Teaching Styles in Contact Improvisation: An Explicit Discourse with Implicit Meaning

Gunn Engelsrud

Background

Since contact improvisation was "invented" in North America in the 1970s, it has gained widespread acceptance; teachers have been travelling extensively to conduct seminars and workshops. The dance form has been documented and researched from several viewpoints, but, as I see it, there is general agreement among practitioners and scholars—including United Kingdom-based Helen Thomas (2003), Norway-based Hilde Rustad (2006) and Eli Torvik (2005), and Cynthia Novack (1990), who worked in the United States—that contact improvisation is a form of nonhierarchical relations that entails an appeal to accept mutual responsibility for each other and that also implies a specific lifestyle. In her book *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture,* Novack, as an anthropologist, perceives contact improvisation as embodied culture where the movements are central constitutional parts. Her position is that through the study of contact improvisation, "the history of the dancing serves as a vehicle for investigating powerful interrelationships of body, movement, dance and society" (8).

I agree with Novack's notions here, and my experience with contact improvisation for twenty years has illuminated that, although this dance form leaves movement choices and partnering solutions open to the dancer and to the relationship between dancers, teachers still play an important role. Teaching can be seen as a powerful position in this dance form, due to both the formal and informal competencies and educations that are embedded in teaching styles. I have yet, for example, to meet a dance teacher who has no

Gunn Engelsrud is professor in the Section for Nurse and Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, at the University of Oslo. She is teaching in the master's and doctoral programs within Humanistic Health Research. Among her latest publications are "The Lived Body as Experience and Perspective: Methodological Challenges," *Qualitative Research* 5, no. 3 (2005): 267–84, and with Gro Hjelmeland Grimsbø, "Young Womens' Fitness Practices: A Critical View," *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement* 13, no. 4 (2005): 227–37.

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training in classical ballet, even if martial arts, Body-Mind Centering, and other forms of movement seem to be highlighted as the most important part of her qualifications.

I regard dance classes as important spaces for knowledge production and as access to specific insights and power structures among dancers as well as between dancers and teachers. In this article I attempt to illuminate the "nature" of teaching styles used in contact improvisation. A central perspective in the article is that dance teachers contribute to knowledge production in dance through the way they present their instructions verbally and tactually during dance classes. The instruction contains (implicit) expectations of how the dancers should move and behave in a dance class, including personal stylistic preferences and values held in the broader context of aesthetic values and social norms. The point of departure for the investigation of dance teachers' performance is that, as lived bodies, both the teachers and the dancers have the potential for an infinite number of expressions via speaking and moving. However, little research-based knowledge exists concerning how teachers perform teaching in moment-to-moment practice.

Method: Considerations Involved in Researching Movement

To examine teaching styles, I rely on movement and speech because these two expressions are continuously and actively used by teachers, although in various combinations. To illuminate these perspectives I took part as a participant observer and an observing participant in seven different seminars from June 1998 to May 2006. The seminars were primarily located in Oslo but also took place in New York and Copenhagen. The teachers I studied with give workshops and classes in broad national and international venues. The participants were professional dancers with experience from classical as well as modern and postmodern dance. In every seminar, however, there were some participants who were not educated as dancers but had backgrounds as artists, researchers, etc. As Novack points out (1990, 194), life and dance (may) overlap and mingle for many contact dancers, specifically in the initial period. In the seminars I participated in, the majority of the participants had met before and were well aware of what was supposed to happen.

My material is composed of texts from my observation and participation in the seminars. The material consists of my own written notes, taken both in and after class. I documented my perspective (a selective one) from observation of what the teachers said during class, as well as how they positioned themselves and moved in space and in relation to the participants. I sat sometimes on the side just listening; other times I wrote down what I heard or I did some drawings of how the dancers moved and drew some of the exercises and movement sequences. The total material I produced consists of written texts in six notebooks (size A5).

To observe is always a selective, variable, and subjective process, based on how and where the researcher positions herself in space. Sometimes I was quite challenged by my own bodily feelings while observing the dance classes and had to "force" these feelings into written language or "to reconsider in writing," as stated by anthropologist Anders Johansen (2003). His point is that writing makes thoughts visible and represents a clarification of thoughts. Feelings and sensations from the researcher's body can both create access to,

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and can comprise a limit to, how others are seen and perceived. In order to use this, I found support in the perspective that the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty asserts in the preface to his principal book, *Phenomenology of Perception*: "All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless" (1962, ix). The phenomenon of double sensation holds a key position in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy (Käll 2006, 85). I have an embodied capacity for self-reflectivity. If I touch my hands together, for example, I can identify one had touching the other, and the other being touched. This double sensation implies that I sense other people and are sensed by them, I see other people and are seen by them. I am immediately present to myself as an embodied subject, and other people's expressions are also present to me in the space where they are performed.

