

EXCHANGES and PERSPECTIVES

Martine Pisane

“What we are looking for is a way of ‘being’ in the performance space...In a performance, how much is true and how much is fake?”

I am struck by the similarities between Martine Pisane’s choreographic language and the movement language of people with learning disabilities. I first saw her choreography at Aurora Nova in the Edinburgh Fringe 2005.

We met and talked about her work and my work and were both interested to collaborate further. Martine did not meet any of the dancers and had never before worked with a dancer with a learning disability. I was keen that she worked purely from the potential of what she saw in the movement. I sent her video footage of the travellers in performance and workshop and we began a correspondence by email.

The particular ways that people inhabit their bodies, the particular ways that people perform, the particular movements that people produce, what are the movement characteristics of the dancer and how does the choreographer interact with them?

I see an absurdity and awkwardness in her choreography, and seemingly unrelated and random occurrences between the performers. Why does one person suddenly and abruptly move off to the right and start doing something completely different?

The performers start to play off each other,

upstaging and provoking in a light way. This movement becomes the language and substance of the choreography. And I think to myself that I have seen all this somewhere before.

An article about her work confirms my thoughts:

“She does not work by

purging, but rather by collecting and redesigning the so-called bits or scraps of body language. She strips gestures of any foreseeable goal in order to highlight an individual’s presence and to let their substance resonate. She shifts presence and by shifting it she highlights it.



Image
Rachel Sachse

Let's say that dance is based on the walk, which already says so much about people, at least as much as their fingerprints. One's walk, one's gait are unique, implying tempo, sense of time, ease and embarrassment. A walk contains a thousand dances, a thousand different impulses."

Martine responds to my questions and my films:

Through my work I ask myself a few questions -
What can a body do? What is it able to produce?
What are we able to see in an ordinary body?
What statute can we give it?
What is the human presence and what are the ones that are fundamental?
Your images could be the answers to these questions.

The first thing which strikes me in your films is the simplicity of the movements and the very simple and direct way in which they are carried out. I like that the movements are elementary, purified of any affect, of any psychology, of any symbolism. They are pure movement and essence of the movement. And I like that they are made without any mannerism. What can often embarrass me in a dancer is the mannerism.

I am attracted by simple gestures such as to rise, to bend down, to carry, to look, to smile. I believe that the body says so much more about its story through elementary gestures than through sophisticated or codified gestures.

I am interested in freshness and pleasure which is present in dancers without traditional training because they are involved in discovery, involved in something that is natural. There is always a small additional time after a successful turn, a time to become stable in order to set out again. This gives something to savour. Succeeding in something that is not planned in advance creates the unexpected. I like to observe the small 'errors' of the body, the small chance mishaps and the involuntary demonstrations.

In your images there is a state of outline which opens the imagination. Your images show the humanity and fragility of a non-specialist body. This is a singular body.

The body does what it has to do. It is constantly in the work of the present because there is no technique to do.



Image
Rachel Sachse

Or rather there are other points of support from the experiments of daily life. In your film I see a man leaning on a wall beside another man. They both balance a left leg and then the right leg. We don't know who imitates who. Then two women arrive and stand beside the two men. At this moment one of the men looks at them. This glance interests me because it is not planned. It is the consequence of what happens. One woman moves the fingers of her hand and its glance sails between her hand and elsewhere. There is mystery in the glance which is in elsewhere but we can't guess where this elsewhere is. It is precious. This glance opens us on a world.

The aim is to by-pass the middle-man, that area of dance that provides a service, and to short-circuit to current contemporary performance practice, to the art of it, to the product. There is no interest in providing a service and no interest in using art as a means to an end. There is an interest in art as an end in itself.

We often laugh at this topic of the glance because a dancer can see without looking. I prefer when people really look at themselves, look at the direction they want to go, while being aware that the public looks at them. This creates a kind of disorder.

With your performers the movements are made for what they are, not more: to raise an arm, to take the hand of one's neighbour, to move the fingers of the hand, to lean on a wall, to sit down to walk to run, to turn, to jump, to go from one point to another. And there seems to be no worry about image, no pre-empting a result which would be liked or ideal. It is there that I see the beauty of the movement; a movement which does not look at itself, which is not narcissistic, which does not judge itself.

The recurrent question for me is how to remain in this natural essence of the movement without appearing artificial or fabricated. This explains why, what I see in your films, matters to me, because I see this is what I see in your performers.



Image
Martine Pisane