

Words on dance

by Swedish choreographer and professor Efva Lilja
Translated by Frank Perry

Words on DANCE is an attempt of finding words to describe the process of making choreography, of making dance. It's a personal and very exiting collection of texts by the Swedish choreographer and professor Efva Lilja, written 1996 – 2003.

“Being limited to words is like suffering linguistic starvation. And yet it is this very journey, and its excitement, I want to put into words. A journey of exploration of what is in progress, of an inner necessity and an indomitable will. I am driven by a hunger for what has not yet been articulated. Having found a way to the very heart of language, to eavesdrop on its rhythm and see it take shape: in dance.”

Efva Lilja

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See - all that is perceptible, movement, smell - all that is hurled towards us to fall into oblivion or to lure us into making discoveries. DANCE. It is you who give dance its meaning. It is in the encounter with you that dance comes into being.

The creativity of the human being is the foundation of every form of development. This is why we have to create space for the creative capacity. To accept the challenge and do the impossible. If culture is defined as the form we give our social life, art becomes of vital importance to our understanding of each other. Through our artistic expression we can decipher the current state of culture. What is your life like? We construct our identity in the awareness of a cultural belonging. In this sense we are all in motion. Subjective experience has its place. Our individual memories and experience are the only tool we have to understand what goes on around us, both in our daily lives and in art. In the encounter with dance we find room for all these differences of ours. Dance as the shadows thrown by our intimations and our instinctive actions. Dance as that place with room enough for all our longings and dreams.

I see working with dance as a form of fundamental linguistic research. This is so exciting. 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. A reflection of our present.

This is a way of looking at a work, as a rediscovered context which can make the isolation bearable. As that which will give us space for everything which exists beyond words. As that which makes visible the very pulse and rhythm of life. Dance has within it possibilities as yet undreamt of...

On DANCE or the madness in the everyday Idyll

March/April 1996

Dance is my way of working with what links us to the past, to what used to be. 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 of the past. This is the only way I know of acquiring a NOW. It is in such terms that I may come to see a work, as a rediscovered context - capable of making the isolation bearable. Like finding your way home. Each new project becomes an attempt to recreate, or to establish, an “ego”. Perhaps we are all homeless, one way or another.

I am constructing the dream about a life.

As an artist I am granted a state of exclusion which provides that free-zone my work needs. Considered mad by the rest of the world, I have the freedom to develop an artistic means of expression that is uncensored. But my work also involves revealing the ties between this free-zone and the society that surrounds it. DANCE. Everything is possible. Even though it is difficult on occasion to find your way in so much darkness.

When I was little, I was afraid of the dark (like most children?). Today the dark is a source of knowledge, the place for the unknown - the hidden - the inexplicable. The vastness of the darkness behind my eyelids makes me giddy. There is something there that reflects the immensity of the universe, just as infinite and inexhaustible. There lie the temptations of travel and undiscovered, unexplored spaces. For a limited time my body is that flimsy coating which serves as a boundary between the outer and the inner universe. Like the surface of water in which the sky is mirrored against the depths. Beyond question. Faced with the vastness of nature I am filled with humility. It is fantastic to be able to be this shell of time for a moment. It is this insight that gives me the strength to open my eyes and look outwards. Night becomes a friend (to be revealed by the day?). “If you tell lies, your tongue will turn black”, the adults used to say, “as black as hell”. Nowadays it seems to me, rather, that it is the eyes that are blinded...

Some things cannot be defined, or clarified, or explained. No answers can be made out, not even with the brightest torch. This is exciting. There is always a measure of risk-taking in working with dance when what is frequently only seeming security is abandoned in favour of a more creative CHAOS. In dance the body acquires the space it needs, its firmament. Or is it the other way round? Start singing - we ought to do more singing... If we listen more closely, we will hear the rhythm, the musicality of movement. That is where song is to be found as well. And yet I still think that my dance speaks more than it sings.

I consider working with dance to be a fundamental form of linguistic research. This is invigorating. 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. But what is it that turns movement into dance? It is not what one does, but why one does what one does. A matter of will. This will has then to be given substance in choreographic 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. It is necessary to affirm the dark as a resource, to dare to give dance an “ego”.

Why must everything be explained, or be possible to translate, why pick it all to bits - as though it were only a camouflage for something else? MADNESS. We hide too easily behind all the words.

The way I experience words is that frequently they form a membrane that enshrouds the entire world. Like the fog on a window-pane, like that which conceals what is real and makes life just unreal enough that it can be managed. All the sore spots to do with being human are clothed in words by means of what we call language, writing, literature, legal definitions - 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. It is the ability to be present while all this going on that is of significance. Obviously words have a value for me as well. Like the words we use in writing...like the words we read in a book, like the words that daze us with the explosive power of poetry, like the words I hear myself speaking. But where is there balance at the level of language? The tolerance?

Time cannot be partitioned off. NOW - is what we feel, we have to find the place we want to be. Life consists of so many sore spots... It is will that is needed to make life bearable. The only peace to be found in this search is that to be discovered in those moments when we become one with the eternal. When we abandon "control" and give ourselves over to what is happening. This is the proper place for art. Sometimes I conceive of the body as a strange hiding-place for various memories and experiences. That is where I travel around among movements, breaths, pulses, and I look for... Like I child I can be thrilled and triumphant about the things I find. The revelations. Other times it all stays hidden - well concealed (in the dark). Sometimes it can be so tempting just to step into the darkness and remain there. To let go, to give up, be looked after... Doubts. Why does everything seem so dark sometimes.

We are constructing the dream about a life.

To work is make your ego available. To expose your vulnerability, and with your skin removed, to expose your nakedness to experience. It is a particularly painful process in which the great danger lies in the risk of falling. I am keeping my balance on a boundary to one side of which lie a mass of received safety factors (like confirmed "truths", codes, more or less trendy patterns) while on the other there is only bottomless darkness. I am equally afraid of both of them.

In order to keep my balance I have to mobilise all my skills: I train my body in order to master the technical ability that gives me freedom, I work with compositional techniques so as to be able to select what is important. Refraining from doing something is a particular problem. To refrain from what may feel seductive but is not necessary. To say No. Another problem is to be found in the lack of living space. It is at that point that I think of the devastating power of small-mindedness when the "Who do you think you are?" principle takes over and grudgingness blossoms amidst all the envy and the nastiness. The latter is a distinct risk in the tiny, often isolated world of dance. You have to be strong to survive and to keep your eyes focused on the goal - THE DANCE.

Professional ethics is a vital concept. It is necessary to listen in order to gain a sense of humility in relation to one's work. Listening not just to the movement but also to what goes on around it. The latter includes not only one's fellow dancers and colleagues but also the other people in the social reality we all share. Solidarity is an unknown concept in our field of artistic endeavour which lacks a forum for cooperation and suffers from a chronic shortage of organisational activity. Respect for one another's work, for our differences and our abilities is as good as non-existent. This weakens all of us and we are all affected by it. Artistic discussions or debate are conducted with quite different bodies... Professional ethics can help to form an active resistance against all this and a refusal to accept the devastating small-mindedness of tradition. Progress is never furthered by the yes-men, neither in artistic work nor in cultural politics. Resistance. Doubts.