In practice, and in theory, "my perspective" is based on this double sensation. Merleau-Ponty says, "I never become aware of my own existence until I have made contact with others; my reflection always brings me back to myself, yet for all that, it owes much to my contact with other people" (2004, 86). In my research this means that how other people behave and act in a class has significance for my experience, and vice versa. We do not make up our minds without already being caught up in certain relationships with others, which leads us to assume a particular set of opinions (Merleau-Ponty 2004, 87). During my study, for example, my boundaries in relationship to others felt both invaded and respected. For example, I often heard people say, especially in the pauses when they where talking together, "The conditioning from society is the problem; contact has nothing to do with institutions." This made me think of the often "private" and "unreflective" positions in which the dancers seemed to define themselves. I wondered why the dancers seemed to think that "conditions from society" are something undesirable, and not a precondition that they could use and deal with. However, such statements might be due to the traditional gender roles and social hierarchies that people who do contact improvisation are "against." In order to work in this setting, I had to perceive this as a sort of precondition and also work every moment to try to contextualize such expressions in the field of research. I chose neither to confirm such expressions nor to comment upon them but rather to use them in order to understand the context of the teaching styles; I came to know something about the potentials, responses, expressions, and intersubjective exchanges of movement that stem from kinaesthetic/somatic experience situated in the dance space. In order to write from this position, I used inspiration from Johansen (2003), the theory of Merleau-Ponty (1962, 2004), and encounters in the dance space.

From my perspective, dancing and teaching take place in a relationship and cannot be reduced to either the teaching (in itself) or the dancers' dancing (in itself). While my focus here is on teaching styles, in a phenomenological approach one has a chance to view these phenomena as interconnected. To arrive at the styles, I examined the material several times; my analysis of the material led me to understand the relationship between the teachers' moving and speaking and the dancing as central in the whole material. Typical words that the teachers used resulted in the three styles I identified: Style A, *The body*

is good enough; Style B, *We have to work very seriously with ourselves;* and Style C, *You just dance IT.* The next step was to use the material from the notebooks[1] to document how the expressions used by the teachers shape the meaning of the themes.

One theme that became evident and is particularly interesting in dance is the linguistic universe in which the activity takes place and through which it presents itself. The teachers produce meaning that, on one hand, can be traced back to institutionally situated discourse. One experience that seems to be of great significance here is that every dancer has been exposed to standards of moving in classical ballet. These standards function as a frame of reference, even in an improvisational setting. The lived experience of the dancers is also important, as something they have "to meet the dance" with, and which, in turn, changes the dance form. To perform the soft, strong, centered, and precise movements of contact improvisation, the dancers have to find this in their own bodies.[2] Another theme has to do with ontological positioning. Some teachers imply that a search for "nature" is afoot in dancing, which could imply that the body is "pure" and can move freely and exist in a privileged space. Other positions might be that dance is perceived as an effect of norms and discourses in society, or that the dancer is a medium for "the dance."

My aim in the following analysis is to illustrate how teaching styles vary. Because of my phenomenological approach, I stay close to the description of how I perceived the teachers' movement and speech. This does not mean that I regard teaching as an objective phenomenon that exists in itself, but I consider every style as relational and imbedded in (dance) culture that contains and expresses certain values. From this perspective, a contact class is already "pregnant" with meaning before the dancers enter the floor. Since teaching is highly dependent on how it is perceived by the students in class, I also include material from observation and informal talk with the dancers during and after the classes.

Contact Improvisation as a Research Phenomenon

To participate in contact improvisation seminars, my perspective is that participants draw on what anthropologist Edward T. Hall calls "high-context communication" (1976, 91). This means that everyone knows that it is a contact class and not a ballet class. They have an implicit knowledge of how to behave in the space and toward each other, and they confront the space with their habitual experience. This is not something that the teacher and the participants need to discuss. When people arrive the first day of the seminar, they enter a familiar space even if the actual place and some of the participants might be new to each other. The dancers lie on the floor and do some rolling or stretching exercises to prepare for class. Everyone is barefoot and wears loose-fitting clothing. With the exception of the first day of a seminar, which starts with the participants sitting in a circle and briefly introducing themselves, the classes often start from where the dancers are in the space, with some floor work designed to unblock the body and the senses.

