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Key Note Presentation

## **Dance Into Articulation**

A performing lecture dancing, drawing, singing, talking, showing films

### **The talk:**

Why is the word being said? Why is the movement in motion? These are questions about the transmission of language, the politics of listening and about the roles of representation in dance. We move politically on an excursion in search of miracles.

Creating without words finds its focus in emotional impressions and gives form and meaning to what would otherwise be incomprehensible. In working with dance we come to rely on a broader definition of the concept of language, that what we do not say may convey as much meaning as what we express in words. Out of this insight respect for our fellow human beings comes into being and we become not only better at expressing ourselves but also at listening. Dance becomes a political action. Agreed knowledge is the basis of our conventions, through dance we break them up and make way for new ones. That's how we move forward.

Movement communicates from a ground of intention, conscious or unconscious. The body is permanently active in its address, but a grammar of language is impossible since its variables are infinite and interpretations always dependent on cultural, social as well as purely physical factors. So what is that communicates?

What I am looking for is the linguistic dimension of movement, to eavesdrop on it... and to look for the links between this process and the way the rest of the world views "language". How do we use movement? I look around and there is movement everywhere. I take hold - test out - reject and fit my choices into a context. All movement has a time, energy and a spatial sequence. It is through

studying these parameters and developing our skills in their use and composition, that a conscious attitude to what is communicative is made possible. This knowledge can be used in dance as well as a source of enrichment for the individual. We all derive benefit from the evolution of language.

Language is defined in our dictionaries as the spoken and written word, based on words having a specific meaning and the existence of a grammatical system for the way in which words are to be used to achieve the goal of comprehensibility. Dance is not a language, movement is not codified nor is it defined on the basis of a specified goal. Language develops out of our need to communicate. When what we want to say is not obvious and immediately present we have to find a way of labelling it. I want language to be more than an accumulation of words.

Our narrow definition of language as a grammar of words is one of the handicaps of the rational world. As a result we lose faith and confidence in what we actually know. All that remains is the kind of knowledge that can be formulated in words. A conservative perspective in an age that ought to be better managed.

I see working with dance as a form of fundamental linguistic research. Movement possesses a linguistic identity, which can also be deciphered in terms of cultural codes: gestures, our way of walking, our way of relating to the world around us. Dance provides a means to work through our connection to the past, to what once was. I “do not make up” what becomes the subject of the dance. It comes into being because it once was. I follow the tracks and find impressions left in the wake of the past. It is there that a now is formed as a reflection of our present.

I set limits to the moment in order to keep my focus trained on it. I put up boundaries around the time I want to defend and break down others that surround what I am attracted to. I stretch things out, reject them, blow them up and resist them. But I also manage to find those moments that are capable of containing eternity, passion and the splendour that inspires that obstinate grubbing my search

involves. Somewhere I will find my way. It's just a question of composition. Composing a life or a dance demands the same tools. It demands an approach to life, to politics, ethics, aesthetics, skills... and it demands a great amount of will.

What is it then that turns movement into dance? It is not what one does, but why one does what one does. It is this matter of will. This has then to be given substance in form, provided with a space, to find its proper proportions of time (rhythm) and energy. The process of composition consists of this kind of searching for contexts and it is unceasing. Dance creates meaning with references to itself.

To experience time, there has to be movement. There also has to be something that is still, static, in order for movement to be perceived, a space. The time of a movement is always the key factor in determining its expression, it's linguistic dimension. I reach out my hand towards you. Is this the start of a caress or a blow? In dance time is relative. In order for my extended hand to be comprehensible, my intention, my will, must be perceptible. What is the speed with which I reach out my hand to you, how much force, is it straight at you or from below or?

All the sore spots to do with being human are clothed in words by means of what we call language, writing, literature, legal definitions and rules. But beneath all this superficial apparatus it is movement, the intuitive and the choreographed, that resounds. People radiate with varying degrees of brilliance depending on their ability to listen. Movement sounds: whispering - crying - howling. We caress, we grab, we strike. Obviously words have a value for me as well, but where is there balance at the level of language? The tolerance? Through artistic expression we can both gauge and affect the state of our culture.

We live in a benevolent welfare state that has fallen on hard times. Un-necessities spread out amongst all the worry and the glitter blinds you. With all the sparkle you become myopic and your existence narrows down to trifles. It's easy to lose yourself in all that is for sale.

Europe is in a financial crisis. In Sweden as well as in Germany we are still well off, while large portions of the European population is on the dole, in a cultural void. Cultural policy is in a state of vacuum, with fuzzy leadership whose actions are based on a materialistic view, where art is seen as goods and products, and the artist is steered toward usefulness and adaptation to the "creative industry". The dominating political philosophy puts art into the "icing-on-the-cake" box. Is this what we want?