All of this makes itself felt in day-to-day work with dance in more or less concrete fashion. The professional ethics approach can contribute to our daily work when the stinginess of the rest of the world penetrates our own in the shape of financial problems. The return-fire has to be made up of our work and its outward face: performance. That is where I meet the audience who affirm the dance through their participation. That is how I get the response which gives me the power to go on and go on and go on... Even though I have to find reasons for my continued existence every single day.

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.

In concrete terms the process would appear to involve attempts in my isolation to try to fathom what can be intercepted in what is going on, to find my way to the boundaries which are necessary to the formulation of an idea, a vision. I improvise and work with movement until I have the basic materials. With these experiences as my foundation I look for collaborators: composers for work with music, visual artists for work with space, etc. Together we work to create the external form which will provide the "framework" for the performance. We lay down the spatial framework and the time the performance will last. After which each of us makes our own way in trying to widen and deepen the theme, we start "sketching". This process encompasses meeting after meeting in which we talk about what we have done, we try things out, we give and take. It is incredibly stimulating. Only when this process has been fully established, do I meet with the dancers.

The dancers are the very heart of our work. It is they who become its face. This means that the selection of the dancers, their personalities, technical skills, ages, gender and personal "baggage" is of crucial importance for what will be expressed in the dance. This approach demands TIME. The dancers need to be able to participate in a lengthy process in which it is the degree of motivation which determines the outcome. The work is a struggle, not least because of the provocation which is often necessary if one is to be brave enough to leave behind the seeming safety we are usually so bent on finding in order to cope in our daily lives. What this requires is a great degree of trust and this trust has to be mutual. We choose each other. I want the dancers to dance as though it were to be the last thing they ever do...

Working in groups has become my means of creating the real-life foundations for this approach, for this artistic and human process, of finding the TIME.

The dancers are the very heart of the group and must be given the freedom to work continually, the remaining artists are linked to the group by project contracts. The producer maintains the administrative continuity and is responsible for sales and marketing. In addition the artistic process generates work opportunities for costume designers, wardrobe mistresses, photographers, graphic designers, cinematographers, draughtsmen, lighting designers, drivers, financial advisors, translators etc. We usually make up about a score of individuals working together during the course of a performance year. We put together a touring repertoire which is in demand all over Sweden and across Europe. We give a hundred or so performances of our various productions in the course of a "performance" year, we make films, we make television - we give dance a face. Our audience is often quite different from that of the world of traditional dance and our producers are committed adherents of our working methods. The dancers grow as artists in the encounter with the differing audience groups and performance contexts. We broaden and deepen our skills through in-house seminars together with artists, politicians or others with practices of interest to us. It is now our aim to take this work further by also inviting guest choreographers to work with us. The external parameters of our work are a self-evident part of a holistic view of dance. These working methods and ways of working make us unique in Sweden. This is an alarming and terrifying state of affairs on some occasions, on others it serves to affirm and inspires us. We work so very hard.

Everything is swimming before my eyes. In moments of deep despair I catch myself reciting a Sunday school prayer. Me - the committed atheist. How can we all find solace? What is it we give our audience?

After one performance a woman came up to me and thanked me for a marvellous experience. She was filled with strong feelings but also worried about all the anxiety she had experienced during the performance. She felt that as an artist I was responsible for ensuring that people were happy. Not for making them cry. *What did I think I was doing? She looked at me with her dark eyes. At that moment, I felt as though I were being eaten alive, I felt eviscerated, exhausted. We all write our own truths. Where are all the happy people? What I do is look for the dance and take notice of words. What more is there to say?

So what is it that dance addresses and what place does it have in our lives?

I received a number letters from pupils in the Fittja middle school outside Stockholm. They wrote to me after seeing a performance called HEM (Home). We had never come across one another in person, but we met in the dance. This is what one of them wrote:

From Patrick Cakki,
eyes and hair: brown, 15 years 10mths, 175 cm tall

HI THERE, EFVA

I want to say that this performance the dancers carried out was about war, misery and living together.

I think the play started in the middle of a war. The man was on fire and was forced to take off his clothes. When he looked at himself he realised that he was different now. The surroundings were different and quickly he understood that everything was different (not like before). He looked away and saw other people, running for their lives.

He knew that he was forced to find someone else he could live through this horrible war together with, otherwise he would never get by. He was that kind of person, weak, inside. Upset, he went on looking for other people but could only kill them. But finally he saw a couple of people who were alive. They were embracing one another in the foetal position because they were so afraid and together they were trying to protect themselves from the outside world. He went up to them and immediately felt that he belonged with them when they received him with open arms.

He fell in love with a girl who fell in love with him. They looked after one another as well as they could. This war had destroyed his way of life, he wanted to go back to the time when there was peace and harmony - he wanted to but he knew that if he was going to succeed in getting through this war with his life intact it was going to take a while.

After a long time the war started to wind down. Many people, almost everyone, had gone mad, the way they were all behaving made you think it was a lunatic asylum. People were protecting themselves against something which didn't exist etc. But thanks to the love between him and the woman he met, they were able to lead normal lives, have children, a home, a LIFE.

Other people see different things. The subjective experience has its place. Our own memories and experiences are the only tool we have for understanding our surroundings. In the encounter with dance, room is made for our differences. Dance as the shadows of our intimations and our instinctive actions.

As a member of the audience what I want the dance to give me is the word I do not know. I want the dance to touch me in such a way that I am moved. I want to reflect myself in the experience of all the hitherto unsuspected possibilities, to lose my senses and allow myself to be transported... to travel. Through the years I have had one or two experiences of this kind with dance. Fantastic moments.

I have found them more frequently in poetry, music, in painting. Recently I saw a painting by William Anastasis for the first time. A large black painting. I got lost in it... Another artist who means a great deal to me is Jan Håfström. Faced with his painting no words are needed. The same goes for Tommy Zwedberg's music, Maurice Ducret's painting, Ulf Rollof's pines, Zensō Sakamoto's images... Places to step into. Moments to live through. I want dance to be as beyond question as all this. Quite simply. POWER. In the writing of Willy Granqvist can be found a trust in darkness and what it contains. In books such as: *Natten, Mörkret och Glömskan* (translates "night", "darkness", "oblivion") I can go on vertiginous journeys across landscapes ranging from the dim to the dark. Or in Eva Runefelt's *Hejlad tid* (Arrested Time), in which she conjures up other dimensions from what seem to be everyday contexts. Or on occasion the intervals in Gunnar Björling... There words find an incontestable place of their own as does emptiness. Anyone can dance there. This is the way I find consolation. And energy.