This dance form is most frequently performed in a duet, with dancers supporting each other's weight while in motion (Novack 1990, 8). A central aspect is that "the exigencies

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of the form dictate a mode of movement which is relaxed, constantly aware and prepared, and on-flowing.... They (the dancers) do not strive to achieve results but rather to meet in constantly changing physical reality with appropriate placement and energy" (qtd. in Rustad 2006, 16). The focus is on nonhierarchical relations, and as founder Steve Paxton states in the well-known 1988 documentary, *Fall after Newton*, the philosophy of the dance form builds on "the pleasure of moving, the pleasure of dancing with somebody in a very spontaneous way."[3]

I found it exciting to observe how the dancers manage to guide their movement through the sense of touch, weight, and gravity, while at same time they manage to maintain themselves as individual subjects. In order to participate in dance classes, they must relate to a social situation through movement and make their bodies available for others to dance with and to be instructed by the teachers.[4] To be exposed to bodily injury is a significant aspect of dancers' experiences and important for the status they can attain in the class. Dancers know what they have to deal with long before the teacher has said anything. Through their bodily movements the dancers "take each other in through the body," as one of the dancers expressed it. Bodily knowledge and transient streams of information are continuously flowing between people in a dance class. Each communicative situation produces an experience at this level where joy, irritation, discomfort, instinct, and gut-feelings are lived.

Even the most "spontaneous movement" is, however, always imbedded in a culture provided by society or a given situation. This does not mean the situation determines the movement but rather that movements are always situated. Even if contact improvisation can be a way of living, as scholars Thomas (2003) and Rustad (2006) contend, it occurs in certain specific situations. Situations where relaxed, not result-orientated, spontaneous movement takes place may also contain components of choreographed movements that are already known to the dancers. Memory and spontaneity are meaningful in relation to each other because a body without memory would not be a lived body. Even if dancing and moving can be understood as an ongoing continuous process—as the sociologist Brian Turner argues, "dance is peculiarly resistant to mechanical reproduction" (2005, 6)—it is also obvious that any dance form rests in tradition and broader social norms and can even be regarded as a political movement. One question that interests me is how the spontaneity of actions might also be understood as something one cannot avoid doing and therefore is always a part of any context of dance (Novack 1990, 195). Movements are productive in the sense that moving produces meanings for the individual dancer (Rustad 2006), but who at the same time always is a dancer in a specific context. The way in which movement is performed evokes specific patterns of interpretation about what participants in the world of dance are able to see and not see, what the body may be or not be, do or not do, appear as or not appear as. Teaching dance, then, is based on this point of view, bound to maintain, create, subvert, or change specific discourses about the dance and movement.

Novack states that contact improvisation undoubtedly is presented with a high degree of idealization. For example, she believes that contact improvisation demonstrates and teaches American values and that some specific values of nature are advocated for:

> Nature in contact improvisation is (ideally) like nature in the American home—powerful, truthful, connected with feelings of love and sharing with others which result from listening to and obeying the natural order of things. Within this "safe" context, wild, spontaneous events can occur. Human regulation exists in order to allow the dance to happen, not in order to impose itself on the truth of the dance. (1990, 180)

Novack refers to discussions in contact improvisation and to dancing in which "ideally, the responsive body represents honesty, reality, spirituality, and suppression of selfish, egotistical striving" (1990, 186). Values such as honesty, "the real," and revealing, and the living of these values, played a central part in the performance of contact improvisation in the United States. Another often-discussed aspect of contact improvisation involves the relationship between individual and collective actions as a "dancer" who makes the dance unfold, or the "third force" that is supposed to be generated by the interaction of two dancers. In the analyses of the teaching styles, this idea of "the third force" is mentioned as something with which the dancers should be particularly aware.

However, even if dance is achieved as a personal experience, changes in society, as Novack points out, also influence how people understand and practice dance. As the body is always involved in society, and involves society, one might say that the body represents a "level" where changes in society become manifest and are expressed, as historian Karin Johannisson (1996, 2001) and sociologist Anders Johansen (2003) have suggested. Iris Young (1990), Susan Bordo (1990), and Pirkko Markula (1995) have noted that in meeting with rapid changes in society, a strong and toned body has traditionally been regarded as more resistant than a weak and untoned body. In contact improvisation, however, the sensuous, soft, and aware body seems to be valued, even though strength is also important; touching, sensing, and dialogue among subjects have priority. To be "open and flexible" is a concept developed in the United States (Novack 1990). The "kinaesthetic turn," or "performative turn," in dance, as scholars Andrè Lepecki (2004) and Melanie Fieldseth (2004) hold it, emphasizes the experience of performance over choreographic planning and implies a new way to relate to the practice of dance: a sense of egalitarianism in decision making, that "[you] never knew what [you] were going to do next" (Novack 1990, 195), and the concept that no one should impose their will upon others. This description of social spontaneity corresponds directly to contact improvisers' conceptualization of the dance (Novack 1990, 195).

