

Report Seminar, Dutch Society for Dance Research, February 8, 2013 The Dance Maker as Researcher

Presenters: Leni van Goidsenhoven, Jeroen Fabius, and Arno Schuitemaker

Leni van Goidsenhoven

Leni van Goidsenhoven (researcher affiliated with the Catholic University of Leuven) approaches the theme of “The Dance Maker as Researcher” from a theoretic angle, mainly based on the insights of dance critic André Lepecki and sociologist Rudi Laermans.

Her presentation started with an initial reference to the old, feeble relationship between science and art. This is a relationship of attraction and repulsion, and nowadays there is also much attention for the connection between science and art.

By way of a brief historical sketch, Goidsenhoven focused on the ideas of dance as a domain of knowledge and of the choreographer as researcher. In the turbulent 1960s and 70s the dancer’s physical body was transformed from an “empty and silent” body, over which the choreographer had all authority, to a knowing and speaking body.

Pina Bausch’s new method of working (the questioning or interrogatory process of construction) can be seen as a huge pivot point in knowledge generation. Her method made “not-knowing” the starting point for everyone and definitively refashioned the dance field to a domain of knowledge.

1995 brought about another pivot point. From that moment on, stabile figures and roles no longer exist in the contemporary dance field. The dancer also becomes philosopher, the dance critic also performer. Dance claimed knowledge and doctrine as its domain: dance performance is a way to understand the world, to investigate and perform research critically and rarely linearly. Dancers and choreographers start to express themselves discursively and question their medium, which is dance as a physical practice.

A case study which reflects the choreographer as researcher is the relatively recent lecture performance, *Idéographie* (2011), by dancer-choreographer Noé Soulier. From inside the dance, Soulier engages in dialogue with philosophy (or vice versa). *Idéographie* literally is a choreography of ideas and revolves around positions and rhythms of words and sentences. Soulier generates a sense of alienation within the audience. He forces them to transition to a more sensory form of comprehension as it is impossible for them to rationally understand the performance.

What does this case study teach us about the choreographer as researcher and dance as a domain of knowledge? Noé Soulier did not pit the two different discourses (the artistic and the intellectual) against each other, but instead involves and engages them, transforming them from the inside out. However, it would be too simplistic to reduce the dance maker to a creative researcher of culture. The discursive must never completely gain the upper hand.

An important tail-piece is that a shift in the contemporary dance landscape, where it concerns the dancer maker as researcher, can be observed. In the neoliberal system, under the pressure of the grants, subsidies and other aid systems, dance makers have to conceive of a concept and a discourse long before they can head into the studio. At any rate, this case study shows that the dance artist as researcher and the art of dance as a domain of knowledge possess meaningful advantages or strengths. Also, the choreographer’s research has little to do with measurable, objective output, (as with the neoliberal system) and more with the development of the dispositions of an active and creative subject in a concrete, everyday context.

Jeroen Fabius

Jeroen Fabius is with the Master of Choreography programme in Amsterdam. In this presentation he explains the concepts for this Master's programme.

In the degree programme, research into the artistic practice can be understood from several levels:

1. Institutional Cadre (macro-level)
2. Perspective Maker (individual level)
3. Pursuit of conditions and practices in which choreographers can hone their research abilities (micro-level)

1. Institutional Cadre

The discussion concerning the status of artistic research has more or less exploded at the beginning of this century, especially in Western Europe. It is important to understand the exact objective of research within the Master of Choreography degree programme and to distinguish it from other degree programmes. One of the most important motivations of the reinvigorated status of artistic research as a component of higher education is a result of the extensive consequences of the Bologna convention. This treaty is part of the European policy to harmonise education in various countries. Its intent is to clarify the status and level of diplomas and degrees in countries within the Union in a similar way. After the Schengen convention it became possible for citizens of the Union to settle in any country within the Union and to find work there. Because of Bologna the arts have become part of the philosophy in the three degree levels of higher education: Bachelor, Master, and Ph.D.

How should artistic research be considered and does it have a place within academe? From the beginning of the years 2000 Fabius regularly traveled to the UK, where the thinking was ahead of the rest of the world, to attend discussions about artistic research. The tension this discussion brings to bear finds itself at the heart of the philosophy of art: that which does not allow itself to be discursively defined, but, rather, is a subjective experience which can never be generalised.