Human creativity is the foundation of every kind of development. That is why we have to make space for the creative capacity. To accept the challenge and do the impossible. If culture is defined as the form we give our social lives, art is vital for mutual understanding. We can decipher the state of culture in the way we express ourselves artistically. What is it like for you? We construct our identity in the awareness of cultural belonging. And so way we are all in motion.

I think that if we were all to devote ourselves more to movement as a source of language, we would understand ourselves better. Become better listeners... Not shut (lock) as many doors.

Dance encompasses as yet unguessed at opportunities.

March/April 1997

I am on the run. On the run from everything that slows me down and seeks to grab hold of my thoughts. I am running fast across unknown terrain. Leaping over mirages and other shimmering bubbles. I am on the run in my own country and I feel homesick.

Something is trying to make itself known. In order for this to happen, all my senses must be sharpened to their utmost. Vulnerability is exposed by removing the skin. The exposed quality of the now naked body has to be matched by a willingness on the inside to take risks. Thinking takes a rest. Then movement steps forward and moves things on. Breathing deepens. Sweat forces its way out. My body starts moving more and more forcefully. The taste of blood in my mouth. Salt. Why? Over and over again... Following what I sense and the certainty that something will be revealed. Something more than the immediate.

A silence exists
a silence that
is overheard in empty rooms
in timeless intervals
of the one who is absent

What happens when the body encounters its surroundings? I think I know and try to find an image. To find a shape, not just for the internal space but also for the outward one (which someone else may meet?). It may well be the case that the purpose of life itself is to prepare a soul for death. The body is transient. In which case the right thing to do is make it ready - for something else... Dance becomes a tool for making that something visible or a road towards understanding of what is happening. Through work perhaps I may come to grips with some part of all that I do not understand. I want to see what there is to see.

I am inhabited. What remains unexplored is the reality of my body as a residence. How can I feel so lonely if this is the case? You have to reach a long way into the isolation. A long way

in, in the midst of what you do not know and what you cannot see. You just have to walk forward. NO - run. Otherwise the madness will catch up to you. Art is my witness. Or maybe, I am the witness. Inescapable loneliness sows its silence in my grief. I weep, I struggle to run uphill. The wind blows hard about the silence. I am panting, gasping for breath, I know that the air I breathe has been shared by many.

When I have run myself ragged I lie back and allow life to pass by for a while. I see others running past. I keep to the shadows in order not to be seen. Out of reach - here all is quiet. I breathe deeply and calmly. I have drunk up my tears but I still feel homesick. I gather my strength to attack what remains... This is how I try to avoid the limitations. I try to get close to the dimensions of the dream as a manifestation of the core of being, the stronghold of the irrational. This search takes the dancers and me down into water, up into the air, into new video techniques or virtual worlds. Ideas fly more easily, freely, further and my body is willing. It is what surrounds us that sets limits.

One is for hire. As a dancer, as a choreographer, you have to make yourself available. To accept the challenge of the work without reservation. This is something you have to want. Primal energy. In its essence this is something that is very primitive. There is an incredible power in dance. Energy, vitality, sensuality... the direct address. When the day to day work of composition ends up by creating a whole and the moment has arrived - then I can fly for a while together with those who have allowed dance to claim their "egos". To be transported, to be turned for a while to vapour.

Integrity and artistic freedom are one thing - the practicalities of life, another. Those of us who work with dance need to affirm one another's successes in order to gain the respect of the rest of society and to ensure its support for the organisation and financial development we need if we are to go on. Even if we cannot always fly, more of us should be leaving our places of safety, those rigidly policed hidey-holes we get stuck in. Knowledge about the history of dance can be of help when contemporary art is to be analysed and evaluated. The artistic process forms part of a social context. We exist. We work with and among people in a culture that sets its stamp on us all. Art mirrors this present in relation to what was. Darkness, light, cold, heat - hate, in a complex weave of experience. Official cultural policy sets up goals of its own but the responsibility for their implementation seems many times to lie nowhere. Ignorance characterises the decision-making chain of command which relies far too much on "opinions" and it is these opinions that ensure our survival or condemn us.

Life is not comprehensible. What we lack creates an everlasting hunger within us and a silence without. The mind as the place we inhabit leaves the body behind and at a loss. A heavy burden. I organise my external space in order to make room for the work (the search). Together with those who have been infected by my desire, or have quite simply recognised it as their own, I will continue to search for the dance.

We are exploring the art of dance and what it offers in our culture. Our first steps involve the setting up of new ways of working. It is my artistic idiom which sets its stamp on E.L.D. And now we want to clear some space for others as well. If only the cultural-political will can be turned into action and the grey veil of envy drop from the eyes of those whose opinions are made law. Knowledge is the fundamental requirement for progress as is our capacity to transform experience into action. To find words for the unnameable. It is the nineties we are living and dancing.

DANCE in the Borderland

Some thoughts on working in the art of dance with children and young people.
June 1997

The society we construct is based on rational action. We set up systems to regulate our being together. We formulate laws: legal, ethical, moral (explicit and tacit)... all with the aim of

maintaining these systems. We struggle so hard to acquire control, to have power over our lives. Verbal language forms part of this strategy. We learn the alphabet and grammar - we develop our skills at speech and writing. Some of us become skilled at expressing ourselves, others are continually misunderstood and come to seem incomprehensible in a frightening way. Our whole society is based on this definition of comprehensibility. Words are given great weight and used to legitimise our actions, to define right and wrong. If you fail to have power over words, you will never be counted... and yet words amount to such a tiny part of our communicative resources. What is always there is movement. Our whole personality, our feelings, desires live in the body that makes the movement. What you are thinking can be seen... It is not what you say, but what you do, that provides you with an answer.

Unlike words, movement cannot be controlled and regulated. An alphabet of movement is impossible as its variables are infinite and dependent on their bodily origin. This realisation contains an incredible freedom. We are our movements. The small child continuously reminds us of this. Movement is what communicates needs (hunger, despair, grief and laughter). Then the child grows older and through imitation learns to acquire words, the rules we have set up, it seeks to gain control. Acquiring knowledge becomes a matter of learning what is right and what wrong. The blueprint is one we have set. We who are adult and know...That's where things go wrong.

No matter how hard we struggle to maintain the established rules, established often of necessity to ensure the survival of our society, we fail. We fail because we are fundamentally irrational. None of us manages continually to behave and act rationally. Being a human being is more than that. Think of the dream, that inexhaustible wellspring. It is there that our subconscious takes shape, showing us what we suspect, what we are seeking and what we do not wish to know. This is the source of nourishment for our imagination and our creativity, without which everything inside us comes to a halt. Not order but chaos. There can be no creative people in the various fields of interest within society without this wellspring - and it cannot be controlled. Refusing to accept the blueprint and always to be questioning and searching for the questions which can lead us onward. To the child this is something very familiar but what value do we place on its search?