In this changing landscape, teaching still maintains a central role. Traditionally the instructor plays an important role through verbal description, correction, and demonstrations that dancers understand as instructions of how they should dance. How people share or do not share conceptions of the body and experience through teaching cannot be, phenomenological speaking, taken for granted; it must be investigated. However, it is important to make clear that what I am aiming at here is to identify some teaching styles *performed* in teaching, rather than characterize the individual teachers' personality or private preferences.

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Style A: The Body Is Good Enough

In this style, teaching is performed by moving with the dancers. The teachers move with strong, energetic definition in the movement, which seems to be based on qualifications from classical ballet as well as aikido and martial arts. The teachers' movements are highly visible and present in space, and the movements seem to draw the students' attention. There is no specific verbal presentation at the beginning, except for utterances such as, "You will see how I teach." The teachers use few words and start "on" the body. The classes start with touching one's own body or working in couples by giving a massage or other forms of bodywork. The "soft start" intends to "unblock the body," as the teachers relay, "touching is good for your body." The focus is on relaxation, awareness, and interest in and openness toward each other. The dancers are preoccupied with what they encounter in the dance and have time to move in the space they create together.

The teachers speak about movements as if movements are "something natural." They express that everybody has information in the body as a human resource. The moving body has "its nature" from the apparent sensations and energies that occur in lived time through history: "You have it all inside," "You have all you need," "Try to be confident with yourself," "See what is there for you." What becomes the focus is *the practice* of dance and movement, not the reasons or arguments for it. The grounds for teaching seem to be that from the dance everybody will be able to achieve his or her full movement potential. Novack refers to several quotations from key teachers and people who practice contact improvisation and say that one has to let "their instincts take over" and that "nature and natural movement were conceived of as supports for the unfolding of the dance, which happens to the partners if they allow it" (182).

One teacher stated that the aim is to teach people how to move: "I just try to be a normal person." It is reasonable to assume that this represents an attempt to transcend hierarchical relationships between instructors and dancers. This hierarchy is assumed to be familiar to all the dancers, but through contact improvisation one seeks to transcend this division in a more equal relation, in which movement as a "natural source" has priority. One issue is whether the instructor is convinced that letting the participants return to their "natural bodies" can transcend hierarchies. For some newcomers, as one student commented, this "sensuous way seems as choreographed as any other dance." She felt that all her social experience with touch and other peoples' bodies was just overridden by the idea of "some natural body," as she expressed it. A dancer's ability to be comfortable in the situation depends on her success at being in the situation and responding to what is there. From my perspective I see the classroom and dancing as social or cultural processes that the teachers create and help shape. In Style A, however, the body is "natural and free," existing behind or before cultural influences. Culture seems to be defined as "something outside" or "bad conditioning" that limits "the natural body." I chose to interpret this expression as emanating from a position in which the teachers see themselves as marginalized and in opposition to the mainstream. It also seems that the instructions are based on strong experience that "everything can happen when the natural body is not limited by social norms."

Style B: We Have to Work Very Seriously with Ourselves

In Style B the teachers define their positions through verbal cues and spoken language. The teachers also move together with the students, but they talk as they move. As with Style A, the teachers perform elegant, strong movements that can be traced back to training in ballet. In this style the teachers create an atmosphere by giving clear instructions, demanding concentration, and being with the dancers: "We have to work very clearly with ourselves. When every person works with themselves, [experience] can be much magnified." Instruction is task-oriented, with verbal instructions and movements closely connected. This way of being "with" the students and presenting ideas for them is a way of manifesting the research-based idea of contact. The tasks that the dancers are going to solve are also presented through a cognitive and "personal" approach to tactual sensation and movement. Everybody is asked to contribute to the concentration that the teachers need. The tasks are intended to widen the dancers' experiences. Style B introduces thematic reflection as something that the participant should take advantage of in order to be able to move with presence and sensitivity.

These teachers often claim that the aim is to "be aware of oneself, the space and others"; "others have to know clearly if you are available as a partner or not!" The students are advised against always going with their habit: "You have to be clear in your mind where the center of movement is," "Check yourself out and find out if you are really there," "Feel the present movement in the situation." In the classes, the teachers explain that our instinct is "not to let anyone into your center." However, allowing this is necessary in order not to grab for the floor or grab other people when you touch them or hold onto them when you dance together; dancers should allow their own weight to transfer and "follow the weight through, all the way to zero before you begin to increase the tone."