Concerning the Master degree track in higher vocational education, the Master aims at the so-called 'Dublin descriptors'. These are indicators which have been established cooperatively for the Master's level in Europe. Indicators for the Master degree track specifically include proficiencies for independent knowledge acquisition and knowledge creation, the ability to direct and fashion complex processes, to develop leadership capabilities, and to reflect and process actions verbally as well as in writing. The difference with the Bachelor in Choreography degree track is that the Master focuses on research. Whereas the emphasis in the Bachelor's degree is on the acquisition of professional knowledge and the development of an artistic signature, the Master starts at the level where this has been achieved and looks at how an artistic practice can be further developed. The Master considers the acquisition of research abilities in relationship to a specific artistic practice.

The programme is different from others, such as the Master of Artistic Research at the University of Amsterdam, The Hague or Maastricht. There artistic research is both the subject of and the means for academic study. The objective of the Master of Choreography is to contribute to the artistic development of a choreographer. Therefore, the term "research" must be understood within the context of the course of study; it is artistic research within the practice of a choreographer.

2. Perspective Maker

The goal is to accomplish choreographic development and good art is not necessarily guaranteed. Validation of quality happens in the greater community; the broad field of producers, criticism [sic] and audience.

The degree programme is a so-called 'Return-Master' for makers who have already shown work professionally for a minimal period of three years, through which they have tested the maker's Bachelor level in the world. Fabius contends that in this way an important problem is being circumnavigated. The Master program cannot guarantee 'good art,' because that could be considered

an interpretation of the institutionalisation of arts education: Bachelor, Master, Ph.D., good, better, best artists... It could result in a problematic posture concerning art, one which makes claims to general judgments about art, choreography, dancing. The work of the makers who are being accepted into the program, is validated artistically by the field: it has found producers and audiences and thus can achieve legitimacy. It has also been tested by judgment of the general audience, which exceeds the constituency of a school.

The makers already have built a network of relationships through which they are able to realize their work. The support from funds, workshops and festivals is of importance here. It is a product of the building of an artistic reputation over many years. The programme enables them to organize their research practice in parallel to ongoing productions, so that they don't have to retreat from the professional field. The student engages in dialogue with other students, teachers and mentors, initiated by the need of that student.

3. Conditions and Practices

In answer to the question of how artistic research should be understood, Fabius asserts that, first, there cannot be an exclusive model for artistic research when starting at the fact that art is a specific, singular, and subjective experience. Art is a creative process in which solutions can be found within specific conditions and circumstances. Yet, according to Fabius, there still are observations to be made about insights gained through the guidance process toward the development of research skills.

According to Fabius, artistic research cannot be understood by appropriating it as a disciplinary territory. Within the Master in Choreography programme no particular concept of what constitutes choreography is being defined. However, conditions which can lead to new possibilities and exchange are being provided. The students research their work from within a particular framework. The limitations the Master offers lie in the structure of presentations, practical experiments and the students' residencies. The students 'lead' their own research and are continually being made accountable.

Fabius thinks that the concept verbalized by a number of authors in the online magazine *Inflexions* as 'research-creation' is inspiring. The connection between the terms 'research' and 'creation' wants [sic] to illustrate how research is always a form of producing [sic]. Research includes the shaping of structures, and in that sense it has a creative component. Conversely, the creative process is accompanied by posing questions as well as by exploring the components and processes with which an object can be created before it eventually comes into being.

In this context, McCormack writes about techniques to shape thought. Based upon this premise, thought or thinking is an active and physical activity. McCormack here refers to Dewey, the philosopher who maintained that cognitive experiences start with a non-cognitive experience. Dewey highlights the way in which thought changes, rather than that which is being thought. After an encounter, it revolves around the event itself and not the familiarity resulting from the meeting. Additionally, there are no aspirations to a correct interpretation or to criticism of a wrong interpretation. Within this premise, different thinking techniques, through which space and time can be experienced, exist. McCormack's premise poses that different speeds can exist within thinking techniques in experiencing time and space. Speeds, which, perhaps, cannot be experienced within habitual patterns.

Erin Manning arrived at a number of encouragements [sic], intended for the maker in the creative process. These stimuli of 'research-creation':

- Edit from within: Understand that there is no beginning, but that composition always occurs from within and during ongoing processes. Additionally, recognise the history of the elements as possibilities when they present themselves within the elements. These can be explored practically as well as conceptually.

