

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

Part 3 – Improvisation within other forms and final questions to Eva

J – Partly why I became part of this conversation is that way back when this building (SDS) was happening and I was down the road in my sort of cubby-hole, I was very aware of the relationship between this building and what the local community would make of it. And Gill and I had been talking about maybe one of the links, in dance, in being the idea of improvisation, as it's something that's very integral to this building. And it's integral to a lot of the dance practices in the communities around here. I was interested, really, because I also talk to other people about their process in different kinds of dance, and I don't have an answer to this question, it's a question that I'm still going round asking. It is -Is what we value in improvisation in this independent dance sector, similar to improvisation practice within say, free-styling, or Flamenco...Do you recognise similarities or is it just something very different? And this is really my question.

- Improvisation if it's similar to those dance styles? Or...

J – Yes because within other dance styles, there are huge ongoing traditions of improvisation. It's often linked to music and sound.

- like Salsa
- or Tango

J – Yes, but the sense of immediacy, the sense of responding to other performers, to other people in the space, the audience, that sense of immediacy. And maybe that's a dance that's embedded in the social, and is really integral to them. That was just my question, do we feel there are cross-over resonances?

- It's a really interesting question, it's difficult because in a way those forms, from the outside, I don't know much about any of them, but from the outside they've all got their set forms and shapes and patterns which people play in and out of. And that's an interesting thought because maybe, we do too.
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- (general laughter) Yes because we don't wear shoes, we wear certain clothing...

J – I must admit I've talked to people about their view of this sort of work and I think it is seen as to have a certain style and a particular-aestheticism.

Anyway I was just curious to get a reaction to that as when I've talked to people what fascinates me is that, from a completely different context, there are those same moments when it works. It seemed to me to be the same kind of thing they're talking about. One of them said 'that's where the juice is'. Whether I suppose in a sense maybe people think there is some potentiality for...

- We were talking earlier about tango, so I felt I had this image of when we were working earlier, saying how the male leads, doesn't he, you have to obey the man...

E – Except sometimes people say it's really the female.

- I don't know the second half of the sentence, but just, that's interesting isn't it, that's the traditional principle. There must still be that sense of play, sense of connection

and presence, fun and flirting, all those things. But is that a principle that prevails it, that there is all that, but the woman must obey the man.

J – I guess it relates to culture, and I guess that probably, are there certain norms within an improvisation, in some independent sectors that actually...

- That the man must obey the woman?

J – No...

- Men that perceive a very ??? energy. The question is do I obey this energy, or I would rather say, respond, maybe with the more feminine or female energy because I am a woman? Maybe it's more a way of interacting, which just comes from the gender itself, and which makes sense or is as it is, but I wouldn't say obey, even though I might respond in a feminine way, but that is because I am a woman.

E – But I'm wondering whether your question, Jane, isn't about...it doesn't matter whether it's dance or it's music. I was very intrigued when I found out that most music wasn't notated, and that a lot of the great composers, like Bach and Beethoven, improvised. Only some of this was written down, which is what remains for us. But I wonder whether your question is not about the ecstatic moments of improvisation which, how would you describe it? This is when it's happening, when you're at one with You can certainly get that feeling doing things that you know already – in fact, a lot of the times that feeling comes *through* doing things you know already, when you start riding the flow. For me, improvisation definitely has the aim of looking for that moment, the juiciness. And when it works, that's when I think 'Wow, I really want to do this', 'I KNOW I want to do this'. And watching – it's very compelling to watch that, whether it's folk dancing, or tango, or...I was also thinking about martial art, that you repeat forms, so that you can then improvise with them in real life situations. When someone's attacking you and you need to respond, you really have to be on the ball.

- The form is available to you.

E – Yes and that's technique, it allows you to have choices so you can respond.

- Capoeira is great for that isn't it.
- Yes.

J – My mind goes back to the idea of humanness, because theoretically there are always these issues of how much things are culturally bound and how much you can appreciate things cross-culturally. But I had this lovely experience of watching these kids watching something completely not being their culture and being entranced, and it was an improvisation moment. So I'm wondering on some level, are there things that we can recognise across some different cultural resonances. That we recognise at some level - Is there something similar going on?

- I would guess that those other forms you're talking about are less strange to their culture than ours is to theirs?

J – Well this was street dance kids watching Flamenco, and it was quite nice, there were a couple of them who were just really obviously, I felt, 'dancers', (whatever that means), but they engaged in a certain way. And they were all about 13 years old, trendy, and there was this very much older Spanish woman doing a Flamenco improvisation, and they were just like 'this'. And I know you can see Flamenco on tv, but I don't think it was something particularly they'd seen a lot of, and I guess, well we all live in Europe, but...