I often observe that the aim is to synchronize. To find synchronicity is to claim a strong listening awareness through the tactile-kinaesthetic body and the ability to "go along with your own rhythm," as teachers contend. The teachers might state that the dancers can even go slower than they think they can.

Another important idea is to feel supported from the ground without "sitting on this support." Having supple feet and hands is equally important; standing on one's feet and doing a handstand are "the same"; and it is important to "catch . . . hold of/reach . . . for the support without expecting anything." An additional topic is to work on "extended energy," a principle these teachers advocate. This entails the participants working together with touch and extending their own energy from the ground (the feet) as if it were "boiling water and someone releases the valve." When they "open themselves up to the ground, they are open to the touch." When a movement is filled up with energy, it must be "let out." As one teacher put it, "We are here to create an opportunity to experience movement."

The teachers have clear ideas about what the dancers need to work on and encourage them with comments such as: "Stay with your sensing body," "You are in your breathing," "Be clear about your mind." Here it seems important to contribute to giving the dancers good experiences in a manner that also gives them confidence in themselves and in the dance. One teacher says, "When we ask people to be sensitive, we have to create a good

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atmosphere." The instruction functions to establish and define what contact improvisation is as a tradition and genre, and the spoken speech is directed toward the dancers on a *personal* level that aims to inspire them to reflect and be open.

If I were to open a dialogue with Merleau-Ponty concerning Style B, I would draw our attention to how he describes the phenomenon of speech and its specific act of meaning, that the realization of speech comes late in relation to being in the world (2004, 202). Style B teachers assume the position as the one who shapes the dance form through instruction. *Having* a body that needs to be "worked on" and cultivated through specific tasks and exercises becomes the focal point. The ambiguity I see in Style B is that the intentions inevitably control the experience they aim to release. The participants are constantly reminded of their habits and that they have to relate to the habit as abstract movement. The instructor gives a specific direction to stimulate the participant's active reflection on their movements as something they have *to consider.*

Style C: You Just Dance IT

A characteristic of Style C is that the teachers do very little movement together with the students. It does not mean that the teachers are not "good movers," only that they do not use much movement in their teaching style. Most characteristic is the extensive use of vocabulary that could be perceived as an "abstract" language intended to address the dance itself. The teachers talk about what the students should work on by *telling* them about it. The speech is not directed (as in style B) to the individual student, but the teachers seem to direct their speech to the space (to the universe). "To extend their energy," "go beyond the personal," is characteristic for the use of language in this style. The guiding of instantaneous movements "from one place to another" is communicated as supposedly coming from "underneath," from the senses, from the situation, and from the ability "to stay personal and read compositionally." By using these instructions, the dancers are expected to be in contact with their own weight, breath, ground, time, space, and the other persons present. They do not receive instructions on specific ways to move but rather assignments of a more "philosophical" kind. The inspiration for this style can be traced to the language of Steve Paxton. Novack describes him as one who

> stresses sensing and responding to the "it," the third force that is created by the cooperation and interaction of two people. The underlying meaning of the "it" derives in part from belief in the rule of physical law and the connection of the body to nature, and in part from conceptions of the dynamics of improvisation in general and the particular use of improvisation in contact. (1990, 182)

Using the concept of the "it" can be related to "the third force," which is communicated as something dancers "know that you know that you know."

In Style C, language is used as a tool to communicate "the philosophy" to the dancers and is built upon an explicit theoretical position (while Style A teachers use language that seems to evolve from movement in the situation, and Style B teachers use language personally directed to each student). The most common sentences that Style C teachers use

include "You have to be very active, but not do very much," "You just sense immediately, not really taking any time at all," and "Relate to the space under the space." The dancers are told to "go down and through the body, get gravity out of the body," or to move from "what comes out of you," or that "we control ourselves to a place of less control": "Let gravity include everything," and "Stay with what is happening, but know that you are going to direct, take control and give direction." Statements that are more directed to the movements the students do in the moment are used to inspire the students—for example, "Recognize the moment that kills choreography." The dancers should move to "include the in-between," "feel the power of the history of movement," "go to the place underneath the body, so we can come into you," "lower your focus from the eyes and allow the focus to go into the movements—the movement will then echo out from what you have been seeing." Topics related to the act of being seen on stage are also addressed, and the dancers are encouraged to make use of, and base their choice of movements on, moods, associations, and the situation. The dancers are encouraged not *to produce* beauty but to allow beauty to become visible—or, as one instructor expressed it, "to give people permission not to move and look like beauty-hunters."