- Value, don't evaluate: The values are part of the forces acting within an object.
- Lure the feeling: As an aesthetic activity, continually seek out the feeling, the experience of an event. Feeling and thought are not opposed to each other, but rather are extensions of each other.
- Affirm All That Appears. Speculate. Propose: allow serendipity, speculation; follow the movement of thought. See the work as a proposal or proposition, not final, but as a foreshadowing of how things could be.
- Pay Attention: Things can split, multiply. It asks for patience, to wait until something finds its expression, to allow it to develop itself to its limits.

Next, Fabius looks a possible application to the project of Keren Levi, one of the students in the Master's programme. Her motivation for participating in the programme is that she has a desire to test ideas related to her own practice. In her own words, she is a 'self-made' choreographer who previously danced with the Batsheva dance company in Israel and has already been working as a choreographer in the Netherlands for some time. In the programme Levi now has time and space which she doesn't need surrender to production stress or duress. She can take her time and resist the temptation to think in terms of a product, and can remain ignorant of where things are headed. In her own way, Levi is developing a method to research the term 'eclecticism.' According Fabius, you could ask yourself if her work and her working method are not more modernist, rather than eclectic. Levi describes her working method as an endless rearranging of the construction of movement phrases. Perhaps her personal temperament has eclectic traits, which influence the manner in which she chooses subjects.

Other examples of research projects include those of Christina Ciupke, Litó Walkey and Arkadi Zaides. In Berlin, Christina Ciupke organised a retrospective culled from 10 years of her own work. Through that string of performances she now researches the ways in which a performance is an 'invitation' to the spectator. Litó Walkey, who for years worked at Goat Island and was a member of the collective 'everybodystoolbox' in Berlin, developed a technique for collectively writing 'performance directives.' Based on this technique, she now researches how in her solo performances the layering of the collective production of a performance directive can be part of the overall performance. Arkadi Zaides was a child when he left White Russia for Israel. He collaborates with Jewish and Arab dancers in Israel and researches forms of the embodiment of conflict and migration in his work.

Lastly, Fabius discussed the question of how to evaluate whether someone in the programme deserves a diploma. Three criteria address this: the quality of the research question, the development of methods, and the quality of reflection. Based on these criteria, feedback and reporting are provided every semester, resulting in a final presentation which is adjudicated by external evaluators.

Fabius concluded the presentation by expressing the hope that the audience was able to imagine how ideas about artistic research can be applied to situations in the studio, rehearsal, the development of an idea, or to conversations during a seminar or in the pub. Judging by the responses from Master students and the number of applications from new candidates, according to Fabius, the Master programme fulfills a need and the choreographers are happy with what the Master programme has to offer them.

Arno Schuitemaker

Arno Schuitemaker is a choreographer. In this presentation he shared about his choreographic approach and the research behind 'The Fifteen Project.'

Background

During his studies in Aerospace Engineering at the Delft University of Technology, Arno Schuitemaker serendipitously was exposed to modern dance and was immediately sold. After graduating from the university in Delft, he began his studies at the Fontys Dance Academy, where he graduated in Bachelor of Choreography, which was a new degree at the time. In this environment he was afforded

his first steps as a dance maker. After his (second) graduation Schuitemaker soon had more opportunities to create more dance works and during the past years as a professional choreographer his interest in movement and the dancer grew to include the relationship between the dancers and the audience.

The Fifteen Project

In many of his earlier works, Schuitemaker illuminated this relationship by having the audience share the performance space with the dancers and by having them play an active role. Once, when browsing a book store, he discovered a book by Marco Iacoboni: Mirroring People; The New Science of How We Connect With Others (2008). Having been curious about and focused on what occurs between the audience and the dancers, he suspected that study of mirror neurons would result in something new. Together with dramaturge Guy Cools, he studied this subject and purchased a second book: Mirrors in the Brain, How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions (2008), written by Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia.

Schuitemaker did not want to portray the science behind mirror neurons in the performance in a literal way, but intended to use both books as sources of inspiration in creating a work in which he could research the relationship between dancers and audience once again, this time propelled by the way our brains process information. Because of this, the question ‘what is the performance about?’ soon became less relevant, while questions such as ‘what does the performance reveal?’ and ‘what does it expose?’ became more to the point. Because of this, Schuitemaker could focus on the sensory experience of the performance as a whole and not only on the empathy of separate movements [sic] or the rational understanding and image/representation of the subject.

