

felt but not seen....

created for and performed at I.nternational D.ance E.xchange A.msterdam,

dance studio Pauline de Groot, Amsterdam Netherlands, May 13th 2006

introductory:

an experimental solo dance where the audience sat with their backs turned to the performer, who gave himself the task to let his dance be felt as directly as possible, without touching anyone closely.

Pauline de Groot sparked the becoming of this dance when she suggested the idea during a coffee meeting.

note on backgrounds of this dance:

I've always argued passionately that dealing with the kinaesthetic sense-mind is the essential quality which makes an experience dance and in my critique of contemporary dance practice I contend that it too often by-passes the actual sensation of moving in the moment which I believe is its essential source and medium.

By studying Elaine Summers' Kinetic Awareness™ technique I look for the ability to return to this sensation of movement at any time and re-examine traditional Western dance from this knowledge. Summers' approach examines physical tension as a gift resulting from our live-energy, which we can use to move along our entire range of possibilities just as we choose. Consequently I have named my own dance practice 'available tension'.

This concern goes together with my aim to help liberate our body-state from traditions of currently inhibiting cultural patterns and forms, and to rebalance these with more intelligent strategies. I do this in line with my interpretation of the teachings of Wilhelm Reich and his understanding of aggression and many related forms of destructive behaviour as at times violent outbreaks of inefficiently channelled (sexual) energy.¹

In practicing 'available tension' and its further application as *con-sens-us*² I've been dealing a lot with the question of energy exchange with others, be they other fellow-dancers, a site of performance, or any audience / witnesses. To me they are essential in what makes me believe in the value of performance as a direct live-act of communication. In both I practice improvisation and/or Open Form Composition³ as important features of almost all of my work, to facilitate communication in the same open-ended manner that goes on in any daily dialogue and interaction.

¹ in Reich's understanding such an outflow of energy could only come to fullest release in the fully functional and therefore fulfilling sexual act, if not prevented by interfering muscle-armour. However that is what often happens when we (subconsciously) withhold tension in our muscles to literally shield ourselves, be that physical, mental, emotional etc., or withholding ourselves from enacting our drives, especially over a long period of time. In Kinetic Awareness™ this is called 'frozen tension'. Reich understood these armourings as part of anyone's character development and he worked all his life to find ways to effectively rework their consequences such as the resulting fear of orgasmic release, which he realised would otherwise lead to all sorts of anti-body behaviour, denying physical pleasure, mysticism as an escape, ideological propaganda of any kind, ridicule of passion, avoidance, and outright suppression and perversion of sexuality. He also saw fascism and war as consequentially violent self-regulations of this basic driving force and contented that as long as we won't solve our issues around sexuality sufficiently on a wide level as cultures, we would not be able to fully realise ideals of love, work, and knowledge. I believe one could add spiritual growth to this last series as well.

² name coined by myself, developed with Eva Tremel and many guest-artists since 2002. The practice researches the wide range of possible kinds of (sensory) agreement and collective enaction and creation, often in public places. see also <http://con-sens-us.blogspot.com>

³ any composition that intentionally includes indeterminate processes for its successful realisation. (my own definition)

the piece / performance

Pauline's idea gave an excellent opportunity to try to research conditions for the audience where the audience would be lead to a more kinaesthetic inscription of the text/action.

I left it up to the moment to decide what that text itself was going to be, in line with my previous works where I trained myself to articulate what needed to be said in that particular situation. When I performed I had not 'one' method but several options:

- coming to a *breathing con-sens-us* with the audience and then moving within that, expanding levels of articulation, speed, tension, and use of space / distances.
- just waiting until our energies would osmotically merge enough so that I would be felt wwhen I was moving,
- using the studio as an amplifier and by energetically becoming one with it in terms of a contact improvisation, the resonances would reach and move the audience as well. (the term audience is misleading, there was not that much to hear!)

The generosity of three friends, Janine Brall, Arturo Vidich, and Bruno Listopad, who all three volunteered to come and be my audience in rehearsals, made it clear that I was going to use movement from the higher ranges of tension and time, which I ended up doing a lot in this performance, rather than starting from minimal near-imperceptibility. Consequently it was hard not to make too many noises that would distract from the kinaesthetic sensation, also in my breathing. ☺

I could make two 'rounds' of action or two clusters of improvised movement-texts, before the self-set limit of 10 minutes was announced by the clock. (actually I was 1½ minutes early to stop) It is a pity that I had decided not to have this performance video-taped because my movements felt very beautiful in their intensity and must have seemed very expressive.⁴

conclusion:

In a way I think it worked. I felt very affirmed by the relative homogeneity of audience responses, in Amsterdam as well as during rehearsals back in Rotterdam: many felt sensations in their backs and spines (whether that was from my activity or because they knew I was in the back of their necks would have to be researched scientifically.⁵)

I am very pleased about the productive and supporting quality of the responses.

Even though the audience did no more (consciously) than sit and sense, this activity still did make the performance a communal enterprise, while I worked very, very hard to make the dance happen the best way possible at that moment. Having expended so much direct energy towards an audience, I wondered towards the end whether it might be a good idea to find ways where one might not have to work quite so hard (performer/s and audience/s alike)

The experience has brought me closer to letting go of my subjective idea of audience responsibility as something stringent and authoritarian, as if people would ever object to someone dancing out of the sheer pleasure from our moving body, not only in daily life, but also in a theatre space. With further successful inclusion of kinaesthesis such a liberation in dance could equally be refreshing as well as serve the enterprise of helping create an atmosphere in which it will be easier to understand our physical presence here in this present dimension, and -if it happens- to consequently move further spiritually as well.

⁴ one original idea was to have two rows of audiences, those who would have wanted to could have seen me with the "main" audience, still with their backs turned to me. I disengaged from that idea when I tried it out (Thank you Bruno for volunteering!), because it proved to be too distracting for me at this stage of my abilities, which is also why I didn't record anything extra on video

⁵ while doing *con-sens-us* with Aharon Israel in 2005 at Perambulação (www.perambulacao.com) I already noticed the difficulty of actually sensing energy-feedback from another person instead of just 'thinking' that. The same happened when I was working as a dancer with Daniel Lepkoff in his project *FIXOTROPIC* in 2003 at Kontakt Budapest.

web-links for further reading (as of May 2006):

- <http://con-sens-us.blogspot.com>

- www.elainesummersdance.com

(for a text-information about Elaine Summers, go to the bottom of the web-page and click "regular index page")

- www.kineticawarenesscenter.org

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Reich