- She was improvising on her own, did you say?

J – No it was actually in a class, and she wasn't really supposed to, but she got up, and then she got a bit carried away, and it was wonderful, so no one was going to stop her. It was just one of those really nice moments. But I was just really intrigued watching them, because a lot

of people, when it's not their dance form they kind of switch off. But I'm always interested in people who get interested in something different.

- But there's also differences between improvised dancers, and dancers that are essentially social, or essentially about fun and participation, and then the art form – doesn't mean it has to be improvised, but the main poem, the thing that is the stage form.

J – Yes I guess the interesting about Contact is that it had blurred some of those boundaries, and certainly with Flamenco and that style of street dance, they were working towards a performance, even if it [the dance form] originated in something social.

E – There's a very lovely film, very short, Public Private, three different views. One is people walking on the street, and the camera is just watching this 'improvisation', then one dancer (Judith Dunn) working alone in a studio, and the third is, I think Paxton and Deborah Hay, doing social dancing. It's very beautiful to see these three different solo, duet, group...you know, we improvise all the time – we walk down the street, and we make the choice to shift this way when someone's coming, or....

K – I'm just aware of the time, so first of all is there anything that we just talked about that we haven't kind of...what do you feel?

The only thing that we haven't talked about that I can think of is the sort of lineage of this body of work, which you (Eva) have a bit. It would be nice to have some time for anyone who's actually come with questions that we haven't thought of. That we haven't talked about.

- I've got a question...

K – Would you feel it would be important to talk a bit more about where the body of work has come from?

E – Well I don't know, if people are interested? I could maybe speak a little bit about what I know about it – but you ask your question first.

- I've done all of these three weeks of Winlab, and have encountered three people teaching a movement practice – improvisation as their focus (?) I guess Rosie less, but still it's a big part of her work, and I'm just really interested – you did answer it actually – why improvised rather than set, but this whole thing about choosing to improvise, but still making a piece of work. From what you did on Saturday, that was a content based piece of work, presumably it was improvised, was it?

E – It was.

- But that was a piece of work that was about something specific, which presumably you perform several times...

E – It was the first time we performed it but we want to continue working on it, so yes.

- So I was just interested in that...

E – Well there are different kinds of improvisation. Why I improvise? – because I really don't like setting material...No it's not really why I improvise, although it is true that I'm not drawn to setting material like some people are. One way I've used set material within improvisation is improvising with it. I was telling Jane that when I was working with Strider, one of the things that we used to do was to set up 'events'. 'Events' were a Cunningham 'invention' but we did it somewhat differently. Cunningham would figure out exactly what he wanted his dancers to do, often using chance procedures, but we would choose, one, or two or perhaps even three pieces from our repertory, (for instance, *Rainbow Bandit*, *Common Ground and Headlong*), and then we improvised using any material out of those pieces. So we were building the events from set material during performance.

Trisha also used that kind of improvisation. She has a piece called 'Locus'. One section is improvised during performance, using the set material of the piece. Also we built pieces through improvisation. Trisha would teach us material, then we'd improvise with this material within a structure that she would give – and, increment by increment, we would build up the piece. Some of my work has some of those elements in it as well.

But then, going back to Steve Paxton, one of the first pieces I saw him do, he came into the space and began to dance, and the piece consisted of warming into dancing. The performance was him improvising into improvising. It was incredible.

So I think there are many different kinds of improvisation. Sometimes, say, if I know a musician very well, then I go into the space, and we don't know anything other than the fact that here's the beginning...and we're going to end it at some point. Come to think of it, that's also happened with people I don't know. But I find it AS exhilarating to work out a particular pathway that I will follow every time, and within that pathway, there's a lot of unknown. So yes I think there are many forms of improvisation, that can be used both to explore and to inform, and they're all interesting. Did I answer your question? I don't even know what your question was!

K – I was just thinking that.

- No I don't know what my question was either.
- The question that I wanted to ask Simone last week, but didn't get the chance, was, and also I could ask you – Do you always and only perform improvised work now, by choice? Or would you create something that you would just believe stands, and re-do it?

E – I saw Simone re-doing an improvised piece.

- Yes, the one...yes she did on Saturday night.

E – She re-did a piece that she made in '68. The answer is yes.