One of the approaches of ‘The Fifteen Project’ (Schuitemaker’s fifteenth project) was the concept of ‘shared space of action’. This concept is derived from the science of mirror neurons and implies that as one dancer performs the action, another mirrors it and so these performers share the same space in which this action takes place. Schuitemaker wanted to add the idea of ‘shared (space of) time’ in order to enable a sensitivity to the “here and now.”

Schuitemaker states that to have dancers remain in the “now” is not straightforward. By dancing what was previously prepared, one always refers to a different time. He also wanted to find out how, other than through improvisation, one can point to the moment itself. One of the ways was to create material together with the dancers, which in its complexity bordered on the possible, so that they have no choice other than to engage to the present moment in order to be able to perform it. An example is the so-called ‘finger duet’: a complex and predominantly synchronous sequence, which consists of pointing and looking at oneself and outside, to the other. This sequence doesn’t only vary on its own theme, but simultaneously accelerates to the extreme, which during the rehearsals sometimes lead the dancers to a merry despair.

Schuitemaker also wanted to work with a performance structure which was relevant for him with regard to mirror neurons. Instead of linear, dramaturgical thought, he considered it more interesting to approach the structure as a network of relationships, of connections. He wanted to develop and share these three concepts (shared space of action, shared space of time and a network of relationships) at the immediate beginning of the performance.

To accomplish this, ‘The Fifteen Project’ starts with the entire audience on the stage, together with the dancers. Chairs are stacked around the performance space, but no one is allowed to be seated. From among the audience the dancers introduce themselves one by one, after which the dancers move in between the members of the audience. Five dancers cluster by supporting each other’s off-balance bodies, together finding a corporate equilibrium. By being off balance the dancers are forced to ‘listen’ well and carefully to others, while also taking care of themselves. Herewith he also was able to give an interpretation of the relationship between action and observation that is relevant in respect to mirror neurons, because one could state that the border between action and observation fades because of the work of these neurons. The relationship between action and observation is also noticeable to the

audience: while watching, the audience has to allow space for the dancers, which makes them move themselves as well. “Watching-to” became “being-part-of.”

And by thinking in terms of a ‘network of relationships’ Schuitemaker could work within the body and the structure of the performance with related movement principles as well as words related to mirroring, such as ‘reversal’ and ‘reflection’. Almost all of the material from the first half of the performance later returns in a through-developed form.

Approach to Choreography

In his approach to choreography Schuitemaker focuses on the question of how the performance can obtain a new perspective. Whereas “performance” in the Dutch language (“voorstelling”) can (and continues to) refer to ‘image’ or ‘imagination,’ it also refers to ‘proposition.’ For Schuitemaker this has been an interesting perspective, because an ‘image’ can refer to another time or another space, while, in the case of a ‘proposition,’ there is greater possibility for an experience in the here and now..” ‘The Fifteen Project’ caused Schuitemaker to further investigate the concept of a ‘proposition’ in addition to his curiosity for the relationship between the dancers and the audience.

New project: ‘I is an Other’

One of the sources of inspiration for his new project is the book I is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World by James Geary. In this book, Geary discusses how scientists have discovered how metaphores neurologically work in our brains. One of the fascinating, fundamental phenomena is ‘synesthesia,’ which is the condition to express [sic] one of one’s senses in the context of another, second sense. Schuitemaker also wants to study the functioning of memory to further develop the concept of a networked performance structure, so that, in spite of the passing of linear time, all of the relationships he wants to include in the performance, become and remain empathetic.

With this new project, which Schuitemaker entitled ‘I is an Other,’ he wants to approach the performance as a “lecture performance.” In it, he will be on the stage with a dancer, in what eventually will become a sensory, triangular relationship with the audience. Through this lecture performance Schuitemaker seeks to integrate research, results and presentation, in addition to having the existence of the one in the context of the other: synesthesia.