We need to make space available for the irrational in order to meet the demands placed on us. For me, it is the arts which provide this space. Arts such as music, visual art, literature, film, theatre or dance. Here we have room for dreams and desires, for self-discovery and for asking questions, for the construction of an identity and the affirmation of the self. There is room here for everything else. It is in this sense that the arts are vital. However frightening - or wonderful - this place for the irrational may appear, it is only we who are adults who can make space for it in the world of the child. Only in this way can our linguistic concepts, our communicative resources be developed. This is how to keep pleasure alive and to give displeasure the space to turn it into something more hopeful. This is why we need to legitimise art as an unquestioned part of our everyday lives and those of children. Art has its own integral value and should not be transformed into a pedagogical tool, as training in group-dynamics or therapy. These should be seen as positive side-effects. Enjoy its peculiarity and infinite possibilities. Art reflects both our history and our present. At its best, creative art also looks forward. We live in an age when reawakening hope is a key issue. Re-lighting the fire in the many eyes in which it has died.

Our cultural heritage encompasses a very exciting dance tradition. How do our children benefit from it? Social dancing (disco, hip hop, techno, rave, etc.) is strongly anchored among youth groups, folk dance is a relatively powerful force among immigrant groups, but dance as an art-form is something most children have never encountered. Frequently this also applies to the adults in the child's world, irrespective of whether they live in the cities or in smaller urban communities. This is a form of cultural inequality. We must demand from our politicians the right to our cultural heritage, including the art of dance as an integral part. If my theories about the function of art are to be put into practice, what is required is a powerful impetus towards coming together. A desire to see for oneself, to experience and experiment with encountering the various languages underlying the forms of dance as art. As far as I am

concerned, this is ultimately a matter of the right to our own language and a developed linguistic identity. Movement constitutes a primary need which contains great power and this can be made visible in dance.

If we wish to encounter the child in dance, this has to be done on the basis of the child's own experience. We have to listen. The movements of our bodies become the instruments for ideas and what frequently are unarticulated desires. The child experiments, rejects, acquires and incorporates the results in a choreographic form. A first (?) encounter with dance as an form of art. If work with dance is allowed to start from this point - on the basis of the child's need to express itself - the motivation for training becomes an natural consequence. How can I get the body to move as I want, to follow my vision towards realisation? The training becomes pleasurable since it relates to a goal I have chosen for myself. Along the way, we acquire music, rhythm, coordination, group-dynamic training, physical strength, intellectual processing, a developed ego-concept, linguistic understanding... Adventure. This is an incredibly exciting process. If only we are able to demonstrate as adults that we want to listen to the experience of children, they will also want to share ours.

As adults, we are the ones who define the world of the child. We shape both their values and their view of the world. In our efforts to be rational and to achieve control, we set limits to the space they have for living. The word dominates all recognised forms of communication. We say: Respond. Explain. Comprehend. Even though we know that words make up a very small part of our communicative resources. How, then, can we uphold an established definition of language? How can we inspire confidence in non-verbal communication as well? We have to be bold enough to risk the encounter with the voice of the individual child. Starting a dialogue by means of a creative process, for example, such as that of dance, can provide us, too, with knowledge, with new energy and a great deal of pleasure. And we have to share experience as well with children as members of the audience. What am I looking at? Why? What does it mean to understand dance?

To understand may mean to experience, to be moved, reminded perhaps about something forgotten long ago... the fact that questions arise does not mean we must necessarily discover all the answers.

By training our eyes to be aware of the expressions and feeling of everyday movements and gestures, we can develop our linguistic awareness so that we become, quite simply, better listeners. Then we are able to respect what is said without words as well. Working with the art of dance is continually to attempt to find one's way at the very margins of language. Being able to acquire movement and embody it in a choreographic form is to give it a new context and a new significance. To try to find the very essence of dance. This is what we can share with the children.

It is a very exposed process, working with dance. One leaves behind familiar codes and the boundaries that create security. The territory being entered demands an enormous attentiveness both on the part of the practitioner and the recipient. All the senses are called upon. As does the individual sitting among the collective mass of the audience, one comes face to face with one's own experience and this, perhaps, is precisely where much of what is miraculous in dance is to be found. It is in the encounter with the other that dance takes place, it is my subjective experience that gives it meaning. And this brings us back to the little child again - who affirms without any doubt the immediate truth of his or her own experience. There is so much to be learnt here!

The Linguistic Nature of Movement
April 2000

The mists of what has been rise from the ground. The dead are taking a rest. Being able to lean on all they have said and done is a good thing. But what is it I have to do? It is the HERE and NOW I have at my disposal. It is now I am. All the rest will be played out in the future.

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.

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 an specified goal.

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 dependant on cultural, social as well as purely physical factors. So what is that communicates, an intention or a desire? All movement has a time, an energy, 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 - but also as a source of enrichment for the individual. We all derive benefit from the evolution of language.

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. Who wants to know? What?

Time only exists when someone defines it. All movement requires time. Why do we experience time so differently? I find it difficult to accept linear time. In itself it embodies a cultural definition. It does not coincide with the way I see life. For me, time is circular. 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. Are there other ways of relating to time than those that can be measured? The time of a movement is always the key factor in determining its expression. 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?

Being

Feeling and intuition are the preconditions of survival, just as they are for that desirable state we call creativity. The individual capacity, the knowledge each and every one of us has, develops out of a faith in this very notion. The scientist and the philosopher know that there is no truth, no definitive "knowledge". So does the child. And yet we continue to try to make reality comprehensible by putting it into words. Do we have no choice? There is often a great difference between the truth of the majority and that of the individual.

It is human beings who define what is called "reality". It is we who create sets of values and ways of seeing the world. In our efforts to achieve rationality and control we restrict our freedom to live. The word dominates all recognised forms of communication. We say: Answer! Explain! Understand! Even though we know that words constitute a very small part of the communicative resources we have available to us. So how are we to uphold a progressive definition of language? How can we inspire confidence in non-verbal communication as well?

Through art we can make space available for what cannot be comprehended. Space for longing and expectation, for dejection, aggression or joy. Space for what cannot be made to conform. Art reflects both our past and our present. The best aspects of creative work in the arts also point our sights forward. We live in a time when the task we face is to reawaken hope. To relight the fire in the many eyes in which it has died. To be allowed to be.

Home Ground

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. If a horse is not standing right there in front of us, there has to be a word we have agreed upon for “horse” for us to be able to refer to it. I want language to be more than an accumulation of words.

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 seems to be very close to a form of mime. It can easily seem silly when what is to be expressed could be better put in words.

Classical ballet, modern “narrative” dance and mime have never interested me as experiences, though possibly as a form of intellectual provocation. Instead I am continually engaged in studying movement from quite a different perspective. How can we express all those other things in dance? How find expression for all that cannot be made to conform, cannot be defined or 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? We see what we need to see. We experience what we are consciously or unconsciously aware of. 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, would 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. What is it that makes us feel alive? 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 thing we never believed we could ever get close to.

