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Attitudes and principles of making

Keywords

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Abstract

This is a list of principles – or perhaps attitudes – of choreographic practice and making. The list is not exhaustive, and indeed comprises many ideas that are so general that they would hold for any kind of making. In such a way they demand that we consider to what extent choreographic making is special at all. Perhaps the list might – as we continue to consider the nature of choreographic practices – help to provoke our questions, our processes, our methods and our choreographies.

In the last three years I've been working as a dramaturg with choreographer-performers Igor Urzelai and Moreno Solinas (<http://www.igorandmoreno.com>). During this time I've become curious about what might be thought of as principles – or perhaps *attitudes* – of choreographic practice and making. My curiosity has grown as a consequence of observing Igor and Moreno work, and finding ways to understand and express the kinds of conditions that underpin their working processes.

The following is a list of these principles or attitudes. There were two conditions for the list: 1) the ideas needed to fit any kind of choreographic making (including, say, conceptual performance or expanded choreographies); and 2) any choreographic methods must be able to be derived or adapted from these principles.



Figure 1: 'A Room For All Our Tomorrows' by Igor and Moreno. Photo credit: Alicia Clarke.

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In no particular order

Emergent and adaptive

Choreographies come into being through processes of – and sensitivity to – change. A choreographic process cannot be linear. They require flexibility and adaptation.

Speculative

Bojana Cvejić (2010) writes that we practise ‘standing-under’ (support) before we ‘understand’. To speculate is to think again, and to invite the power and beauty of uncertainty. It is related to iterative processes.

Iterative

In which cycles of practice, watching, sharing, testing, change, re-practising are ongoing.

Relational

Choreographic practice is always in relation to others (within the work, outside the work).

Dis/organized

We are testing the limits, edges and degrees of organization and disorganization.

Situational

Choreographic activity and problems ‘cannot be separated from the situation in which they occur’ (Cvejić 2010). Context is, as they say, everything. There are no neutral situations or spaces.

Restless

Restlessness is a persistent desire for change and action; it is not being able to rest; it is cajoling and tinkering, and the willingness to keep pursuing what might be.

Attention

I like how we say in English that we are *paying* attention. It *costs us* to notice, to practise observation and awareness. The various sensory frames of choreographic practice determine what we might notice and what the materials of our observation might become.

Imagination and play

Principles of making are built on imagination and play. Together they invite surprise, unlimited – or unthought of – relationships or connections, and build an atmosphere of trust, openness and even love. I suspect that the other items on this list are made possible by imagination and play.

Hacking and open-source

What are the tools for choreographic hacking? What is being pulled apart, and recombined? How is work being obstructed, reverse-engineered, restrained, interrupted and sold for new parts?

Cvejić states that choreographers are increasingly acknowledging ‘the open-source model for how ideas and performance materials are created and circulated’ (2010). We can make no claims to originality.

Composition

I’m thinking here of the kinds of things that have infested undergraduate (and high school) choreography courses since such things existed: repetition, canon, dynamics, levels, time, space, you know the rest. They are the tick-boxes of A-level dance. This is not to say that these compositional tools aren’t important, but I wonder whether they are a tail wagging a much more complex dog. What would the teaching and learning of choreography be like if we didn’t consider these tools to be the building blocks or basics?

Friction

With closeness and relational work comes the potential for friction. What might become possible with resistance, challenge and difference? If we don’t compromise, then we generate heat. Friction affords change or deviation.

Stewardship

A steward is someone who accepts responsibility for taking care of something that is deemed worthy of care. Stewardship implies a lightness of touch and time in which the steward might manage

resources, frames or contexts, materials and even culture. A steward is accountable and responsible. The steward's brief or enduring encounters with a choreographic work are in striking contrast with the choreographer-as-genius who seeks to own something that cannot be owned.

Reference

Cvejić, Bojana (2010), 'The ignorant dramaturg', *Sarma.Be*, July, <http://sarma.be/docs/2864>. Accessed 20 April 2012.

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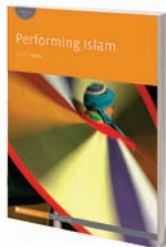
Simon Ellis is a choreographer, dancer, film-maker, dramaturge and teacher. He is from New Zealand but now lives in London, and is a senior research fellow at the Centre for Dance Research at Coventry University. He is particularly interested in the limits and possibilities of collaboration in choreographic processes.

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