The teachers express an implicit understanding of what it means to be a dancer. The words used for instruction encourage dancers to investigate "the action you are doing, so that you can immediately relate to it." The dancers' choice of movements should be based on confidence in the situation and confidence in the body in that situation, a confident conduct of movements that, according to the teacher, should take account of the movements preceding and movements following, without this becoming controlled. There is an explicit focus on perception, imagination, and taking the atmosphere into the movement.

Style C is built on the belief that the dancers' intellectual capacity to capture the philosophy is an important tool in understanding what they do; dancers should think consciously and not only move (unconsciously). Even though the dancers do not speak very much themselves in class, the teachers tell them a lot about the necessity of thinking and its relation to the work they are doing. What dancers think as they move is an important resource; to know the philosophy is a precondition for forgetting about negative thoughts, especially the worry whether "I am good enough." The teaching style cultivates restraint from reactive responses of the body-in-the-situation; dancers should "recognize how the body perceives and then drop it" and refrain from "reactions that we think we have to do something."

Discussion: The Dancing Subject—The Subject Dancing

Underlying Styles A, B, and C are ideas about how dancers learn and advance their practice of movement styles. The differences range from teaching movement as a largely nonverbal, intersubjective experience (Style A), to highlighting information in explicit verbal instructions that can then be worked on by specific people (Style B), to theorizing about movement from a "philosophical" level that, once absorbed, surfaces in practice (Style C). As Merleau-Ponty (2004, 159) points out,

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> Movement is not thought about movement, and bodily space is not space thought or represented. . . . Each voluntary movement takes place in a setting, against a background which is determined by the movement itself . . . We perform our movements in a space which is not "empty" or unrelated to them: movement and background are, in fact, only artificially separated stages of a unique totality.

In Style A one could say that the teachers perform movement without "thinking." The message is to let movement happen, if you "just move." The dancers are preoccupied with what they encounter in the dance and have time to do movement in the space they create together. The dancers do not have to listen to specific verbal instruction; the teachers use sounds such as "ohhhh," "oops," and "beaaauuutiful" and demonstrate and perform the movements with the students. "You just try to . . . juuust see if . . . " are often-heard expressions. The teachers do not talk about details of what students *must* work on. The teaching seems to be driven by energy and kinaesthetic feeling, based on self-perception, whereby the dancers can find that they are able to relax and trust the body's own potential for movement. There is no explicit pressure on them to "be more focused." What I became particularly aware of is that if you "become concentrated," it means that one becomes denser in one's body mass and runs the risk of losing attention to the situation.

Style B introduces thematic reflection as something that the participant should take advantage of to be able to move with presence and sensitivity. Through the task that the teachers give, the participants are constantly reminded of and asked to work with their habits; as Merleau-Ponty states, "It [the body] . . . develops our personal acts into stable dispositional tendencies" (1962, 169). Dance is one way that one elaborates on the body in order to give significance to certain movement and not others; it is built around a cultural norm and habit; Merleau-Ponty points out that "the body has understood and habit has been cultivated when it has absorbed a new meaning and assimilated a fresh core of significance" (1962, 169). To give a specific direction to movement stimulates the participant's active reflection. Being aware of movement is something they have *to think of.* The habitual bodies that the dancers have are to some extent something they continuously have to cultivate in order to move smoothly and strongly in line with the tasks the teachers give. The teachers' verbal instructions force them to thematize what they are doing.

In Style C there is an emphasis on philosophy, and the teaching style builds on cultivation of an active understanding that seems to transcend the personal level. The dance *itself* should move through the bodies as a "third force." Here the students should not only "work on their habits" but also cultivate inhibition of "reactions that we think we have to do something." The demand is to understand the existential ground for movement and make oneself available to "let movement through" the body. The body in Style A is good enough as it is; in Style B, however, the bodies' habits are often mentioned as something the dancers must work on. In Style C bodies seem to be seen as instruments the "It" or the flow should pass through and as something that can limit the dance.

One consideration is that while some teachers may not explicitly relate to the students

that they teach through language, they do so through their bodies. In Style A the teacher says "you will see how I teach." One teacher states that dancing for her was a "way to express myself; I do not have words." Moving is seen as an expression in its own right, as the philosopher and dancer Maxine Sheets-Johnstone states:

> We are a moving-in-the-world being. . . . Whatever the initial way of motivation and incipient intentionalities might be, they develop by way of a tactile-kinaesthetic body. The body is itself the object of motivation and intentionalities—in the form of head turning, stretching and so on. In such ways the tactile-kinaesthetic body is itself constituted; we put ourselves together; we learn our bodies. We did so through movement. (1999, 253)

Language may be a poor way of expressing what this teacher wants to say. The anthropologist Thomas Czordas (1993) calls this "somatic modes of attention"—ways of listening and performing sensitivity through the breathing of one's own body.