Sometimes it is as if reality is just a scream in your ear. It screams, it roars and thunders away without mercy. All the muck just invades your most vulnerable orifices. The journey to the many mansions of power provides a host of opportunities for reflection on powerlessness and impotence. The art of dance is evolving on the basis of the linguistic perspective that constitutes its foundations. Keep ignorant people on the hold! They can deprive the possibility of knowledge, of creativity and linguistic awareness that the qualitative experience of art can provide.

Therefore we have to be continually engaged in studying movement and get use of it. How can we find expression for all that can't be made to conform, can't be defined nor codified, but has to be experienced and processed by the individual on the basis of his or her entirely subjective values and ways of seeing things? Dance into articulation. This is what literacy in dance can be about.

Culture is what we live, the common foundation of our society, our societal contract. How do we develop cultural ideals? I understand the forces of the market economy and its guiding mechanisms, but I cannot accept that financial policy is the ultimate ruler. I want to turn the political hierarchy upside down and work for a strong cultural policy integrated into all political areas. I want to see a policy that doesn't just put survival and material wellbeing in focus, but has a good cultural climate as its ultimate goal, not least for a long-term sustainable development. A decent, humane attitude to people with plenty of room for curiosity, creativity and

development makes it possible to support other market forces than those that blind you. With room for dance, Europe needs more artists.

There must be accessibility to art, credibility and a belief in art as just art. Dance as dance. Art must be an integral part of our cultural consciousness at all levels, a force for good and a strong field of knowledge. Knowledge in dance must be tried, retried and given new nourishment. Questioning the present is a prerequisite for development. Artistic expression questions and queries the current state of affairs in a way that generates new thoughts and a creativity that leads to new insights about that which would otherwise remain hidden. Put this in the perspective of dance as a way of developing our linguistic capacity through bodily expressions and we are back in the political foundation of democracy!

The political game played with our lives is for high stakes. Both investments and cut-downs in our cultural wellbeing involve risk when made without a clearly stated goal. What we conceive as arbitrary makes for divisiveness and uncertainty. Uncertainty is dangerous. When we are scared, we easily make mistakes. What makes us capable of walking past a beggar, a homeless person sleeping on a heap of rubbish, looking at you with lonely eyes or with hardened eyes that have lost their curiosity? If we want a society with creative, innovative, strong citizens able to apply and utilize their voices, their creativity, that demands also a belief in our common commitments. Life is not self-generating.

I am an artist and I look upon my audience as fellow humans with integrity, individuality and very specific needs, as well as their ability to interact with dance in the same way as in other intra-human communication. Creative processes take place in all our lives. We cook, knit, paint, play, solve union problems or engage ourselves in the housing cooperative— everything that builds a cultural foundation. We build houses. We put walls and roofs around our experiences and activities. We build roads for our need to travel, virtually and in real life. We build physical and mental rooms. Some of us do dance. We acknowledge each other's work, look at it

and get inspired, or get disgusted and distance ourselves from it. We help out with the production, with the plans and sketches that are in constant development and change. Some of us specialize in the creative process and become artists with the object of stimulating and influencing others through art. We all share everyday life and individual exclusiveness. We know that living comes with a cost.

How do we make use of the multiculturalism, the complexity and diversity in our society? Cultural identity is the foundation of a developed self-image. We are able to codify certain gestural movements and expressions such as: Hello, Come here, Yes, No, etc. on the basis of our cultural, social and under certain circumstances - our gender-defined situation. Sign language consists of another set of codified movements. However, contemporary dance in the west presupposes different requirements than those of sign language.

Dance whose form has literary narrative as a goal makes use of conventional codes (perhaps most clearly seen in the formal language of ballet). In contemporary modern dance, “narrative action” (story-telling) is fairly unusual, and when I do come across examples, it can easily seem silly when what is to be expressed could be better put in words.

Innovative, contemporary dance breaks with these traditions, with normalcy and instead exposes hidden values, also when it comes to language. In the same way, new forms of learning can make us rethink our idea of the self, our linguistic identity as well as of the world. Our thoughts and experiences bring us forward to new insights and new positions vis-à-vis the present.

If art were to continue to follow the lead given by the latest research, go past what has already been said, then the audience, too, will be able to encounter something active, something that functions. An encounter charged with expectation that has to do with life, with what is vital, what has to be done. Positive challenges, having things demanded of us, being seen, being free to make use of ourselves, being

moved and being free to touch, to come in contact with the kind of things we never believed we could ever get close to.

The validity of the work, the way its meaning is experienced by the person interpreting it depend, as has already been mentioned, on cultural and social affinities, on gender and age. The same goes for the dancer. The ability to find the expression for what is to be portrayed involves making use of oneself, both in terms of the dancer's personality and experience and technical skill. The will itself is never enough. The body is the tool and has to be available as an instrument, trained with a fundamental understanding of the nature of language. Technical skill in dancing can therefore never be the goal, only the means to get there. We have to make all we have to offer available and we have to be willing to get close. We have to want the encounter. We have to want dance.