Research in Relationship to Performance

‘The Fifteen Project’ demonstrates, together with ‘I is an Other,’ how Schuitemaker regards (artistic) research in relationship to the performance. For him, the performance serves the research, rather than that the research serves the performance. In other words, the performance is necessary for him to conduct his research. Schuitemaker’s interest is in the relationship between the dancers and the audience. He needs the performances to (be able to) progress in his research. According to Schuitemaker, one could interpret the word ‘research’ as “*re-search*”: a continual and renewed searching. Through the performances Schuitemaker takes new steps forward, while he also gives himself space to continuously (re)shape his fascinations.

Discussion

Throughout the seminar the audience could pose questions to the presenters and engage in discussion about the afternoon’s theme.

- *Can Leni further explain the meaning of “researching” and “generating meaning”?*

In her presentation, Leni placed research in the arts adjacent to the humanities and beta sciences. Although research in the arts falls within the humanities, she contended that this is too narrow and

that this research goes a step beyond mere interpretation. In turn, makers can use this interpretation to create. This is why research in the arts is independent of the academic field. The main idea is that the maker interprets and deconstructs something, after which he or she creates something to be shown to the audience. Because of this the dialogue is ongoing, because, in turn, the audience also constructs an interpretation.

- *Does Arno, besides dance, have an interest in theatricality?*

In answer to this question Arno posed a return question: What is theatricality? According to him, we could consider the lighting or the pants a dancer wears, in fact everything that makes theatre, to be theatrical. Arno thinks his work is full of theatricality. He collaborates with composers, lightning designers, and so on.

- *To be a maker is an individual process [sic], but in what measure does it enrich them to see [works by] other makers?*

According to Jeroen, makers can obstruct insights by not collaborating. A maker must intentionally create space to think and learn to be productive within it. As a maker, art is not yours. Jeroen posed that a maker must ask questions and must reflect with a mind that is more open. He contended that art emerges particularly through exchange.

Arno indicated that he likes to collaborate with others and he's open to share what he's, working on with his colleagues. However, he doesn't do this at every stage in his creative process.

- *Is Arno's movement research essential [to his process] and are other aspects, such as theatricality, layered into it?*

For Arno, the different forms of research need each other and they are all present during the creative process. He thinks that there are different layers and/or areas, all of which he wants to access [sic].

- *Oftentimes, when students are exposed to theory, they don't handle it with precision. Is this Jeroen's experience within the Master programme and how does he resolve this?*

Master students are adults. According to Jeroen, students can be very astute observers. Often they have a few years of theoretical [sic] foundation. He said that they don't read texts for a philosophical foundation of their work per se, but, rather, extract inspiration from reading and that becomes relevant to their own research.

- *How does this compare to a Bachelor?*

According to Jeroen, Bachelor students often only have a superficial reading experience. This is not the case with Master students.

- *In research, shared, communal knowledge is being generated. Is this an oldfashioned concept?*

According to Leni, academic terms are quickly adopted in the arts, although that isn't always comfortable. Therefore, subjectivity and objectivity must be reexamined. Leni posed that this must be reshaped.

Jeroen asked what is considered knowledge and our attitude(s) toward it. From an empirical perspective, this is very objectivist, but we now live in a time that makes less of a distinction between the object and ourselves. The object is influenced by one's observations and this is a recursive process. He thinks that art is not necessarily about producing knowledge and to create objects from it, but rather about techniques and the embodied knowledge we assign to it. Knowledge is more of a process. How this should be standardised or academised, according to Jeroen, is unclear.

Audience: Herein inter-subjectivity also exists: It is possible to learn from each other and to ask yourself if you can further develop another's knowledge. It's about transferability. This doesn't have to happen in mere language and there are different forms to objectify it [sic].

- *Within an academic setting it is also possible to look at dance in a different way. Therefore, change specifically occurs within science.*

According to Jeroen, it is possible to draw from different theories. It is necessary to think about dance in a different way and to ask different questions.

- *Is there any research pertaining to creative processes in which the group acts as maker (the group makes the choices) and the choreographer is the facilitator?*

Jeroen referred to 'Grand Union,' a group directed by Yvonne Rainer in the 1970s, which combined improvisation and dance.

- *In a well-stocked fine arts studio, new things come into being because the maker is surrounded by an abundance of materials. In dance, is there such a thing as unsolicited research?*

This is not the case in Arno's practice.

Leni mentioned 'Peeping Tom' as an example. This group used a studio filled with materials with which the dancers worked. From this, consequently, a performance emerged. According to Leni this is an example of creation which did not materialise via research.