According to Merleau-Ponty, one is not introduced to language or social situations by first having studied the formalities or definitions of words but rather by actively making noises, crying in pain, moaning in joy, "imitating" and exchanging sounds with one's surroundings and thus gradually participating in the melodies and sound registers of the local language. The processes of movement and expression comprise a background for how Merleau-Ponty also understands the body as expressive through speech. In each of the three styles, I have illuminated different ways in which the teachers use movement in relation to speech. In Style A the teachers speak from moving and there is no use of verbal explanations. This does not mean that the teaching style is not influenced by society (remember the use of "bad conditioning" in this style). If the dancers are willing to confirm this position, they run the risk of conceptualizing the dance form as still marginalized but "more authentic and real" than what they can get in society and social institutions. They will miss my point (and Novack's and Merleau-Ponty's) that culture also is shaped and learned in this particular dance space as a social and historical situation.

In all three styles the dance form is (already) there as something the dancers are supposed to achieve, no matter if discourse about the form is explicit or implicit. The dancers have to fulfill the expectations that the teacher, unavoidably, will have toward them (which must be considered as reasonable in teaching). To say, as in Style A, "I just teach people how to move" can be as demanding as to claim that "people must work very hard with themselves" (Style B) or to demand that they think in philosophical terms (Style C). To make one's own body available to the dance form and at the same time transcend the boundaries of the form, as well as occupy and create new space for one's own expressive body, might be a challenge for the dancer. To be exposed to a variety of teaching styles that are not clearly positioned might leave dancers with unsolved problems.

Without knowing that they are exposed to a perspective on the world from the teacher, students frequently confront a tacit premise for the organization of contact improvisation: that dancers must be willing to take part in relatively intimate, or even intrusive, relationships with others. The practitioners also appear to have internalized the conditions of these specific contexts in their own bodies. As one dancer said:

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> I often feel afraid in dance classes; I often look around to find people whom I feel comfortable with. I love to dance but it always at the same time challenges me as a social being. I have this need for safety, and I cannot express my feelings when I am vulnerable. As a dancer you should manage, and not discuss with the teachers.

Every situation contains boundaries concerning possible topics of discussion. This becomes part of the context. Rather than receiving the instruction as inspiration, dancers can respond with dutifulness as they seek to perform tasks. I became aware of increased tension in the movement and anxiety in the faces of the dancers.

One interpretation is to link dancers' tensions and anxious faces to the creation of contexts, specifically in Styles A and C, which seem to function rather implicitly. Teachers who have a strong verbal focus contribute by contextualizing borders to a greater extent than those who "just move." However, those who use verbalization also run the risk of contributing to tension in the dancers' bodies. They want to move in a relaxed way but often cannot find the right energy (*ki, prana*) inside their own bodies. As one dancer said, "I find relaxing on the floor the hardest work; I simply can't find out how to do it." The ambiguity of being a dancer was expressed by the fact that dancers are predominantly trained to be concerned with what their movements look like. To be preoccupied with the thought of other people gazing at/observing their body leads them to look upon themselves with a similar gaze.

When dancers attend classes, these points represent a point of departure with regard to how they make themselves available for instruction as body subjects. At the same time, their presence is a precondition for the instruction. How the teachers and dancers "work" together and understand the situation is dependent on, as the philosophers George Lakoff and Mark Johnson state, "the embodied understanding of the situation" (1999, 102). Dancers' interpretation of the instructions, if we use Lakoff and Johnson, is dependent on their own bodily understanding. For participants in dance classes, this precondition might challenge them, as the dance scholar Jaana Parviainen notes:

> Nevertheless, in the dance classes, while the body strove to learn the correct patterns of movement, it was questioning the meanings of their patterns. The body often resisted the movements imposed on it, felt shame at being humiliated into doing things which were against its potential identity. (1998, 4)

How the students might feel in class is visible to the teachers to a limited extent. Since they are actively teaching, this in fact might be due to their own habitual body, explicit awareness of themselves, and implicit theoretical perspective. Working with my material demonstrated that in all the teaching styles there is an unthematized perspective hidden behind the position the teachers take. Even if listening to and adopting the ideas of the teacher can be seen as the "nature" of being a student, this is a problematic position. Parviainen talks about the complicated and inconsistent answers the movements evoked in her and reflects on how the body subject as a person is visible and vulnerable both in the performance of dance and in the teaching and learning of dance and movement. Along the same lines as Parviainen, I understood that taking part in dance classes evokes

crucial issues concerning how to illuminate the life world and experience of the dancing subject.