Letting Oneself be Touched

We sit next to one another with our eyes open. Our gaze extends outward while our minds turn inward. We sit next to one another in closed and separate mental spaces. Contact comes into being only when mind meets mind, when the neighbouring body becomes perceptible.

This is how I see communication between the stage and the auditorium. Contact only comes into being when our curiosity is piqued and our awareness is directed outwards, when body meets body, when the intentional movement reaches out in its address and the individual identity is reflected in what has been created. Getting our curiosity going.

The craft skills of the choreographer are the key. Making a composition. Seeking to find the right form, constructing a powerful rhythm and charging the time we have together with the physical presence and energy of movement. This requires knowledge about movement in relation to concepts such as space-time-energy. It calls for knowledge about the way these factors affect the significance of a movement. That is the point at which the process gets going and when trust between the choreographer and the dancers becomes of vital importance.

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, and on gender and

age. The same goes for the dancer. The ability to find the right 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 totally available as an instrument. Trained and developed for dancing 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 if we are to gain new knowledge. We have to be willing to get close. We have to want the encounter. We have to want dance. This is how curiosity is engaged.

Dreaming

Out of trust comes the readiness to give oneself completely. To let oneself be carried away, transported both by dreams and intellectual stimulation and so move into the fantastical arena of the unconscious or out into entirely new worlds of experience. Once I, as the choreographer, have been able to initiate this deeper process in the dancer, together we can create the conditions under which the audience are also able to master the work in their own way. That is when the encounter comes into being and the movement acquires meaning. That is when mind meets mind and body meets body. The dance becomes available to the senses as experience and as intellectual process.

This is how our creativity is made use of. We all become co-creators of meaning, of significance. We assign value, we give opinions, we think. As children or adults, women or men, rich or poor, Turks or Japanese, as artists or members of the audience. In different ways. 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. New processes come into being. We go forward, leaving a performance – changed. The dream abolishes the validity of linear time, like the scenic moment. What is being staged is the human condition.

The Mindlessness of Moderation

The hindrance posed by having to keep things within bounds, by having to avoid excess, constitutes a major threat to art. When the principle of moderation rules and the utilitarian is applied as a standard to the work of art. What is the use of art, 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 within us 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.

The journey to the many mansions of power provides a host of opportunities for reflection on powerlessness and impotence. If the art of dance is to evolve on the basis of the linguistic perspective that constitutes its foundations, greater awareness as to conditions and effects is required on the part of the politicians and cultural officials who make the decisions. Ignorant people in positions of power present a lethal danger. They can deprive us of the possibility of knowledge, of creativity and linguistic awareness that the qualitative experience of art can provide. Incompetence makes the concepts more difficult to deal with and we are left having to deal with what is wordless without being given the tools to defend ourselves.

Body

The body is our home ground. The body is where we start from. 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 through the midst of our memories and experiences, that we make a leap and create new

ones. Every day we remaster 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.

The Art of DANCE in a Frozen Landscape

April /June 2002

Why would a choreographer go to the Arctic to work? Why expose a dancer's body to the cold she would otherwise try so hard to avoid? Why stage dances in surroundings where there is no audience?

The Preliminaries

In January 2001, I wrote a letter to the Polar Research Secretariat of Sweden's Royal Academy of Sciences informing them of my interest in taking part in the expedition to the Arctic Ocean in 2002. The expedition was to last for seven weeks from 20/4 – 7/6. I received a letter confirming I was going in October and started making preparations. In November, the Polar Research Secretariat arranged an introductory weekend on board the ice-breaker Oden, then moored in Luleå. It was there the members of the expedition and some of the crew members got to know one another and were informed about the research projects that would be carried out during the expedition. We were also given a lecture on cold weather and the injuries cold can cause together with information about life on board. During the course of that winter we were given supplementary information and those of us who would be working on the ice received rifle training owing to the danger posed by polar bears. In mid-April we assembled in Gothenburg – 32 research scientists, 22 crew members, 5 officials of the Polar Research secretariat and the undersigned – to get settled on board and on April 20 the Oden left harbour with a great deal of pomp and circumstance. This was the first time an expedition to the Arctic had left so early in the year. That far north it was still winter. Normally expeditions go in July – August.

During the preparatory period, my participation in the expedition attracted a lot of attention, particularly in the media. The expectations just kept growing ... at a time when it was vital for me to be left in peace to allow myself the opportunity to enter deeply into the whole process without the pressure of time. My stated ambition at the time for our departure was that the outcome of my work on the ice should be a short dance film for SVT Fiktion, the foundations of a new choreographic work whose premiere was planned for the inaugural week of the Ice Globe Theatre in Jukkasjärvi, in the very north of Sweden, in January 2003 as well as a written commentary on my work. How things turned out is made clear in the text that follows as well as in a travel journal I kept during the expedition. The latter describes life on board, the impact of the practical considerations and the physical conditions on the work I did, the social environment and the natural world. This may be necessary.

The Arctic is like nowhere else.

Observations, Thoughts and Reflections during the Expedition

A Few Comments prior to Reading

Mystery is what entices body and mind to go beyond the ordinary. That which cannot be defined and not even timidity can resist. The mysterious would rather be approached with adulation or, in some cases, in torment. Seductively alluring, threatening, terrifying... the feelings, the intellect can become totally engaged with this indefinable something and it needs to be approached with a firm resolve, a keen mind and memory. You have to make an effort but the struggle is well worth the trouble.

Without mystery the environment becomes one-dimensional. Scientists, both men and women, search astutely for what will increase our knowledge and make the world more comprehensible, easier to deal with and more manageable. Mystery is there somewhere as the stimulus that entices, the intangible something that always slips away. I am seduced. I am affected by the sensual aspect of what I experience, by rage and hate during confrontation, by joy in the experience of completeness. Slipping around inside the sphere of mystery invoked by what is intangible in the world involves self-exposure, laying oneself open.

Pretty much every one of us tends to wobble around our lives. We step sure-footedly forward, start to lose our balance and then get the jitters. It is easy to slip and lose your direction.

The Arctic has always exerted a mysterious fascination for me. A lifelong dream I had been incapable of revealing. This vast expanse around the North Pole is made up for the most part of water. Frozen water. Incredibly deep water. In this deep-frozen whiteness, a continuous but imperceptible motion occurs. The ice drifts, is set in motion by the wind, breaks up from the pressure of the tides, is coloured by the continually changing light or submerged in the absolute darkness of the polar winter. Nothing is solid, and yet there is a powerful impression of stillness here. The waiting perhaps – and the silence.

What we call insight is to be found in silence. Every human being has to deal with their own silence, their own loneliness. There is so much stirring within us, inside the shell of our bodies. We have to listen if we are to attain any kind of intelligibility. If I dare eavesdrop on my own silence, I can find joy in all the insight and understanding it contains. In this way the desire to eavesdrop on other bodies is woken. I want to know. I can see the movement. Bodies, as human dwelling-places, communicate in movement. Silently. Silently. Silently. If it is not to fade away, the inner life must be nourished and stimulated.

