

Speaker Speaker ISSUE no. 4 Failure

Self Interview

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Failure and working in the unknown

- A self interview exploring failure in choreographic creation processes.

Q. What are you currently working on?

I am currently in the second year of my masters degree in choreography at Oslo National Academy of Arts . I'm curious about the value and relationship between words and movement as they are intertwined. Our oral and written language are considered the primary tools for expression and communication in everyday life. My research is questioning whether spoken words and movement can be read as "equal partners". I am looking at how words can act as an extension of the movement, and vice versa. Questioning what methods must be established in order to balance and challenge the hierarchy between the two mediums. My interest in playing with ambiguous text and choreography is to open and expand the experience of navigating through layers of meaning.

Q. What is a keyword for your artistic research process?

A lot of my process comes from specific tasks and structures that I hand over to the performers to research together with me. I don't necessarily have preconceived ideas for the outcome. However, I am particularly interested in what arises in the process of working. At the early stages of a creative process it's about creating a multitude of possibilities in the movement material including the references and associations being worked with. Working with a heightened state of listening is an aspect that continually comes up in the process. In this state of listening there is a beautiful alertness that almost transcends from the performers bodies as they are working and exploring tasks that I give them.

Q. Can you describe how you are creating conditions for working in this format?

A lot of my choreographic research is currently looking at the relationship between spoken words, text, language and movement— what I call entangled materials. I work with layering several tasks and intentions on top of each other. The text-based material that is being explored is set in structures with room for experimentation. We play with associations of words and how this can be layered, revealing a number of meanings, questions or issues. At the same time the movement intention is different and layered with other references. Within this exploration the performers also have to relate to one two three other performers or spatial tasks. In these meetings, there are different intentions and synergies that arise. So, through all of this, I am bombarding the dancers with information, references and layered tasks that are

accumulated on top of each other. This way of working creates an endless web of possibilities for where the work can go. What is particularly exciting about this choreographic approach is that at a certain point, it's too much for the dancers to work with. In a sense there's a failure of the task given. And at *that* particular point is where something changes and happens in the performers presence. This is where the heightened listening and alertness arises, resonating from the performers that I am working with.

Q. So you are building and creating choreographic tasks for your performers with an intention for them to fail?

Yes and no. It's more about the presence that the *failure* creates in the dancers, an alertness and active listening. At the same time, by working with an accumulation of layers the dancers are continually *trying and working*. They must work and re-work the choreographic material but with new references and information being thrown into the mix. It is a continual process of editing, adding, rearranging and experimenting while developing the choreographic work. The written texts inform the movement material and vice versa. Working in this format requires a state of hyper awareness/presence in the performers when exploring how the text, spoken words and movement material meet. There are set structures and intentions for the dancers to work with, yet there is also a lot of uncertainty. It's an approach that overloads the dancers while they are exploring, causing them to potentially "*fail*" in their attempts. This creates an intense focus, trying to deal with the accumulated layers and tasks. The process requires this failure, creating a complexity to movement and text explorations that I find are vital to the research process.

For someone watching from the outside, they might see something that resembles a collapse or a drop in that moment of failing. What is interesting to notice is how the performers recover and re-tune into the work, finding ways to continue with the explorations. It sounds like I am very brutal to the people that I work with, however I think that it's an approach or method that creates a certain state. It can be seen as a practice of adding new information to keep things fresh in practice-based research, not allowing space for boredom to arise in the work.

Q. There are often negative reflections/ideas linked to failure, yet you seem to use it as a method for creativity. How do you think your performers feel about this approach?

I very often encourage the dancers that I work with to take all my input, reflections, feedback and tasks in, digest it, then forget about it all. The thought is that by forgetting about it all, the important things stick and will resonate, allowing the dancers to work intuitively and without the pressure of *failing*. There is often a lot of fear linked to failure, it's got a bad reputation. However, by actively talking about failure and to a certain degree creating conditions for it to occur, we are decentralising the pressure and consequences. Suddenly, there is a lot of freedom and room for experimentation and play. I want to encourage failure, use it as a tool to overwhelm, overload and create impossible conditions which can let people's guards down. In that moment of meeting

the failure, tuning into the unknown areas out of our control, we are vulnerable, we are present. This is the place that we are alert, to expand our approaches to work in something unexpected and unknown.

I think that the dancers I work with understand why this accumulative process is important to the work, especially when exploring hierarchies and the value of language and movement. If dancers are too much in their head, they are actively thinking, planning and trying to get the task "correct". Then they are already tuned out and not present, hence the idea of overloading the system. I think it's important to be aware about the conditions and expectations we create when working in the studio. There's something about seeing people for who they are, and encouraging levels of vulnerability in a creative process. These are qualities that I look for in my dancers and appreciate.

Q. What do you mean when you say vulnerability?

What I mean in this situation, is that I want my collaborators to be honest and not to control the situation by having a predefined idea of what they will do. The core of the process lies working with elements of the unknown, creating playful scenarios and situations in the live encounters between language and movement. In order to be present in the work, the dancers must be willing to take part in this journey and allow themselves to be surprised in a creative process. To allow this, there needs to be an element of risk, not quite knowing if the outcome will happen or be achieved. Yet, at the same time it requires a heightened state of listening, so that the dancers are aware of what is happening in the space and can react/respond. By pushing their comfort levels they are expanding their capabilities and boundaries creating new paths and connections, establishing a larger playing field for the creative process.

to fall into the

unplanned, the unpredictable, perhaps even the unexpected.

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what is expected of us
what we set ourselves up to achieve.
the fear
the pressure
success

A perfect failure