We have to trust the movement. Out of trust comes the readiness to let oneself be carried away, transported both by dreams and intellectual stimulation and so move into the arena of the unconscious or out into entirely new worlds of experience. That is when the encounter comes into being and the movement acquires meaning. That is when mind meets mind and body meets body and our creativity is really made use of.

We all become co-creators of meaning, of significance. We assign values; we give opinions, we think. We look at what happens in different ways. We create different meanings and assign different values to various goals. In this way we become more clearly defined to each other and can go on to reach a dialogue. We go forward – changed.

The hindrance posed by having to keep things within bounds, by having to avoid excess, constitutes a threat not just to dance but to art. When the principle of moderation rules and the utilitarian is applied as a standard to the work of art, questioning what is the use, what good does it do?

This is how our minds are numbed and turned to popularised and commercialised forms of entertainment whose goals are quite different to those of art. They are adapted to be just right, to fit in with our expectations or to be the means to something else. The human being is rendered passive out of a misguided sense of benevolence and indifference takes over. What is created is an aesthetically pleasing surface whose aim is to mirror the expectations of the public. Art is not possible without the breaking of this polished mirror. We have to be bold enough to see through it, a kind of self-acknowledgement of the madness within us. An affirmation of both what is ugly and what is beautiful, of what is violent, of our passion or of the very particular poetry of stillness. Without this, art loses its meaning. I keep my focus on the artistic perspective, others can address the social potentiality of dance.

Many studies underline the importance of art for the development of society: art as art, as a factor for choosing a location, for economic growth, for new forms of work, for the creative industry, etc. Art is also a significant factor in knowledge development with particular emphasis on the ability of man to communicate with his own species. The artistic sphere contributes greatly to the understanding of how creativity works, how creative environments are developed and increased knowledge about the amazing art of mankind. Artists develop art and push it towards a widening of cultural norms and the formal set of rules that are employed in our society.

A good cultural policy provides the tools for a broader understanding of how new vistas are opened up. It enhances our definition of knowledge to include also the bodily/practical experience as forming meaning, faith in other forms of knowledge and thereby a widened definition of language. For what we are after, we are depending on a good cultural policy that creates possibilities for deeper artistic processes with an outlook that places our countries not only in Europe, but in a global perspective. A policy that creates both understanding and legitimacy for



art's specific power to contribute to a good society where we can all live in awareness, creativity and empathy as seeing humans. We can go, without going past. That simply makes it more fun, more interesting and more challenging to live.

Are you curious? If so, you are one of many who want to go further and know more, one who is triggered and challenged. Without curiosity we die. We die anyway, of course, but we die alive. Losing one's curiosity and attention is to stop living. Sensitivity and a keen ear come from curiosity. And faith. One who starves or freezes, one who is humiliated or locked-up, doesn't stand much of a chance. But the rest of us? Sometimes it is as if reality is just a scream in your ear. It screams, it roars and thunders away without mercy. All the muck just invades your most vulnerable orifices.

Contemporary dance mirrors our existence and uncovers new perspectives in different fields of knowledge. Dance offers a chance for us to see what will otherwise remain hidden. Dance activates us, sharpens our senses and demands participation and reaction. At times it offers peace and a moment of reflection, at times it demands activity by provocation, confrontation and that "scream in your ear". The art of dance help to develop both an individual and societal sense of self.

Through dance we shall continue to develop society and our cultures toward new successes, other qualities of life and new aesthetic practices. We shall educate the ability to handle creativity, train for critical thought, reflection and articulation in work. We shall develop knowledge both within and about the field of art that we have chosen. Both theoretical and practical aspects of dance didactics, dance pedagogy and educational topics shall be dealt with.

The body is our home ground. Time exists only when we define it and we all exist somewhere in relation to the concept of space. It is as we make our way though the midst of our memories and experiences that we make a leap and create new ones. Every day we re-master movement and its communicative capacity in telling

silences or frenzied howls. It is never dumb. We stand, walk, look, close our eyes, laugh. We reach out a hand. Enjoy touching or find ourselves revolted by an unwanted touch. We are alive. All too soon we will find ourselves among those who are resting. When our bodies will burrow down to decompose in the soil and fall silent within. Until then we have every opportunity to make use of ourselves. Let's dance!

*"Change a habit and avoid convention. Stop indifference from catching a hold. Push away slowing resistance and open up for enjoyment free from perversion. Stir up and mess up. Create new rites around that which must be protected so that goodness and love are again recognisable. View art as immaterial pleasure or materialised madness, the alphabet of outrage paired with lust and profound intimacy. A dissection of reality down to its smallest particles, reunited in entirely new entities dipped in love. The encounter with art should be like coming home or finding an exciting, challenging place where anything can happen. A place where we want to remain, amidst all the incomprehensible, to be present, listening, narrating..."*

*Efva Lilja*