I have made my way here to find the time and the opportunity to find my relation to all this. To experiment with both my sense of movement and my ideas in relation to this dream. To investigate what the cold, the ice, the snow and the whole of this apparently abandoned place will do to me. People who live at northern latitudes move in a different way to those who live in warmer climates. The further north I get, the slower and more restrained movement becomes. Gestural language becomes more “refined” and words become sparse. The colours pale. We become increasingly quiet-spoken and patient. The cold forces us to constrain our bodies, to stop wasting heat. The darkness sets a different rhythm and the natural world makes its considerable resistance felt. What was it that made people continue northwards, that made them defy the cold and the dark? How does the present relate to what has been? Where does my own longing come from?

Human life is all but impossible in the Arctic. Everything is white – albeit in a thousand different shades and now in April/May, here as far north as one can go, it is still so cold the effort to speak is painful. The silence contains sounds. The sea, the ice, the snow and the wind produce their own sounds. There are quiet a few animals.

In this place I seek to make space for my thoughts about time and the concept of time, to muse on it. I am trying to understand our endless hunger for history, for our roots, to make it all intelligible. What sets its stamp on us and our linguistic codes? I make no pretension to scientific skills. I am a subjective interpreter of signs, travelling through a frozen world. I write down my thoughts and observations to share with the curious. As an artist I make use of myself. My body is at the disposal of this process, my mind gropes for intellectual codes to capture transient thoughts and regain control over the present.

Anxiety is a way of expressing this helpless fumbling. Inevitably so, if one abandons what is already familiar. Like steering a course through uncharted waters. It is thrilling, exhilarating and marvellously pleasurable, only then to come up against the enormous resistance of so much that cannot be grasped and be forced into a fall with nothing to cushion the landing. It hurts. At this point it is essential to be aware of that sense of enticing mystery to provide the strength required to start again. Next time. I'll find out next time. This cannot be achieved without a certain degree of both pleasure and suffering. I want to lay myself open. I think many people will recognise themselves in this – and all the better for a bit of mystery.

Cold as Ice

I did not feel cold my first time out on the ice. I stood, sat, walked and lay out on the snow for just over three hours. I tasted it. Testing its consistency. Astonished by all the colours. Trying to comprehend...

The snow here is dryer than any snow I have ever encountered. It goes flying like dust. When I stamp on it, it whirls up in clouds. Weightless. It tastes of air. Not the slightest bit like the snow I have tasted at home. The outer surface of new ice is salt but the only taste the snow has is that of coldness. The air is very dry. The mucous membranes of the body thicken and your hair becomes brittle and unruly. There is the crackle of static electricity on board and it is light. The sun shines just as brightly night and day. It never even approaches the horizon, just turns circles round the heavens. Dazzling.

It is easy to lose your sense of time since light no longer determines the extent of the day. We keep time on board through our routines and habits, but nature itself knows neither day nor night. The winds blow. The chill factor can bring the temperature down to -45° but the cold is not excruciating. The colder it gets, the more beautiful the light and the ice crystals become. That is the beauty I find myself in.

I maintain body warmth by keeping as much of my body as possible covered. I keep the heat in by keeping my movements contained. I keep my arms and legs moving close to my trunk. When I rest, I huddle up or dig myself in. I close my mouth and close off myself. The cold of the ice makes movements more constrained. Tight.

What I Have to Do

There are many different things underlying what a movement expresses and it can easily deceive. To get to the meaning, I tear away its skin (of necessity, if I am to get to the heart of it.) The bits left over become debris in the rubbish dump of all that is non-essential. This is enormously pleasurable work at times.

Finding what I have been looking for so long is wonderful. I could not bear to be without that moment when one movement yields naturally to become another. The inexpressible moves away into silence. A certain degree of skill and time for the process to deepen are required if the search is to succeed. Time is the most difficult thing to manage. And yet what is clear at the same time is that it is often when conditions are at their very worst that it happens. That is when creativity is challenged and is at its strongest. Crisis. Enormous tension. Anxiety. Wounds heal and clouds disperse without anyone missing them. A time of pleasure and joy is

succeeded by the most demanding of challenges. And then you're back in the same place again. You have to fight on...

There are no movements left to discover. The human body and its movement have been thoroughly analysed from kinetic, medical, social and anthropological perspectives – indeed, from any conceivable viewpoint. What remains as an inexhaustible source to be explored is the linguistic perspective and how this relates to dance as an art form. I put myself through what I want to have tested. I create experiments inside my own body. This helps my ideas to form. My experience is stored in my memory. What happens on the outside corresponds to its equivalent on the inside. The work consists of repetition. Over and over again. Desire and aversion. Happiness and anxiety. All the opposites, in fact, that provide both life and work with their dynamism. My sense of my own worth requires me to be responsible for myself and my dreams. The Arctic is part of that. I am doing what I have to do.

Dance

The vast expanses of ice, the deep-frozen emptiness here, create the conditions for the mind to roam freely. No impulses to interrupt you, nothing irrelevant can intrude... There is a kind of spiritual purity here, if I am to be allowed to romanticise the situation ever so slightly. It gets a lot less romantic when it comes to a direct, bodily confrontation with ice, snow and cold. I make my way out into the whiteness on a frozen crust of snow, imagine that I am safe and then step through up to my thighs and get stuck. I come across soft loose snow and race swiftly ahead only to crash into a block of ice and come to a dead stop. The ice fissures with the ebb and flow of the tide and then the threat is the sea in the form of a hole in the ice or an open channel. The cold squeezes your body, biting and ripping at exposed patches of skin. You have to be on guard. While the mind may be free to wander, the body has to move with greater reluctance. I keep my mouth closed.

Every step in the snow meets a resistance that increases the dynamic effect. The resistance has to be fought against. I have to put my back into it. To struggle. Even when my steps are easier, on the crust, my body is under strain. The readiness has to be constantly in place in case I step through the snow or fall over. Hence the straining of the body. And so I choose to lie down. The weight of the body is displaced over a much larger surface when lying, making it easier for the frozen crust to support it. The body can find some rest when confident of being held up and its movements become softer. In a dip or in the shelter of an ice-block there is some protection from the wind. Resting is easier. In this way some of the preconditions for my work on the ice start to define themselves. Slowly I learn to read the changes in the whiteness. To make the most of the moment.

I improvise on the basis of the impulses I receive from the physical conditions, the colours in the whiteness, the shape of the ice, its great ramparts and dams. I use my fear of polar bears, of crevasses, of all the various dangers I fail to comprehend. I use my fascination and pleasure in the unending beauty nature offers. I listen within and trust in my intuition and my feelings. On other days an intellectual struggle is waged in which I rigorously criticise everything I previously gained. Why? To what end? I try to discern any insights I may have made, to incorporate them into the choreographic process and the next time I go out on the ice it is with choreographed sequences of movements that have to be tested.

