release work was through the sensibility of many different people, and they each presented it differently. Some people really absorbed Mary's way of teaching and taught classes similar to the way Mary would teach. Someone else was influenced by his T'ai Chi practice so he brought T'ai Chi principles into his classes. Someone else had worked with Joan Skinner so she brought a Skinner viewpoint into her classes. One of the beautiful things to me, teaching at EDDC, was that many teachers came and taught their own very particular strand of whatever their creative interest was at that time. The students took in lots

of different kinds of work, and I assume that each student has made their own mix of it all and when they teach, they won't teach what I taught them, they won't teach what Gill taught them, they will teach the things they have absorbed and integrated, and make sense to them. Which I think, yes you're right, ballet is taught in many different ways, Cunningham is taught differently by each different Cunningham teacher, but they're teaching ballet, or Cunningham technique. Where I think in this kind of work, there are so many influences that are still forming it, it's developing and changing, responsive and alive, which is where I wanted to get to – that in the naming/saying that it's a technique, you're giving it stature, but you're also perhaps rigidifying it. So my question is, how can you continue to have a technique and keep it open to change and to all the different influences that are hopefully transforming it?

Kate – And that is a big difference – just thinking about Joan Skinner, who actually teaches people to teach her technique. That's quite a big philosophical difference, not conceptual difference.

- Just today you've been making lots of references to different practices, you (Eva) mentioned BMC, which in itself is a mix of many different influences. You mentioned Shiatsu, Chinese medicine, so reflecting through these different ways of understanding the body or understanding movement and anatomy, energy.
- Alexander?
- Contact...

Eva – Certainly not all of us teach that way, but many of us have come in contact with, and have researched, lots of different methods and systems, so we're moulding our teaching out of the influences that have formed us.

- So when you say you've fought for some recognition of the body of work, was it calling a technique a part of that?

Eva – In a way, no, but in a way, yes because it legitimises it...

- Yes, within a situation where technique is what is recognised...