- But that's not necessarily doing set material. That's re-doing an improvisation and that's re-doing a piece.
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E – Yes it's a piece, a choreography. You know quite a lot about what you're going to be doing. But you also don't know a lot about what you're going to be doing.

K – But there's a degree of that, isn't there.

E – Oh absolutely.

K – From knowing nothing to knowing really quite a lot, like what sorts of moves.

E – Yes.

K – Should we hear a little bit about the lineage, and where's it come from? From your perspective.

E – Well I think Anna Halprin had a lot to do with what we're doing now. Simone, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown – were some of the people who worked with Anna Halprin and then went to New York and took part in the experiments that were going on in the late 60s and the 70s. That particular time period around the Vietnam War and what was happening in America politically and socially had a lot to do with how this work evolved. I think the growing interest in Eastern ways of looking at the world, which also included things like Aikido – which was a big source of inspiration for Steve when he developed contact. Drugs. They were very prevalent at that time. And...Judson and the experiments that were happening then, like the introduction of pedestrian movement into dance vocabulary, Yvonne Rainer's 'No' manifesto,

the happenings and involvement of a lot of these dance people with the visual art world and music world and experimental theatre. Release work – definitely filtered in there through different people. Danny Lepkoff for instance was a major person bringing that in. Then things like Authentic Movement, that I think a lot of us now use as part of our training. And then the way choreographers began to use improvisation. Curiously, Deborah Hay once came to EDDC as one of the teachers during an end of year workshop that focused on improvisation, and said: 'I don't improvise'.

- That first week of Winlab when Rosie did 'The Suchness of Heni and Eddie' – it looked very improvised, but you could see the decisions trying to be transparent, and that was all that playfulness and real. But afterwards talking to Heni, she was like: 'It wasn't improvised...' I mean of course it was, but they knew their pathway really clearly, and she said that she would expect the same level of communication and engagement from herself as when she did Fin Walker's piece earlier on in the year, which was every second...it didn't feel any different to her, really. Because I was saying – how do you put yourself out there? We're all sitting there so expectantly and you're walking around – what's going to happen, anything. And she said 'Well we know where we start, and we know where we finish, and we know each other, and we know ourselves.'
- What's EDDC?

E – It's the European Dance Development Center, the school that used to be in Arnhem in the Netherlands. I used to teach there. Gill used to come as a guest.

- And it's closed now, you said used to.

E - Yes it became absorbed into another school.

- In terms of an education model, were you involved in any setting up of...you know you talked about the workshop model...in terms of sharing and delivering this work, was that something you talked about a lot on how to do that and to honour the work?

E – I came into ideas that were already there when I started teaching at EDDC, but while I taught there we did a lot of talking about the program and many things changed as we went along. That particular school in Arnhem was an off-shoot of SNDO, the School for New Dance Development in Amsterdam. Some of the ideas germinated there. Some ideas were brought from places like Bennington College, where Judith Dunn and Steve Paxton taught. Many artists who are involved in either performing improvisation or who work with improvisation taught at EDDC.

K – Do people have other specific questions that they would like to be part of this kind of discussion? Or do we feel that that's long enough, kind of altogether? How does everyone feel?

- One of the questions that came up for me today in the workshop but didn't have the space to ask, was – I think you were referencing to this...but do you do one-on-one work? Or have you done that?

E – I sometimes do one-on-one work, you mean outside of teaching a group?

- Yes, just something about the practice of working with a lot of different people, different bodies.

E – Yes, I do one-on-one work because I'm also an Alexander teacher.

- Just curious about the influence of that and your practice.

E – Yes it definitely has a big influence although there are periods of time when I go through NOT doing one-on-one work. I get lots of ideas for my group classes from working with

individual people and seeing what comes out of each body, what is the issue that they're dealing with, that we're looking at, trying to solve, what are the images that work here, and as they surface I think to myself, maybe many of us could benefit from looking at this particular issue, so I bring it into a group class. I find it very inspiring to teach one-on-one, but I don't like doing it exclusively, because I enjoy being in the studio so much, moving with other movers. I also sometimes work individually with people in a studio, rather than in a room, so that I can help them take the information they just discovered through the body work immediately into moving. In group classes I have people touching each other from the beginning because I think there is so much to be learnt, both from touching and from being touched. Plus I think touch is such a wonderful thing. When I used to teach students for 4 years at EDDC, by the time they left they knew a lot about bodywork. They weren't Alexander Technique teachers, but they knew a lot about the body, they knew about touching, and how to create change, and how to receive that kind of information and pass it on.

K – Shall we finish there?

- Thank you all very much.