The requirements of body and mind interact in a fundamental way in the creative process. While the work I do on the ice is concrete, tangible in a practical sense, that work has still to be combined with an intellectual process if it is to be given choreographic form. It has to be brought together with conscious intention and will if the meaning of its substance is to be revealed.

I struggle with myself in the battle between meaning and meaninglessness. Life offers resistance. I do not give in easily, I have been hardened. The good, the beautiful, desire and pleasure have to be set against their opposites for us to be able to experience them. How could we express a view about what is beautiful, if we were not also familiar with what is ugly. We have to take care as well not to become too immersed in what is agreeable. Here, in the Arctic Ocean, there is a great risk of simply drowning in the beauty. But life cannot just be pleasant. As human beings we develop from encountering resistance, emotional extremes such as passion or suffering increase the intensity of our lives and losing oneself to desire is wonderful.

Another difficulty with staging dances on the ice is that the movement gets lost in all the clothes. The cold requires one to wear thick layers and the safety rules aboard ship insist on the wearing of a life-jacket overall. This kind of overall is a wind-proof, incredibly warm thermos-like garment that is buoyant in case I should “fall in”. All this to have a chance of surviving. It could take a while to fish me out. I like my brilliant orange overall, but it is a bit like moving around in a thermos. There is always a certain distance between my body and its external envelope. It has the effect of swamping particular movements and as a result the dynamic effect disappears. In addition the strong light is dazzling and I have to use my glacier goggles. I pull my leather helmet with its fur lining down over my ears. A scarf around my chin. Thick padded gloves and boots complete my encapsulation. This is the get-up in which I dance.

I am looking for myself. Small bits of the puzzle are scattered here and there. Some part of the whole is to be found in the work, another in the Arctic.

I can experience what my own movement expresses from within, or it can be experienced by those around me. Powerful feelings and their expression are often intensified by the fact of someone watching. It is for this reason artists make their work available to the observer. The dance comes into being only in the encounter with the audience, the meaning of the dance only happens in the awareness of the audience. It is then movement is experienced and evaluated. What is it that makes the whole thing intelligible?

The intention, the will. If I want to make a discovery, my inner life (my will, mind and memory) is set in motion and new meanings are created. When I put my trust in my own capacity for insight, I accept the experiences I have as the response. I create my own meaning. This is my privilege as the audience, my privilege as the person addressed. Cultural and social codes are an obvious part of the context.

We see what we want to see, hear what we want to hear. The eye can deceive both the taste of the palate and the nose’s delicate sense of smell. This is how we put together the pieces of the puzzle that is our way of seeing reality. We can manipulate our awareness of feeling. With a sufficiently strong incentive we can endure great pain. Sometimes I think this is easier for certain people that affirming their desire. Or, in order to avoid all these powerful feelings, we set limits to our lives within a more restricted sphere of security and certainty. Then we refrain from powerful movements. The puzzle may be easier to lay out if there are fewer pieces.

A work of art, a dance performance or a musical one, requires the participation of the observer. Contemporary art involves forms of expression grounded within a contemporary description of history, using codes that are intelligible on the basis of one’s cultural affinities. But you still have to have the desire, the will. The reluctance to accept experience that cannot be predicted means that the ego becomes detached from any potential encounter. This results in boredom, a feeling of discomfort or the total refusal to engage with what the work is offering. There is a refusal to see, a refusal to hear. There is no desire to be aware of the taste, to smell one’s way to information. No thank you. In this sense the encounter with art is no different from the meeting with another person or coming to terms with a new environment. Our intentions govern our senses.

What Do I Think I Know? What Do I Think I Understand?

I live my reality every day. I experience, I see and I listen to what goes on around me. A multiplicity of information jostles in my experience of this reality. I interpret it on the basis of what I have been through before and draw conclusions, which are sometimes revised even before they have been formulated. We are all born with the capacity to live our lives as creative beings, capable of thinking and feeling. The thin shell of the body encompasses an inexhaustible energy and a vast range of possibilities. We have to create ourselves as the people we want to be. But searching to fulfil one's capacities requires an exercise of will. Being a participant has its price and nothing is as pacifying as pleasure. The person who experiences pleasure and harmony often lacks the will to change which is the foundation of creative thinking. I think I know because I am reminded of something. I think I understand because something is recognised.

And suddenly the familiar codes no longer apply. I have never been here before. I have never previously experienced ice, radiant nights and cold such as this. I am astonished by what I experience in physical terms and by the movement it gives birth to. And then I recognise something. This huddling, this attempt to keep the body together. This is something I do, not only to keep the cold at bay. I also do it to protect myself in certain emotional states. From internal coldness and dark. This is somewhere I have been before.

But when do I know?

Travelling

There is rumbling, thundering, crashing and shaking. And at entirely unpredictable intervals, swaying, scratching and sudden silences. Watching the breaking of the ice from the bridge is a purely physical adventure. An experience of power, gravity and absolute relentlessness. Being part of it from your bunk, exhausted and desperate for sleep, means holding on for dear life, swearing and cursing and drifting off to a sleep that is constantly interrupted. Tracking it from my workplace in the gym is a challenge of a different kind. During the course of the journey I have developed entirely new exercises in dance technique in a horizontal position. I look out.

The colour of the ice is white. The whitest imaginable. Everything is so white it is blinding. Dazzling. The colours of the sky, of the light, are reflected in the whiteness. And in the midst of all this - clear radiant blueness. Blue ice. A bright, clear blue of a shade I will never forget. Under the surface the ice is the colour of turquoise, but the blue that shines so prominently amidst the whiteness is stronger than any other blue I have ever seen. The scientists say it is a result of sunlight fracturing against cavities in the ice. I look out into all this. And then if I close my eyes, I see an entirely different set of colours in the darkness behind my eyelids. Warm, wonderful, muted colours against blackness. Inside and Outside complement each other. I am on the move between here and there: travelling.

Ruthlessly

What is timeless is also eternal. Most of what I encounter and feel is transient. Time as a concept exists by our mutual agreement, yet I stick to my own which is extremely subjective. Occasionally it is fleeting and elusive, at other times sluggish. Usually it is measured against huge quantities of transient things. The apple that decays from within, ice-cream melting, the numbered days of the elderly person. Here, on the ice, time is measured against what appears to be timeless.

It is easy to experience this landscape as eternal. This feeling changes me, it soothes my anxiety. Time becomes what is contained within. The chronology gets lost. Hours and minutes are not counted. Time is - and I have to conform to it. If I want I can lie down in the snow and simply stop.

Lightning fast, slowly – I practice patience. The work is lonely. The starvation of the body that affects one on one's own is ruthless and cruel. It can be alleviated by sensuous contact that is heartfelt and intimate. It can also be mitigated by the sensuous experience of skin meeting snow. When the body is received by loose snow and beds softly down to rest in shelter from the wind and in apparent safety. It is easy to remain lying there.