Theories that emphasize the body subject as fundamental to being and experiencing in the world are relevant to understanding how contact improvisation has become a dance tradition. Moving, touching, sensing, and feeling are interwoven through movement and the verbalized instruction of teachers who set out to initiate or accompany the participants' movements. The subject continuously influences and is influenced by other people through movement, touch, and speech. These dimensions receive different emphases in the three teaching styles discussed in this article. I have tried to identify how I have perceived the styles that are used by the teachers, and based on my material I have illuminated some expressions that are used in teaching. In class these expressions are part of a continuous flow of movement and speech that does not seem clearly contextualized but is nonetheless present. When some teachers say, "I just teach people how to move," one could say that this is only possible if you have a perspective. Just moving might involve movement of the individual, isolated body or reference moving as a living organism with access to others and to the world. The same could be said about the philosophical perspective in Style C, where there are references to others' positions in philosophy without these positions being referred to in relation to the students.

Conclusion

All teaching styles produce symbolic power as well as create social positions and tactile-kinaesthetic experiences for the dancer. These findings contribute to a discussion of positions taken by teachers. I do not think the positions are as "innocent" and nonhierarchical as they are presented. Even if dancers often are polite and nice to their teachers (as part of tradition) my material includes expressions that show that anxiety and tension also exist. Tension is created in relations that are perceived as equal and nonhierarchical; as I see it, this tension is a challenge both in teaching and experiencing dance. However, dancers have a cumbersome heritage of evaluation and criticism of their movements that I regard as highly counterproductive in the art of dance as well as in teaching. I have, by taking part in a practice, attempted to deconstruct the conditions of a learning context, for instance, by questioning the available interpretative frameworks for teaching. To involve theoretical perspectives that emphasize experience in dance as a socially manufactured phenomenon emphasizes the need for dance theory, as well as a new discussion of how dance classes are organized and taught. The fact that dancers today wish to play an influential role in the practice itself is a challenge for the relation between the teacher and the students. As reflexivity, contemporary conceptions of participation, subjective experience, and dialogue are part of the contemporary culture, it is a challenge to also make this idea relevant for dancers. Traditional dance forms, however, seem to constitute a point of reference that appears to be difficult to circumvent as a normative discourse. Normative discussions are part of every dance practice and are thereby incorporated into the dancers' bodies. With their bodies, they not only incorporate the teachers' intention with flexibility but also respond with tension and holding their breath at very subtle levels. My aim is to illustrate

this fact in order to be able to understand what dancers and teachers do when they do come together in seminars and workshops. As Merleau-Ponty says:

> If there is no such thing as benign fate, then neither is there such a thing as its malign opposite. Courage consists in being reliant on oneself and others to the extent that, irrespective of differences in physical and social circumstances, all manifest in their behaviour and their relationships that very same spark which makes us recognise them, which makes us crave their assent or their criticism, the spark which means we share a common fate. (2004, 88)

What is interesting is to recognize what gets manifest in actions such as teaching. Since the teachers are highly variable in how they move and speak, more attention should be paid to the consequences this might have for dance experience. Dancers often have to live what they are thinking: rather than articulating what they have learned, they demonstrate in movement what they have achieved. This makes them capable of mastering skills that are impressive to other people, but it also makes them vulnerable because the experience is exactly of this type. In order to understand how they are influenced, examination of teaching styles and their cultural and institutional context can illuminate that teaching styles are central, even if this dance form is regarded as a form of nonhierarchical relation that entails an appeal to accept mutual responsibility for each other.

Notes

1. I also interviewed three teachers formally during the seminars and spoke informally with the teachers about my project. This article, however, is based on my observations to what they actually did during the seminars and does not include material from the interviews.

2. To find movement "inside" one's own body as a tactile-kinaesthetic entity is, according to Einat Bar-On Cohen (2006), necessarily born out in practice.

3. This quotation from Paxton is also cited in Torvik 2005, 8.

4. Later in the article I quote Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1999) concerning how we learn through moving. While I think she has a good point, I also experienced students' frustration when teachers, without saying a word, would take them by the hands and move them around in space. To be able to do so the teachers have to have the authority and students have to be willing to give the teachers this power, while the teacher might take it as a sign of what "the body can do."

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