To dance on the ice is to experience these extremes in movement. Large, powerful movements in opposition to all that is quiet, tight, hard, tiny movements in toward the body – or absolute stillness. Extremes of enormous exertion or total rest. I sing out loud against the biting wind that erases my voice as soon as it has left my body. I sing aloud, bellowing against the wind or whispering into the quietness. No one can hear me. I am dancing.

Perhaps it is these extremes and oppositions that create the experience of the absolute beauty the ice landscape possesses. All this loveliness, this incredible beauty set against terrible harshness, severity, frozenness and inhospitableness. No, the Arctic is not like anywhere else.

Afterwards

And so our Arctic expedition comes to an end, 6 different research projects were carried out: the role of the East Greenland current in the global circulation of the oceans. How a decrease in the ozone layer threatens marine life. Micro-organisms and the carbon cycle. The effects of the sea on organic compounds. Radioactive elements as remedies. The common occurrence of environmental pollutants in the Arctic, and my own project: The Art of Dance in the Arctic – an exploration of movement in a frozen landscape.

We sailed a total of 6860 nautical miles. The ship's engine consumed 1900 cubic metres of heavy oil. We travelled over water that ranged in depth from 47 to 4000 metres! The thickest ice we encountered was 4-5 metres. The most severe chill factor was minus 47° (temperature plus wind) and when the wind was at its strongest, the gusts reached 30 metres per second.

The sound of the wind, the taste of the cold, images of the light...The memory of all that is powerful – it is all stored inside me. So much struggle and pleasure have changed me, as experience always changes you. Now all this will become the source for my ongoing work with dance. Can the experience be given shape, be translated into choreographic form? What will happen to all these intentions in the encounter with the dancers? The desire to see where it goes is very powerful. I close my eyes and see the images appear inside in the darkness. My pulse accelerates at the idea. The challenge is enticing. I want to make use of myself. I want to dance!

This text was written during the polar research expedition Arctic Ocean 2002, 20th of April – 6th of June. The work on ice was performed in temperatures from –10°C to –47°C on locations as follows:

77°10,148'N 19°21,693'E
77°12,568'N 19°23,8,0'E
81°38,7'N 16°02,6'E
82°21,4'N 3°04,8'E
81°21,4'N 4°03,5'W
81°13,9'N 8°34,8'W
78°58,4'N 9°56,8'W

72°22,0'N 18°11,4'W

A DANCE on the Arctic Ice is one part of choreographer Efva Liljas research project: Dance in a frozen landscape.

A big THANKS to scientists, to the wonderful crew of the icebreaker Oden and to the staff of the Swedish Polar Research Secreteriat – among them faithful polarbear protectors Magnus Auger and Mats Johnsson.

Biography

Efva Lilja

Choreographer and artistic director at E.L.D.

Professor in choreography at University College of Dance, Stockholm Sweden

Efva Lilja has made a name for herself as one of Sweden's most exciting choreographers with a very distinctive repertoire that has been much celebrated. After a number of years as a dancer she made her debut as a choreographer in 1982 and in 1985 E.L.D was set up. Subsequently she has created pioneering new work in a range of collaborative endeavours with other artists; works that have been described as beautiful, poetic, erotic, Nordic, controversial and of epoch-making importance for Swedish dance. Her work is performed at the major stages in small intimate venues, on television, video, in schools, art forums - in wood, earth, water, fire and snow. In 1994 she was the first Scandinavian choreographer to be invited to make a piece for Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, France and in 2001 she was invited as the first Scandinavian artist to make a piece for The Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain, to mention two of her major works.

Together with her collaborators Efva Lilja has managed to establish what is a totally new way of working for the art of dance in Sweden. As artistic director and choreographer she runs the touring repertory company as a continual operation all year round. Her work has been performed all over the world in more than seventeen countries. Over the years she has received a wide range of grants and awards for her artistic achievements in dance. In 1999 she was appointed an Honorary Member of the International Centre for Cultural Relations. In 2000 she received the Prix D'ASSITEJ.

Efva Lilja was first trained at the Ballet Academy and at the University College of Dance in Stockholm. Her subsequent training took place at the Royal Academy in England, in France (Miriam Berns) and the United States, where she studied for a year at the Merce Cunningham Dance Foundation in New York and where she also took classes in composition with Robert Dunn and composition workshops at Columbia University, including work with Meredith Monk. As a freelance dancer she was employed by a number of choreographers in Sweden and New York and her touring engagements included work for the Swedish National Concert Institute and National Theatre Institute. For five years she was under contract to the choreographer Margaretha Åsberg and Pyramiderna. Efva Lilja has also taken part in several films, including *Amorosa* directed by Mai Zetterling, *Dansen* (the Dance) directed by Jan Troell and *Kvinnorna på taket* (the Women on the Roof) directed by Carl Gustav Nykvist. She has also taken the director's chair herself: such projects include *Huset* (the House) by and

with actor and director Allan Edwall and as a choreographer collaborated with the Russian director Anatoli Vasiliev in Moscow, in the play *Mozart and Salieri* by Pushkin.

Efva Lilja has written a number of articles published in books; *Kulturen - möten och mödor* (Culture - Meetings and Hardships); *om DANS eller Vanvett i den vardagliga idyllen* (about DANCE or Madness in the every day Idyll), book about movement research, published by Carlssons; *Styrka och mod - om barns skapande* (Strength and Courage - about Children's Creativity) published by Rädda barnen, *80-talets dans* (Dance in the Eighties) published by the Museum of Dance as their yearbook and *Fylkingens jubileum* (The Fylkingen Jubilee) published by Fylkingen, to name but a few. Her writing has also been published in a number of periodicals in Sweden and France. Her collection of poems...*en tids rörelse...* (a movement of time) is available from Kalejdoskop, the Swedish publishing house. In 2000 she published her book *Danskonst i språkets utmarker* (Dance at the boundaries of language) and 2003 *Danskonst i fruset landskap* (The art of dance in a frozen landscape) available at E.L.D..

Efva Lilja is a lecturer in very great demand. Together with her colleagues in E.L.D. she also runs research and artistic development projects. As a professor she focus on this and she is also developing working methods in choreographic composition. In 2002 Efva Lilja took part in an scientific expedition to the Arctic, Arctic Ocean 02, organized by The Swedish Polar Research Secretariat. Her work on ice is presented as a dance film for The Swedish Television, as a book and as a dance performance: *The Outmost White – A dance from the top of the world*. Efva Lilja is a committed proponent of cultural politics and very involved in the arts policy field affecting dance. For many years she has been an active force in bodies such as the Swedish Dance Committee and Fylkingen. She was a founder member of the Association of Swedish Choreographers (FSK) in 1986 and was its first chairperson. She was the government's appointee to the governing board of the University College of Dance 1994 - 1997 and was the designated expert in dance at the Ministry of Cultural Affairs during 1995.

Additional biographical information may be found in the Swedish National Encyclopaedia, *Vem är det* (the Swedish Who's Who) and other reference works, also in the archives of the Swedish Museum of Dance or at the E.L.D. website www.eld-p.se.